

# Lost in His Own Reflection



Golden-haired Narcissus was the most handsome young man in town. Everyone who saw Narcissus immediately fell in love with him. All the women swooned when he passed them on the street. The young ladies, wearing their most beautiful dresses, smiled and waved as they tried to catch the eye of the attractive young man. Narcissus paid them no attention and would have nothing to do with them. Many women were in love with him, but he had rejected them all.

Narcissus wandered through the forest, happy to be alone with his thoughts as he hunted deer. He had no idea that a lovely nymph was secretly watching him. Echo had been cursed by the goddess Hera. The goddess had punished the girl by decreeing that Echo could only repeat the last words someone else had said.

Like all the other ladies, Echo fell madly in love with Narcissus as soon as she saw him. She moved closer to get a better look. Narcissus was startled by the sound of leaves moving and called out, "What's that? Who's here?"

Hidden behind a tree, the nymph could only reply, "Here!" Narcissus pleaded with the owner of the voice to come out so he could meet her. Echo excitedly rushed toward Narcissus with her arms open, ready to embrace him, but the conceited young man pushed her away and yelled, "Leave me alone!"



The heartbroken maiden could only repeat, “Alone! Alone!” as she watched Narcissus run away. He soon found a pool of water. Narcissus was tired and thirsty from running through the forest, so he lay down and leaned over the water. As he looked at the pool, he noticed someone staring back at him.

*Look at that lovely golden hair, those sparkling eyes, and those two perfect pink lips, he thought, enraptured. Why, that is the most beautiful face I’ve ever seen.* He reached toward the young person before his eyes, but the face disappeared. *What happened?* he asked. *Where did that beautiful face go?* he wondered. *Perhaps if I return tomorrow, I will see it again.* Narcissus pulled himself away from the pool and slowly walked home.

Narcissus did not realize that he had fallen in love with his own reflection. Day after day, he returned to the pool and spent hours staring at the water. Narcissus did not eat or drink,

and his sadness and despair grew inside of him. Finally, the handsome young man withered away and died. His fixation on his own beautiful image was his doom.

Today you might hear someone referred to as a narcissist. For example, “Jeff is such a narcissist; all he does is think about himself and how he looks.” A narcissist is a person who is totally focused on himself or herself. The noun has negative associations because a narcissist is someone who focuses only on what he or she wants and selfishly ignores everyone else.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

This Greek myth provides the source of a second present-day word we use: **echo**. In the story, Echo is only able to repeat the words she hears. The word **echo** comes from the Greek word for “sound.”

