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Wise and Powerful

In *The Odyssey*, women play an important role in Odysseus's long journey home. Some women help him, while others make his travels more difficult. Three key women—Penelope, Athena, and Calypso—shape the story in different ways. Penelope, Odysseus's wife, is known for her patience and intelligence. For twenty years, she waits for her husband's return.

Many suitors come to Ithaca, hoping to marry her and take Odysseus's place. However, Penelope cleverly delays choosing a new husband. She tells the suitors that she will pick one after she finishes weaving a shroud for her father-in-law. But every night, she secretly unravels part of the cloth so that it is never completed. Her cleverness keeps the suitors waiting until Odysseus returns.

Athena, the goddess of wisdom, plays a protective and guiding role in Odysseus's journey. She watches over him, offering advice and help when he is in trouble. She encourages his son, Telemachus, to search for news of his father. When Odysseus finally reaches Ithaca, Athena disguises him as an old beggar so he can secretly observe the suitors. With her guidance, he is able to reclaim his home and family.

Calypso, a beautiful but possessive goddess, delays Odysseus's journey by keeping him on her island. She falls in love with him and refuses to let him leave. Odysseus spends seven years there, longing to go home. Eventually, the gods tell Calypso to let him go, and she helps him build a raft. Even though she does not want to lose him, she finally respects his desire to return home.

Each of these women influences Odysseus's journey in a unique way. Penelope's loyalty gives him something to fight for. Athena's wisdom helps him survive. Calypso's love delays him but also gives him time to reflect. These powerful female characters show that women in *The Odyssey* are not just background figures—they shape the story in important ways.