Echo and Narcissus

An old, old story.

Tutor: It’s one of the most famous Greek myths.

*Student: Yes. It’s very famous.*

It’s one of the Greek Myths everyone seems to know.

*Well, not everyone.*

Perhaps not.

*Everyone has heard of Echo and Narcissus, I suppose.*

Well, most people probably have.

*I think so.*

People all know what ‘echo’ means.

*And they’ve heard of Narcissus.*

But not everyone knows where they come from.

*No.*

It all starts with Zeus.

*And his wife.*

Yes. Her name was Hera.

*She was a goddess.*

And she was married to Zeus.

*Yes.*

The chief of the gods.

*Yes.*

And she was looked after all day long by mountain nymphs.

*The Greek gods all lived around the tops of mountains.*

And the weather always seems to have been lovely.

*Warm and sunny.*

Peaceful.

*Zeus was a bit naughty.*

Yes.

*From time to time.*

He liked playing around with mountain nymphs.

*In the sunshine.*

Nice!

*But Hera didn’t like that.*

Not one bit.

*No*.

So Zeus got one of Hera’s nymphs to distract her.

*By telling her stories.*

Hera loved stories.

*So the nymph told her stories.*

Very long ones.

*And while Hera was listening to stories, Zeus could play around.*

With mountain nymphs.

*In the sun.*

The nymph who told the stories was called Echo.

*Yes…*

And Echo was a wonderful storyteller.

*She could tell the most amazing stories.*

And she could tell them all day long.

*But people always find out, don’t they?*

What?

*They always find out when they are being tricked.*

I suppose they do. *They always do. In the end. They always do.*

And eventually, Hera did.

*Eventually she found out that Echo was playing tricks on her.*

The stories were wonderful.

*But they were very long.*

*Yes.*

*Very long indeed.*

You could see it was a cover up.

*Covering up for Zeus.*

So he could lie about in the sun with a lot of mountain nymphs.

*Yes.*

And so Hera got very angry.

*She was angry with Zeus, of course.*

But also with Echo.

*So she punished Echo.*

Yes.

*Not fair, really.*

No, but she did.

*She took away Echo’s power of speech.*

Being a goddess, she could do that sort of thing.

*She made it impossible for Echo to speak on her own.*

So that Echo couldn’t say anything for herself.

*No.*

All she could do was repeat the last words someone else had just said.

*Repeat the last words someone else had just said.*

Yes! Exactly like that!

*So then Echo began to wander among the rocks and trees.*

Lonely and sad.

*She couldn’t speak to anyone.*

She could only repeat what anyone might say.

*Very sad.*

Especially for such a wonderful storyteller.

*Very sad.*

A lot of these Greek Myths are sad, aren’t they?

*Yes. They are.*

Most of them seem to be very tragic.

*Like this one.*

It gets sadder and sadder, doesn’t it?

*Yes, because now Echo meets Narcissus.*

Who is a very good looking young man.

*Very good looking indeed.*

So good looking that Echo falls madly in love with him.

*Madly in love.*

She wants only to be with Narcissus.

*Nothing else at all.*

But he doesn’t know she is there.

*Nor does he know how good looking he is.*

No, he doesn’t.

*In those days there were no mirrors.*

So Narcissus had never seen himself.

*He had no idea what he looked like.*

None at all.

*To begin with, Echo was shy.*

Very shy.

*She hid among the trees and rocks.*

Really shy.

*She followed Narcissus from a distance.*

And she could not call out to him.

*No.*

Because she had no power of speech.

*Until one day Narcissus heard someone following him.*

“Who’s there?” He called.

*And all Echo could do was call back “Who’s there?”*

Probably Narcissus called this a couple of times.

*And got the same reply, of course.*

“Who are you?” He must have called.

*Only to get “Who are you?” in reply.*

In the end, he called “Let’s meet each other!”

*And got the reply “Let’s meet each other!”*

So they did.

*Echo came running out from the trees and rocks.*

She ran out and flung her arms round Narcissus.

*Maybe this was all too much for him.*

Maybe.

*Maybe.*

At any rate, he would have nothing to do with poor Echo.

