Book XVII Summary

* Telémackhos wakes up and wants to go check on his mom. He leaves orders that Eumaios is to bring "the beggar" to town during the day so that he can beg for food.
* Back in the great hall, Penélopê is ecstatic to see her son alive. She asks him for news of Odysseus, but Telémackhos tells her to be patient.
* Telémackhos, who seems awfully bossy, orders her to go bathe, change her clothes, and pray that Zeus will help them with their revenge against the suitors. Meanwhile, he has to take care of a passenger who unexpectedly sailed with him yesterday.
* Telémackhos quickly spots Odysseus's loyal friends—Mentor (the real one this time), Antiphos, and Halithersês—and goes off to consult with them.
* The men eat while Penélopê weaves and asks (again) for news of Odysseus.
* Telémackhos tells her about his visit with Meneláos and then mentions that Odysseus was last seen alive on the island of Kalypso.
* Theoklýmenos interrupts and tells Penélopê about the sign he interpreted for Telémackhos the day before—the sign which prophecies that Odysseus is in fact already back in Ithaka and plotting revenge.
* But Penélopê doesn't believe it.
* Meanwhile, Odysseus and Eumaios head into town.
* Eventually, the pair runs into Mélanthios, the annoying goatherd. He mocks and abuses the beggar, but Odysseus doesn't respond. He just prays (aloud) to the gods that Mélanthios gets what he deserves.
* Given what we've seen so far, we're about 99% sure this will in fact happen.
* When they reach the hall, Eumaios goes in first.
* But when the disguised Odysseus speaks, an old dog sitting on a dung heap nearby pricks his ears up and tries to wag his tail.
* Odysseus recognizes him as Argos, the hound that he trained as a puppy but never had the chance to take hunting before he left for Troy. Now poor Argos is old and mistreated by everyone, which is super sad.
* Odysseus sheds a tear for the poor condition of his favorite dog and asks about the animal.
* Eumaios says that the animal was swift, strong, and courageous in his prime, but now he's just abused by everyone.
* As the men enter the hall, Argos breathes his last breath and dies happy, having recognized and seen his master after twenty years.
* Eumaios grabs a spare bench and seats himself across from Telémackhos while the disguised Odysseus enters the hall.
* Telémackhos, who has to pretend he doesn't know this guy, gives the beggar a generous hunk of bread and meat and tells him not to be shy in asking for food.
* Odysseus goes down the line, begging food from each man. With this strategy, he learns who goes on the good list and who on the naughty list.
* Everyone gives Odysseus something until Mélanthios recognizes him as the same old beggar from before and insults the man.
* After hearing this, Antinoös turns on Eumaios and lectures him for bringing a beggar to the hall.
* Telémackhos stops Eumaios from his angry reply, but only so he can insult Antinoös himself. He commands the suitor to give the beggar some bread.
* Instead, Antinoös threatens to throw a footstool at the man. But beggar Odysseus ignores him.
* After he has begged and received from everyone else, Odysseus calls on Antinoös to give something. He begins by telling him a false sob story of how he was a rich man once and had the misfortune to sail to Egypt.
* Antinoös interrupts with a refusal to feed him and throws a footstool at him (in his defense, he did give fair warning) and clips him on the shoulder.
* Odysseus doesn't even wince, but everyone else is embarrassed by Antinoös's bad manners.
* Upstairs, Penélopê hears all the noise and can tell that Antinoös is causing trouble again. She sends her maid to fetch the beggar to her for questioning—she wants to ask him for any news on Odysseus.
* But the beggar says that he'll meet with the Queen later tonight; he wants to avoid any suspicion from the suitors.
* Penélopê is bummed at first, but she quickly realizes that this is a clever beggar.

