

“Echo and Narcissus”

retold by Walker Brents

Liriope the river nymph gave birth to a beautiful child. She brought him to the blind seer Tiresias to ask his destiny. Tiresias predicted that the boy would live a long life, but only if he never “came to know himself.” The child was named Narcissus. As he grew, his beauty increased. His dazzling looks had a strange effect upon the woodland spirits, **the naiads and the dryads**, around whom he spent his days. They all fell in love with him, but he was oblivious, interested only in hunting in the hills with his companions. His pride in his beauty grew so great that he had nothing but scorn for the feelings of others.

There was one nymph, Echo by name, who saw Narcissus chasing deer into nets in the hills. Echo was instantly seized by love and could not overcome it. Secretly, she followed him through the wilderness, waiting for her chance to make herself known to him—but one thing held her back: she could not initiate speech on her own. She could only repeat what was said to her. This was her condition, and it had come about because one day the goddess Hera was questioning the nymphs about her husband Zeus. She asked them where Zeus was, suspecting that the unfaithful god had been chasing the lovely nymphs and dwelling among them. Indeed he had, and while he was making his escape Echo distracted Hera with a flow of entertaining conversation. When Hera learned she had been fooled, she cursed Echo, saying, “From now on your words will not be your own. You will only be able to repeat what is said to you. That way your powers to beguile and distract will be curtailed.”

Thereafter Echo could only repeat the words she heard. She could not announce herself to Narcissus. She trailed him silently, hoping for the right circumstance to meet him and declare her love. One day Narcissus had wandered away from his companions, and was in the forest looking for them. Echo was nearby, but Narcissus did not see her. “Is anyone here?” he cried. “Here,” she answered. “Come to me,” he called out. “Come to me,” she replied. “Do not avoid me,” he pleaded. She said the same to him. “Let us meet,” he announced. This was her chance. She stepped out of hiding and stood before him smiling, saying, “Let us meet.” He fell back from her scornfully. “You are not the one I seek. I would die before I would be near you.” Echo advanced toward him, pleading, “I would be near you.” But he ran from her.

Haunted by his rejection and crushed by shame, Echo hid herself in caves and covered herself with leaves. She began to waste away and disappear. In the end only her bones were left, and these became rocks. But her voice remained. Travelers and wanderers heard it sometimes, answering them with their own words. Still Echo did not forget Narcissus.

Meanwhile, Narcissus too fell victim to a curse. Another nymph had fallen in love with him, but was also spurned. This one cried to the heavens for vengeance: “May Narcissus fall into a love that is not returned!” The goddess of righteous anger, Nemesis, heard these words. And so it happened that on a sunny and hot day Narcissus found himself at a pond to which no shepherd’s flocks had been, from which no goats had drunk. It was a wild place. A green meadow surrounded it, and tall trees shaded it from the sun and sheltered it from winds. Putting his face to the waters in order to quench his thirst, Narcissus caught sight for the first time of his own reflection. He was astonished by the beautiful face that met his eye.

“What star-like eyes are these; what smooth skin! That forehead, that jaw, that gorgeous flowing hair! Who are you? Draw near to me!” He reached his hands to the water, but the reflected image disintegrated. He waited for it to reappear. “Only the surface of these waters parts us. No fortress gates nor city walls; no long rocky highway, no impenetrable forest nor unclimbable mountain stands between us. Yet I cannot reach you! How can this be?” He cried to the endless skies, “How is it that when I find my love his very nearness keeps us far apart?” But there was no answer.

Narcissus could not leave this place. Entranced by his own reflection, he began to waste away from hunger and thirst. His strength and his life ebbed away and did not return. Echo hovered around him, invisible and unforgetting. Her disembodied voice repeated his final word, which was “Alas.” He died, and his spirit left his body. Even on the boat of souls, crossing the river between this world and the other one, Narcissus leaned over the edge, looking into those waters, trying to catch a glimpse of the image that so captivated him.

The nymphs heard of his death and went to the pond to retrieve his body for the funeral ceremony. But when they got there, they found no corpse, only a new blossom with snowy petals and a yellow corona. The flower came to be called “Narcissus,” in honor of one who, in the enigmatic words of Tiresias, “came to know himself,” and fell in love.

the naiads and the dryads. Nymphs of the water and of trees
corona. Trumpet-shaped cup of flowers such as the daffodil

Questions:

1. Which of the following BEST states the prediction Teiresias makes about the child Narcissus?
 - A. The child would die young.
 - B. Narcissus would live a long life, but only if he never came to know himself.
 - C. Narcissus would grow up to become a strong warrior.
 - D. Narcissus would marry the nymph Echo.
2. Which character traits of Narcissus are emphasized in paragraph 2 of the story?
 - A. Pride and scorn
 - B. Sensitivity and compassion
 - C. Wit and humor
 - D. Thoughtfulness and consideration
3. The word *initiate* in paragraph 3 most nearly means
 - A. Emphasize
 - B. Curtail
 - C. Originate
 - D. Paraphrase
4. Why did the goddess Hera curse Echo?
 - A. She was jealous of Echo's beauty.
 - B. Echo distracted Hera while Zeus was chasing the nymphs.
 - C. Echo had neglected to make sacrifices to the gods.
 - D. The curse was a way of Hera's getting revenge on Narcissus.
5. Who is the goddess of righteous anger in the story?
 - A. Athena
 - B. Aphrodite
 - C. Hera
 - D. Nemesis
6. How is the curse laid on Narcissus similar to the one laid on Echo?
 - A. They are both doomed to a wretched old age.
 - B. Narcissus and Echo are both fated to suffer from unrequited love.
 - C. They both are destined to issue prophecies that other people ignore.
 - D. They must travel continually, never pausing for rest.
7. When the nymphs learn of the death of Narcissus and try to retrieve his body, what do they find instead?
 - A. The body of Echo
 - B. A blood-stained arrow
 - C. A blossom with snowy petals and a yellow corona
 - D. A mirror

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- This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.