*No.*

Nothing at all.

*The more she tried to love him, the more he ran away.*

She tried to make Narcissus love her.

*But he couldn’t.*

“I cannot love you!” He said.

*To which she replied “Love you!”*

Very sad.

*Mmmmm… Painful.*

Eventually, Echo understands that Narcissus will never love her.

*So she wanders off among the trees and rocks.*

And eventually just pines away and dies.

*Only her voice remains.*

Repeating the last words anyone says.

*All that remains among the trees and rocks is an echo.*

A reminder of a sad mountain nymph.

*Very sad.*

Well, we did say that these Greek Myths are usually tragic.

*And so they are.*

And it gets worse, too.

*Much worse.*

Because Narcissus is so good looking that he falls in love with himself.

*Well, with his own reflection.*

Yes.

*When he eventually comes to see it.*

Yes.

*He sits by a river one day.*

Sits by a lovely, still pool.

*Looks into the water.*

And sees his own reflection.

*Sees himself for the very first time.*

Yes.

*Sees himself looking up out of the water.*

And falls madly in love.

*With his own reflection.*

Madly in love with the reflection of himself in the river.

*Head over heels in love.*

With himself!

*Well, he was a very good looking young fellow.*

Even so!

*Well…*

It’s a bit over the top to fall madly in love with your own reflection!

*But that’s what the story tells us he did.*

Yes. It does.

*He is so much in love that he cannot bring himself to leave.*

No.

*So he sits on the side of this lovely pool all day long.*

Just staring into it.

*Staring at his own reflection.*

He does nothing, all day.

*Just stares into the water.*

He doesn’t eat anything.

*He just stays on the bank of the pool.*

Staring into the water.

*Looking at his own reflection.*

Day after day.

*Just looking into that river.*

And, of course, the end of the story is inevitable.

*Inevitable.*

You can see how it will end.

*It’s inevitable.*

Narcissus pines away and dies.

*Right there, by the pool.*

Pines away and dies, just like Echo did.

*Tragic*.

But where he dies, on the bank of the pool, a lovely flower grows.

*A beautiful, white flower.*

Well, maybe it was yellow.

*I see it as a white flower.*

But I see it as quite tall, with a yellow flower.

*Anyway, whether it was yellow or white doesn’t really matter.*

I suppose not.

*The story tells us that it was a flower which grew right by the pool.*

Yes.

*Right where Narcissus died.*

Yes.

*And it grew out over the pool.*

And the flower hung down over the water.

*Face down over the water.*

So it looked as if it was looking into the pool.

*Looking at its own reflection.*

Just like Narcissus.

*Yes. Just like Narcissus.*

Which is why we call that flower the Narcissus.

*Yes.*

It’s a whole family of flowers, actually.

*Yes. It is.*

The Narcissus family.

*Which includes daffodils.*

That’s why I saw it as quite a tall, yellow flower.

*You often see them growing round ponds, don’t you?*

You do.

*Looking into the water.*

Staring at their own reflection.

*Just like Narcissus.*

And it’s not just the name of a flower, is it?

*Mmmm…?*

Narcissus I mean.

*His name is part of our language now.*

We use it when we want to say someone is very, very vain.

*Very, very keen on how they look.*

We say they are “narcisissistic”.

*In love with themselves.*

Like Narcissus.

*Exactly.*

“Narcissistic”. I can hardly say it!

*Not an easy word to say, is it?*

Narcissistic? No, it’s not.

*You have to say it slowly.*

Narcissistic. Like that.

*Narcissistic.*

Quite a nice word, isn’t it?

*Yes. I suppose it is.*

Once you know how to say it!

*Yes.*

And we still talk about an echo.

*Yes.*

Sometimes you can hear the sound of your own voice coming back.

*Yes.*

Especially in rocky places round mountains.

*Yes.*

As if a mountain nymph was repeating your last words.

*Repeating your last words.*

Exactly like that!

*Interesting, these old Greek myths.*

Yes. I suppose they are.

*I’m hungry, though.*

Me too.

*Shall we get something to eat?*