The kindly Phaeacians load Odysseus with gifts and take him home, leaving him fast asleep on the shores of Ithaca. On their return journey, Poseidon turns their ship into a lump of stone for daring to assist Odysseus.

Odysseus is disoriented after twenty years away from home, but the goddess Athena meets him and tells him what happened: during his long absence, a number of young men from Ithaca and neighboring islands have moved into Odysseus’s great house. Thinking that Odysseus is dead, the suitors, as they are called, eat his food, drink his wine, and insist that Odysseus’s wife, Penelope, choose one of them as her husband. Penelope, who still loves Odysseus and prays for his return, has put off a decision as long as she can, but the situation has become very tense.

Athena disguises Odysseus as an old beggar and promises to help him. She tells him to seek shelter with a swineherd names Eumaeus. Meanwhile, Odysseus’s son, Telemachus, who had set out on a journey to learn the fate of his father, escapes an ambush planned by the suitors and secretly lands on Ithaca. Following Athena’s instructions, he also goes to Eumaeus’s hut. While the loyal swineherd is informing Penelope of her son’s return, Athena appears to the disguised Odysseus.

The next morning, Telemachus returns home and tells Penelope about his travels, but not about his father’s homecoming. Odysseus, disguised again as a beggar, also returns to his own house. No one recognizes him except his faithful old dog, which lifts up its head, wags his tail, and dies. In the great hall, Telemachus permits “the beggar” to ask for food. The suitors give him bread and meat, as is the custom, but one of their
leaders, Antinous, is particularly insulting. He refuses to offer any food, and while Odysseus is talking, he angrily interrupts.

Book XIX: Recognitions and a Dream (read the interpolation below, then read pg. 356, line 120-pg. 358, line 190)

Lively action continues in the great hall, where another beggar attempts to bully Odysseus. Antinous mockingly arranges a boxing match between the two, which Odysseus easily wins. Telemachus orders the disorderly crowd to leave for the evening. Surprised by his authority, the suitors obey, giving Odysseus and Telemachus time to remove all the weapons from the great hall as part of their preparation for battle. Then Odysseus, still in disguise, goes to meet his wife for the first time in nearly twenty years.

Book XX: The Test of the Bow (read the interpolation below, then read pg. 393, line 71-line 83)

Resigned to ending the suitors’ reign over her home, Penelope cries herself to sleep that night, dreaming of the husband she believes is lost forever. The next day the suitors return to the hall, more unruly than ever. Penelope appears, carrying the huge bow that belongs to Odysseus. Her maids follow, bearing twelve iron ax heads. Penelope has a proposition for the suitors.

Book XX: The Test of the Bow (read the interpolation below, then read pg. 403, line 446-pg. 405, line 499)

One by one the suitors try to string the bow, and all fail. Only Antinous delays his attempt. In the meantime, Odysseus steps outside with the swineherds Eumaeus and Philoetius, another faithful herdsman, and reveals his true identity to them. Odysseus returns to the hall and asks to try his hand at stringing the bow. Antinous sneers at this idea, but Penelope and Telemachus both insist he proceed. Telemachus orders the women to leave the hall, and Eumaeus presents to Odysseus the great bow he has not held for twenty years.