Book XVIII Summary

* A real beggar by the name of Iros, who regularly begs at Odysseus's hall, sees the newcomer and basically says that the town isn't big enough for the both of them.
* This launches us into another back-and-forth round of insults.
* Antinoös, seeing these two going at each other, spurs them on, since everyone loves a good fight. He promises a prize of fat blood pudding to the winner.
* Telémackhos assures beggar Odysseus that the crowd will watch his back (meaning they won't let some jerk hit him with a footstool).
* The crowd cheers, proving that if there's one thing Greeks can agree on, it's that old beggars shouldn't be hit unawares from behind.
* Iros is all, "You're going down!" and Odysseus is all, "Oh really? Well look at…THIS!" and then he rips off his shirt and everyone goes "Ooooh!"
* Iros kind of wants to back out, but Antinoös really ups the stakes by threatening to have him beaten and castrated if the new beggar wins against him.
* Odysseus decides to be merciful and strike Iros only once, which he does, in the jaw. Unfortunately for Iros, this one punch is enough to break his jaw and send blood spewing everywhere.
* Everyone is massively entertained by the fight (hey, what else were they supposed to do before YouTube?) and they all cheer the beggar Odysseus on.
* In the meantime, Athena puts Penélopê to sleep for a few minutes during which she showers her in ambrosia and makes her even lovelier than she already is.
* She also inspires Penélopê to show herself to the suitors and get them all hot and bothered over her.
* Penélopê is oblivious to her influence on the men and scolds Telémackhos for allowing such abuse (she's referring to the beggar) in her household.
* Wait, says Telémackhos—it's not what it seems—
* But Eurýmakhos interrupts and compliments Penélopê on her beauty. Though she plays modest at first, Penélopê finally ends up flirting a bit with the suitors; she complains that they haven't courted her correctly, as not one of them has presented her with any gifts.
* Unfortunately, not one of the suitors responds with, "*I've* got a gift for you. Come here and I'll show it to you."
* Instead, they comically search each of their troves to find a suitable gift for the Queen. Odysseus thinks this is hilarious.
* When Penélopê leaves, her servants carrying the shining gifts she has just received, Odysseus decides to test the loyalty of her maids.
* At night, the maids are assigned to keep the torches burning in the hallway so that the suitors—getting drunk in the hall—can see what they're smacking into before they smack into it.
* (Really? Who ordered that?)
* Beggar Odysseus tells the servants he'll take care of the torches tonight and sends them up to go care for Penélopê.
* The women giggle at him, until beggar Odysseus threatens to snitch on their rude behavior and they scatter in fear.
* The suitors lay into the beggar again, but this time Odysseus answers back: he could defeat any of them in battle.
* This infuriates Eurýmakhos, and he lobs a footstool at the beggar. (Very original.) It misses, however, and hits a wine steward, spilling all the wine. Now look what you've done!

Book XX Summary

* Beggar Odysseus settles down to bed on the floor outside of Penélopê’s room, but has trouble falling asleep. Kind of like before the night of a big game, or in this case the slaughter of 100+ men.
* He sees some of the maids slipping out to go sleep with the suitors. He's enraged at the maids' betrayal but stays silent.
* Athena arrives and to give Odysseus a game-day speech, while Penélopê cries upstairs.
* She prays for death and then dreams that Odysseus comes back, but of course doesn't believe the good omen.
* Odysseus wakes at dawn and, in a moment of angst, asks Zeus for a sign that he was meant to come home.
* Zeus hears and sends a thunderclap through a perfectly clear sky.
* A maid grinding barley hears the thunder clap and knows Zeus must be around and listening. She prays that all her hard work to feed the greedy suitors will soon be over.
* Oh, and that all the suitors die.
* This is convenient for Zeus, who gets to grant two prayers at once.
* And we're back to Odysseus, who takes heart at seeing the thunderbolt.
* Telémackhos checks up on beggar Odysseus and then orders the maids to prepare a feast, because today is a holiday.
* Mélanthios returns to taunt the beggar more. Does he ever learn? And also, doesn't he have anything else to do?
* Afterwards another man approaches the beggar—Philoítios, the resident cowherd. He greets the beggar warmly and notes his resemblance to Odysseus. We quickly see that he is ashamed and outraged at the suitors' behavior in his lord's house.
* The beggar asks Eumaios and Philoítios if they would fight on Odysseus's side against the suitors should he return to Ithaka. Sure!
* Telémackhos seats the beggar opposite himself with his own share of food and a goblet of wine and challenges anyone to insult him.
* Athena, who apparently loves conflict, wants the suitors to tease Odysseus so he'll get all worked into a rage. Because she always gets her way, the suitors indeed taunt the beggar, one by one.
* Yet another suitor, gets everyone back to the issue at hand: who's going to get Penélopê. He asks Telémackhos to see reason: it's obvious that Odysseus isn't coming back, so Penélopê needs to get over herself already and marry one of the suitors.
* Prophetic fugitive Theoklýmenos, has a vision of the hall filled with dripping blood and shades of the dead. Then he tells everyone about it.
* You would think this would dampen the mood, but the suitors just laugh at him, too.
* Telémackhos rolls his eyes and tries to ignore them, a task made easier by the knowledge that, very soon, the hall will indeed be filled with their dripping blood.