

the terrain of Tartarus, and the bolts of those gates, and dreamed a three-headed dog — could such a mind be turned to mercy by a few notes of music, a few tears? Would he who made the water shrink always from the thirst of Tantalus, and who toyed with Sisyphus' stone, rolling it always back and forth — could this will, this black ever-curdling rage, this dire fancy, relent and let a girl return to her husband just because the husband had asked? Had it been she following him through the Field of Asphodel, through the paths of Tartarus, through the gates, over the river? Had it been she or the echoes of his own fancy — that cheating mourner's fancy, which, kind but to be cruel, conjures up the beloved face and voice only to scatter them like smoke? Was it this, then? Was this the final cruelty? Was this the torment Hades had promised? Was this the final ironic flourish of death's scepter, which had always liked to cudgel poets? Had he come back without her? Was it all for nothing? Or was she there? Was she there?

Swiftly he turned, and looked back. She was there. It was she. He reached his hand to take hers and draw her out into the light — but the hand turned to smoke. The arm turned to smoke. The body became mist, a spout of mist. And the face melted. The last to go was the mouth with its smile of welcome. Then it melted. The bright vapor blew away in the fresh upper current of air that blew through the crevasse from the upper world.



Of all the nymphs of river and wood, a dryad named Echo was the best beloved. She was not only very beautiful and very kind, but had a haunting musical voice. The other dryads and naiads and creatures of the wood begged her to sing to them and tell them stories — and she did. She was a great favorite of Aphrodite who used to come all the way from Olympus to chat with Echo and listen to her tales. Being goddess of love, she was especially concerned with gossip — which is mostly about who loves

whom and what they are doing about it. And Echo kept her entertained as no one else could.

Aphrodite said, "All the world asks me for favors, Echo. But not you. Tell me, is there not someone you would wish to love you? Some man, boy, god? Just name him, and I will send my son Eros, who will shoot him with his arrow, and make him fall madly in love with you."

But Echo laughed, and said, "Alas, sweet Aphrodite, I have seen no man who pleases me. And gods are too fickle. Man and boy — I look at them all very carefully, but none seems beautiful enough to match my secret dream. When the time comes, I shall ask your help — if it ever comes."

"Well, you are lovely enough to demand the best," said Aphrodite. "On the other hand, the best happens only once. And who can wait so long? However, I am always at your service."

Now Echo did not know this, but at that moment the most beautiful boy in the whole world was lost in that very wood, trying to find his way out. His name was Narcissus, and he was so handsome that he had never been able to speak to any woman except his mother. For any girl who saw him immediately fainted. Of course this also gave him a very high opinion of himself. And, as he went through the woods, he thought:

"Oh, how I wish I could find someone as beautiful as I. I will not be friends with anyone less perfect in face or form. Why should I? This leaves me lonely, true, but it's better than lowering myself."

So he walked along the path, but he was going the wrong way, getting more and more lost. In the other part of the wood Echo had just said farewell to Aphrodite, and was coming back to the hollow tree in which she lived. She came to a glade in the forest, and there saw some-

thing that made her stop in astonishment, and hide behind a tree. For whom did she see but Zeus himself — king of the gods, lord of the sky. He was leaning on his volt-blue lightning shaft, holding a river nymph by the shoulder, and she was smiling up at him.

"Well," said Echo. "He's at it again. Won't Aphrodite enjoy hearing about *this!*"

But then her attention was caught by something else. She turned to see a tall purple-clad figure moving through the trees toward the glade. She recognized Hera, queen of the gods, jealous wife of Zeus, and she realized that Hera must have heard of what Zeus was doing, and was coming to catch him. And so the kind-hearted nymph hurried forward and curtsied low before Hera, saying, "Greetings, great queen. Welcome to the wood."

"Hush, fool!" whispered Hera. "Don't say a word! I am trying to take someone by surprise."

"This is a proud day for us," said Echo, thinking swiftly, "to be visited by so many gods. Just two minutes ago, Zeus was here looking for you."

"Zeus? Looking for *me?* Are you sure?"

"The great Zeus. Your husband. He asked me whether I had seen you. Said he had heard you were coming this way, and he wished very much to meet you. When I told him I had not seen you, he flew off looking very disappointed."

"Really? Can it be so? Zeus looking for me? Disappointed? Well — miracles never cease. Which way did he go?"

"Oh . . . toward Olympus."

