

Echo and Narcissus

by Ross Montgomery

Ancient Greeks loved telling ‘myths’, or made up stories. Here’s a famous one about Echo and Narcissus – a sad love story that’s given us some famous words!

Zeus, the king of the gods and goddesses, was always running away to spend time with the Nymphs. They were beautiful, magical creatures who lived in rivers and streams. Hera, Zeus’s wife, became very jealous of Zeus spending so much time with them – so one day, she decided that enough was enough. She stormed to the Nymphs’ home to drag her husband back!

Along the way, she bumped into a beautiful Nymph named Echo. Echo knew how much trouble Zeus would be in if he were caught, so she tried to distract Hera by talking.

“Er.. hi!” she said. “Lovely day, isn’t it? Would you like to hear a story?”

“No,” Hera answered, sternly.

“Yep, who doesn’t love stories?” Echo continued. “Here’s a good one: er, so, once upon a time, there was...”

Hera wasn’t stupid, and knew exactly what Echo was up to. Finally, she’d had enough.

“Seeing as you love lying so much,” she cried, her voice rising to its highest pitch, “I’ll twist your tongue so you never tell a story again!”

Echo tried to answer – but all that came out was, “Again... again... again...”

Echo gasped. Hera had stolen her voice so she could only repeat the end of the last sentence said to her! Hera pushed past, and Echo was forced to live in silence. Distraught, she cut herself off from the Nymphs and ran away to live alone beside a lonely pool in an empty forest. Without speech, she wilted like a flower without light.

One day, a handsome young man called Narcissus became lost in the forest. Narcissus wasn't just handsome - he was the most handsome man in the world! In fact, a prophet had warned Narcissus's mother that he should never see his own reflection. Narcissus was so handsome that everyone who saw him instantly fell in love with him – what would happen if he saw himself?

Echo was no different. The moment Narcissus stumbled out from the trees and found her pool, he stole her heart completely.

“Oh – hi,” said Narcissus, when he saw Echo gawping at him. “Who are you?”

Of course, there was nothing Echo could say but, “Who are you? Who are you?”

Narcissus frowned. “That's rude. Can you bring me some water from this pool? I'm really thirsty, but my mum says I should never go anywhere near water – I don't know why.”

Echo wanted to tell Narcissus that she loved him. She wanted to explain her curse and how she would do anything for him. But the only vibrations that could leave her throat and pass through the air were, “Why.. why.. why..”

Narcissus finally lost his temper. “I just told you why! Oh, forget it - I’m too thirsty for this. I’ll get some water myself if you’re not going to help me!”

“Help me... help me...” came the Nymph’s heartbroken echo.

She was too late. Narcissus bent down to the pool to drink, and the moment he saw his reflection he fell head over heels in love with himself. From that moment on, he was cursed. He couldn’t eat, he couldn’t sleep... he couldn’t even drink from the pool, in case he broke his beautiful reflection. All he could do was gaze into his own reflected eyes, forever and ever.

“I love you,” he whispered to himself.

And all Echo could do was repeat his words, the volume growing fainter and fainter as her tears fell into the pool beside him.

“I love you... I love you... I love you...”