**Echo and Narcissus**

Zeus, the King of the Olympian gods, was notorious for his numerous love affairs and flings. He never missed an opportunity to mess around, especially when his wife Hera, Queen of the Olympians, was otherwise occupied.

There lived a young and beautiful mountain Nymph named Echo, who was a very pleasant girl, but she had a reputation for being a chatterbox. Nothing pleased Echo more than the sound of her own voice.

One day, while Echo was amusing and distracting Hera with her chatter, Zeus took advantage to frolic on earth with the other mountain Nymphs. He succeeded in ravishing some of them, until Hera finally became aware of his infidelity.

Hera was livid, to say the least, but she knew better than to challenge her husband, Ruler of Olympus and possessor of the fearsome thunderbolts. Rather that retaliating against Zeus, she took out her wrath on poor Echo!

You see, Hera assumed that because Echo distracted her during her husband's earthly encounters, she must of course be in cahoots with Zeus. It therefore followed that she must be punished.

Nothing could be further from the truth - Young Echo may have been way too talkative, but she was not doing Zeus any favors when her chatter kept Hera from noticing his absence. Still, Hera was convinced otherwise.

To punish the hapless girl, Hera took away her most valuable possession, her voice. Hera permitted Echo only to reply in foolish repetition of another's shouted words. Thus, all Echo could do was mimic the words of the speaker.

There lived in Thespia a vain youth named Narcissus, son of the blue Nymph called Leiriope. This Nymph had been seduced by the River god Cephisus, who had encirled Leirope with the windings of his streams and trapped her.

Narcissus was the product of their union.

Leirope was concerned about the welfare of her new baby so she went to consult a famous oracle by the name of Teiresias regarding her son's future. The seer told the Nymph that Narcissus "would live to be a ripe old age, as long as he never knew himself."A cryptic pronouncement, to be sure, but fitting, as we shall soon see.

Narcissus was incredibly beautiful as a child, and grew even more so as he matured. Both men and women equally desired him, but the vain youth rebuffed everybody. By the age of sixteen he had left strewn a trail of broken hearts, rejected lovers all.

Narcissus had absolutely no interest in falling in love with anyone and strenuously resisted all attempts at romance.

Echo had spotted the gorgeous - yet conceited - youth and had fallen desperately in love with him. Looking for an opportunity to convey her adoration, she found her chance one day while Narcissus was out hunting stags.

For hours Echo stealthily followed the handsome youth through the woods, her heart beating with excitement, yet unable to speak first. Finally Narcissus heard soft footsteps behind him and paused in his tracks.

Nothing there. He kept walking.

He heard the steps again and this time shouted loudly, "Who goes there?"

"Who goes there?" came Echo's reply. And so it went, back and forth, until finally Echo could no longer handle the longing - dashing out from behind a tree, she rushed the startled Narcissus and wrapped her arms around the lovely object of her obsession.

Narcissus was mortified! Who was this impetuous girl, he wondered, and why was she trying to kiss him? Repulsed, he shoved away Echo, rudely telling her to leave his presence.

Devastated, Echo spent the remainder of her life wandering in lonely glens, pining away for the love she never knew, until at last only her voice remained.

Narcissus was not finished. A handsome man named Ameinius was one of the vain youth's most ardent admirers and relentlessly vied for his attention. So what did Narcissus do? The conceited youth responded to the entreaties by sending his suitor a sword, telling him to prove his adoration.

Not knowing how else to prove his adoration, Ameinius proceeded to plunge the sword into his heart, committing suicide to demonstrate his love. As he lay dying, he beseeched the gods to punish the heartless Narcissus.

The goddess of the hunt, Artemis, heard the dying plea and proceeded to exact revenge. She caused Narcissus to fall in love, but the kind of love that could never be fulfilled.

Narcissus came upon a clear spring at Donacon in Thespia and, as he bent low to quench his thirst, for the first time caught sight of himself reflected in the pool.

Try as he might to touch the exquisite person in the waters, however, he never could.

Enraptured sat Narcissus, gazing at the beauty reflected, but unable to be fulfilled. The spell of Artemis had totally mesmerized him, and for hours he sprawled by the spring, until at last he recognized himself.

Tortured by the sudden realization that he could never possess the object of his infatuation, Narcissus grew morose. In the same way that he had tormented all of those suitors unlucky enough to fall in love with him, it was now Narcissus who for the first time experienced the pangs of love unrequited.

Unable at last to stand the agony Narcissus plunged a dagger in his heart and died, calling out a final goodbye to his reflected image.

Where his blood soaked the earth sprung up the white narcissus flower with its red corollary, forever growing at the water's edge, its head inclined towards the water.

**Reading Questions – Answer all questions in complete sentences!**

1. Why did Hera punish Echo?
2. What punishment did Hera give Echo and why?
3. Who is Narcissus and why is he so vain?
4. Why did Echo fade away and what was left?
5. Ironically, how is Narcissus hurt by love?
6. Explain how “echo” and “narcissus” got their definitions as we know them today.
7. Explain why a pretty yellow and white flower is called a “narcissus”.
8. Add the story of Echo and Narcissus to your reading log.