"Thank you, child," said Hera. "I'll be going too." And she disappeared.

In the meantime, Zeus, hearing voices, had hidden

himself and the river nymph in the underbrush. When Hera left, he came out, and to thank Echo he gave her a shining blue sapphire ring from his own finger.

Hera, having returned to Olympus, found that Zeus was not there. She realized that something was wrong, and sped back to the forest. The first thing she saw was Echo admiring a large sapphire ring that burned on her finger like a fallen star. Hera recognized the ring, and immediately understood that the nymph had tricked her in some way and had been given the ring as a reward.

"Wretched creature!" she cried. "I know what you have done. I see the gift you have been given. And I would not have it said that my husband is more generous than I. So I too shall reward you for what you have done. Because you have used your voice for lying, you shall never be able to say anything to anyone again — except the last words that have been said to you. Now, try lying."

"Try lying," said Echo.

"No more shall you meddle in high concerns — no more shall you gossip and tell stories and sing songs — but endure this punishment evermore. . . ."

"Evermore . . ." said Echo, sobbing.

And Hera went away to search for Zeus. And the nymph, weeping, rushed toward her home in the hollow tree. As she was going she saw once again the dazzling brightness that was the face of a god, and she stopped to see. It was no god, but a lad about her own age, with black hair and eyes the color of the sapphire Zeus had given her. When she saw him, all the grief of her punishment dissolved, and she was full of a great laughing joy. For here was the boy she had been looking for all her life, as beautiful as her secret dream . . . a boy she could love.

She danced toward him. He stopped, and said, "Pardon me, but can you show me the path out of the wood?"

"Out of the wood . . ." said Echo.

"Yes," he said. "I'm lost. I've been wandering here for hours, and I can't seem to find my way out of the wood."

"Out of the wood . . ."

"Yes. I've told you twice. I'm lost. Can you help me find the way?"

"The way . . ."

"Are you deaf, perhaps? Why must I repeat everything?"

"Repeat everything . . ."

"No, I will not! It's a bore! I won't do it!"

"Do it . . ."

"Look I can't stand here arguing with you. If you don't want to show me the way, well then, I'll just try to find someone who can."

"Who can . . ."

Narcissus glared at her, and started away. But she came to him, and put her arms around him, and tried to kiss his face.

"Oh, no — none of that!" said Narcissus, shoving her away. "You're just like all the rest of them, aren't you? They faint, and you say stupid things. Stop it! You can't kiss me."

"Kiss me . . ."

"No!"

"No . . ."

And she tried to kiss him again. Again he pushed her aside. She fell on her knees on the path, and hugged his legs, and lifted her lovely tear-streaked face to his, trying to speak. But she could not.

"No!" he said. "Let go! You can't hold me here. I will not love you."

"Love you . . ."

He tore himself from her grip and strode away. "Farewell," he called.

"Farewell . . ."

She looked after him until he disappeared. And when he was gone she felt such sadness, such terrible tearing grief, such pain in every part of her, that it seemed she was being torn apart by white-hot little pincers, torn flesh from bone. And since she could not speak, she said this prayer to herself:

"Oh, Aphrodite . . . fair goddess . . . you promised me a favor. Do me one now. Hear me though I am voiceless. My love has disappeared, and I must disappear too, for I cannot bear the pain."

And Aphrodite, in the garden on Olympus, heard this prayer — for prayers do not have to be spoken to be heard. She looked down upon the grieving nymph, and pitied her, and made her disappear. Her body melted into thin cool air, so that the pain was gone. All was gone . . . except her voice, for Aphrodite could not bear to lose the sound of that lovely story-telling voice. The goddess said, "I grant you your wish — and one thing more. You have not asked vengeance upon the love that has betrayed you. You are too sweet and kind. But *I* shall take vengeance, nevertheless. I decree now that whoever has caused you this pain will know the same terrible longing. He will fall in love with someone who cannot return his love . . . and will forever desire and never achieve."

But Narcissus knew nothing of this — of Echo's grief, nor Aphrodite's vow. He wandered the forest path, think-

ing, "All these girls who love me on sight — it's too bad I cannot find one as beautiful as I. For until I do, I shall not love. And all their loving will be only vexation to me."

He sat down on the bank of a river to rest. Not a river really, but a finger of the river — a clear little stream moving slowly through rocks. The sun shone on it; it became a mirror, holding the trees and the sky upside down, and a small silver trembling sun. And Narcissus, looking into the stream, saw a face.

