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The Story of Echo

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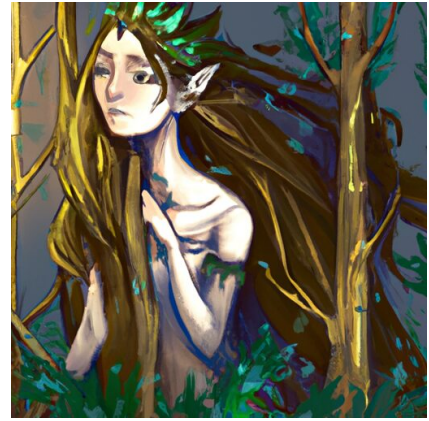
Among the trees of the forest, and where the cool streams run, beautiful wood-nymphs used to have their homes. They loved to play in the flickering sunlight and under the dancing leaves, and people sometimes caught sight of the gleam of their white feet as they dipped them in the rushing waters of the brook.

There was one happy little nymph named Echo, whose favourite amusement was to play tricks and tease her companions. "Daphne! Oh, come here! - quick - just see!" she would sometimes call. And when Daphne came running to the spot, eager to see what there was to be seen, Echo would have vanished as completely as if she had never been there - until presently a stifled laugh showed her hiding place.

Echo was, too, a great chatterer; she never listened long to anyone else, but was sure to talk a great deal herself. One day she came upon a shepherd sitting on a rock and watching his sheep as they cropped the grass below. She noticed that some of the sheep were beginning to stray from the flock and, thinking this a chance for a bit of fun, she at once began to laugh and talk with the shepherd to keep him from thinking of his flock. Soon, not one of the flock was left in sight, and then, with a laugh at the dismayed face of the shepherd, Echo, too, ran away and left him.

At first, the other nymphs used to laugh at her nonsense and enjoyed the fun as much as Echo herself did. But as she was continually playing her tricks on everybody in season and out of season, and as the tricks, like that she played on the shepherd, were often unkind ones, her companions gradually came to leave her out of their sports and plays. After a time, as she did not mend her ways, they avoided her altogether.

One day it happened that Juno (Hera), the queen of the gods, came to the forest, and Echo troubled her so much with her foolish chattering that, finally, Juno declared a just punishment on the teasing nymph. "Since Echo talks and jokes only to weary everyone," Juno said, "she shall no longer be able to speak unless someone first speaks to her. She shall have power to answer but never to begin a conversation."



Echo, ashamed and sorry, went away into the deep woods, where ever after she dwelt alone. She was seldom seen by men, but a traveler, once, coming out of the wood, told how he had lost his way at nightfall and had called loudly, hoping someone might hear and come to his aid. He seemed to have a faint answer, he said, but as he could not tell where it came, he called again, saying "Come here!" "Here," the voice answered. "Where are you?" he called. "Where are you?" replied the voice. Finally, out of patience, "Away with you!" he shouted. "Away with you," came back with an angry sound. After that, he heard no more, nor, although he searched the wood, was he able to find a trace of anyone.

Echo's voice is still heard sometimes in lonely places, but only when someone calls to her. If the call is a laughing one, she laughs back; if it is sad, she answers mournfully. But merry or sad, she never shows herself.

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