

ECHO AND NARCISSUS

The lovely and talkative nymph Echo lived free from care and whole of heart until she met Narcissus, hunting in the forest. This frivolous young lady no
* sooner beheld the youth, than she fell deeply in love with him, and was proportionately grieved when she saw that he did not return her affections.

All her blandishments were unavailing, and, in her despair at his hard-heartedness, she implored Venus to punish him by making him suffer the pangs of unrequited love; then, melancholy and longing to die, she wandered off into the mountains, far from the haunts of her former companions, and there, brooding continually over her sorrow, pined away until there remained naught of her but her melodious voice.

The gods, displeased at her lack of proper pride, condemned her to haunt rocks and solitary places, and, as a warning to other impulsive maidens, to repeat the last sounds which fell upon her ears.

Venus alone had not forgotten poor Echo's last passionate prayer, and was biding her time to punish the disdainful Narcissus. One day, after a prolonged chase, he hurried to a lonely pool to slake his thirst.

Quickly he knelt upon the grass, and bent over the pellucid waters to take a draught; but he suddenly paused, surprised. Down near the pebbly bottom he saw a face so passing fair, that he immediately lost his heart, for he thought it belonged to some water nymph gazing up at him through the transparent flood.

With sudden passion he caught at the beautiful apparition; but, the moment his arms touched the water, the nymph vanished. Astonished and dismayed, he slowly withdrew to a short distance, and breathlessly awaited the nymph's return.

The agitated waters soon resumed their mirror-like smoothness; and Narcissus, approaching noiselessly on tip-

toe, and cautiously peeping into the pool, became aware first of curly, tumbled locks, and then of a pair of beautiful, watchful, anxious eyes. Evidently the nymph had just concluded to emerge from her hiding place to reconnoiter.

More prudent this time, the youth gradually bent further over the pool; and, reassured by his kindly glances, the nymph's whole head appeared. In gentle tones the youth now addressed her; and her ruby lips parted and moved as if she were answering, though not a sound came to his ear. In his excitement he began to gesticulate, whereupon two snowy arms repeated his every gesture; but when, encouraged by her loving glances and actions, he tried once more to clasp her in his arms, she vanished as rapidly as the first time.

Time and again the same pantomime was enacted, and time and again the nymph eluded his touch; but the enamored youth could not tear himself away from the spot haunted by this sweet image, whose sensitive face reflected his every emotion, and who grew as pale and wan as he,—evidently, like him, a victim to love and despair.

Even the shades of night could not drive Narcissus away from his post, and when the pale moonbeams illumined his retreat, he bent over the pool to ascertain whether she too were anxious and sleepless, and saw her gazing longingly up at him.

There Narcissus lingered day and night, without eating or drinking, until he died, little suspecting that the fancied nymph was but his own image reflected in the clear waters. Echo was avenged; but the gods of Olympus gazed compassionately down upon the beautiful corpse, and changed it into a flower bearing the youth's name, which has ever since flourished beside quiet pools, wherein its pale image is clearly reflected.