



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Wood-folk

Josephine Preston Peabody

Pan led a merrier life than all the other gods together. He was beloved alike by shepherds and countrymen, and by the fauns and satyrs, birds and beasts, of his own kingdom. The care of flocks and herds was his, and for home he had all the world of woods and waters; he was lord of everything out-of-doors! Yet he felt the burden of it no more than he felt the shadow of a leaf when he danced, but spent the days in laughter and music among his fellows. Like him, the fauns and satyrs had furry, pointed ears, and little horns that sprouted above their brows; in fact, they were all enough like wild creatures to seem no strangers to anything untamed. They slept in the sun, piped in the shade, and lived on wild grapes and the nuts that every squirrel was ready to share with them.

The woods were never lonely. A man might wander away into those solitudes and think himself friendless; but here and there a river knew, and a tree could tell, a story of its own. Beautiful creatures they were, that for one reason or another had left off human shape. Some had been transformed against their will, that they might do no more harm to their fellow-men. Some were changed through the pity of the gods, that they might share the simple life of Pan, mindless of mortal cares, glad in rain and sunshine, and always close to the heart of the Earth.

There was Dryope, for instance, the lotus-tree. Once a careless, happy woman, walking among the trees with her sister Iole and her own baby, she had broken a lotus that held a live nymph hidden, and blood dripped from the wounded plant. Too late, Dryope saw her heedlessness; and there her steps had taken root, and there she had said good-by to her child, and prayed Iole to bring him sometimes to play beneath her shadow. Poor mother-tree! Perhaps she took comfort with the birds and gave a kindly shelter to some nest.

There, too, was Echo, once a wood-nymph who angered the goddess Juno with her waste of words, and was compelled now to wait till others spoke, and then to say nothing but their last word, like any mocking-bird. One day she saw and loved the youth Narcissus, who was searching the woods for his hunting companions. "Come hither!" he called, and Echo cried "Hither!" eager to speak at last. "Here am I,—come!" he repeated, looking about for the voice. "I come," said Echo, and she stood before him. But the youth, angry at such mimicry, only stared at her and hastened away. From that time she faded to a voice, and to

this day she lurks hidden and silent till you call.

But Narcissus himself was destined to fall in love with a shadow. For, leaning over the edge of a brook one day, he saw his own beautiful face looking up at him like a water-nymph. He leaned nearer, and the face rose towards him, but when he touched the surface it was gone in a hundred ripples. