

Echo and Narcissus

Long ago there lived a pretty nymph named Echo. Almost never alone, she liked to play in waterfalls with the other nymphs and go hunting with the goddess Artemis. Echo was generous and warm-hearted, but she was also a chatterbox. Sadly, it was this love of talking that led to her harsh punishment by the goddess Queen Hera.



One day Hera was stalking through the woods, angrily searching for her husband Zeus, king of the gods. She had correctly suspected that he was once again on earth, flirting with some of the nymphs. Hoping to protect her friends from Hera's quick temper, Echo ran up to the goddess and began to talk on and on. By the time Hera was able to break away, the nymphs had fled and Zeus had returned to his home on Mount Olympus.

"You have deliberately delayed me with your **incessant** chatter!" Queen Hera shouted at Echo. "As punishment, you will never again speak except to repeat the last words of others."

Soon after that, poor Echo saw and fell in love with Narcissus, an extremely handsome youth who liked to spend his time alone, hunting for deer. Unable to speak to him of her love, Echo secretly followed him wherever he went. Finally, she gathered her courage. She stepped out from behind a tree and threw her arms around him. Narcissus, who felt no affection for anyone, pushed her aside. "Go away! I'd rather die than be with you," he said rudely. "Be with you," Echo tearfully replied. But Narcissus scornfully walked off into the woods.

Forlorn and ashamed, Echo hid in valleys and in caves. She slowly faded away until all that was left was her voice. It can still be heard today, softly answering those who call.

As for Narcissus, he was punished by the goddess Nemesis for his cruel treatment of Echo. "Narcissus, too, will feel the pain of unreturned love," the goddess declared. "I will make this cold-hearted youth who doesn't love others fall in love with himself."

On a warm afternoon, Narcissus stopped to rest by a clear, deep pool. As he bent down to drink from it, he saw the image of a handsome youth on the smooth surface of the water. Narcissus's heart filled with love. He stretched out his arms and tried to touch him. But each time he reached down into the water, the youth disappeared in a swirl of ripples.

Day after day Narcissus remained by the pool, gazing longingly at the image in the water. He couldn't tear himself away. Forgetting to eat, he became thinner and thinner until he finally faded away. It is said that a sweet-smelling flower with white petals sprang up in the place where he had sat for so long. This beautiful flower is called the narcissus.