He blinked his eyes, and looked again. It was still there — the most beautiful face he had ever seen. As beautiful, he knew, as his own, but with a nimbus of light behind it so that the hair was blurred and looked long — like a girl's. He gazed and gazed, and could not have enough of it. He knew that he could look upon this face forever and still not be satisfied. He put out his hand to touch her. The water trembled, and she disappeared.

"A water nymph," he thought. "A lovely dryad . . . daughter of the river god, no doubt. The loveliest of his daughters. She is shy. Like me, she can't bear to be touched. Ah . . . here she is again."

The face looked at him out of the stream. Again, very timidly, he reached his hand. Again the water trembled and the face disappeared.

"I will stay here until she loves me," he said to himself. "She may hide now, but presently she will recognize me too. And come out." And he said aloud: "Come out, lovely one."

And the voice of Echo, who had followed him to the stream, said, "Lovely one . . ."

"Hear that, hear that!" cried Narcissus, overjoyed. "She cares for me too. You do, don't you? You love me."

"Love me . . ."

"I do . . . I do . . . Finally I have found someone to love. Come out, come out. . . Oh, will you never come out?"

"Never come out . . ." said Echo.

"Don't say that, please don't say that. Because I will stay here till you do. This, I vow."

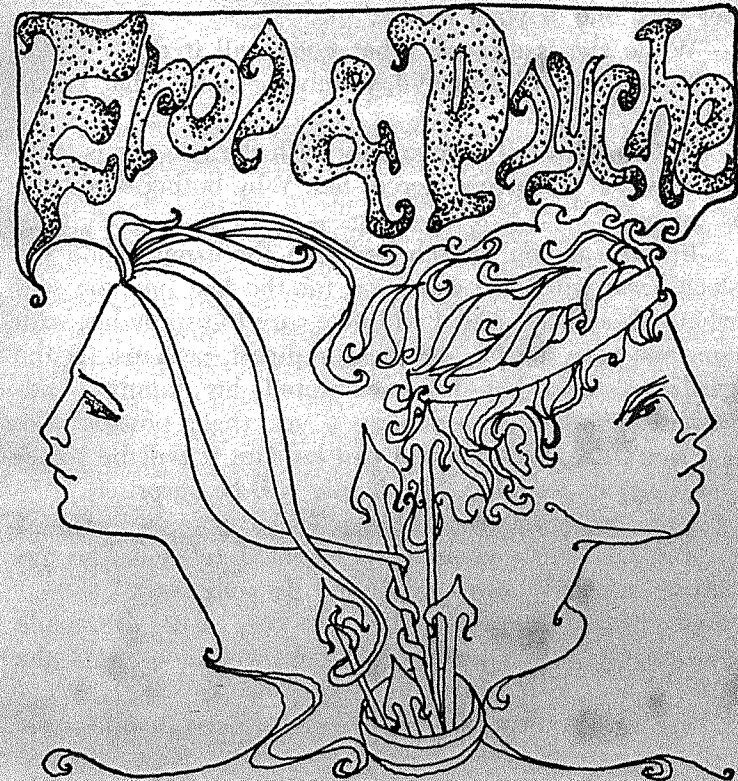
"I vow . . ."

"Your voice is as beautiful as your face. And I will stay here, adoring you forever."

"Forever . . ."

And Narcissus stayed there, leaning over the stream, watching the face in the water, watching, watching . . . sometimes pleading with it to come out, hearing its voice answer. Coaxing, begging, looking. . . . Day after day he stayed there, night after night, never moving, never eating, never looking away from the face. He stayed there so long that his legs grew into the bank of the river, and became roots. His hair grew long, tangled, leafy. And his pale face and blue eyes became delicate blue and white petals — the flower Narcissus, that lives on the riverbank, and leans over watching its reflection in the water.

And there you can find it till this day. And in the woods too, when all is still, you will sometimes come upon Echo. And if you call to her in a certain way, she will answer your call.



There was a king who had three daughters, and the youngest, named Psyche, was so beautiful that Aphrodite grew jealous, and began to plan mischief.

"I'll teach that little upstart," she said to herself. "How dare she go around pretending to be as beautiful as I? When I get through with her she'll wish she'd been born ugly as a toad."

She called her son Eros to her, and said, "Son, your mother has been insulted. See that castle down there?"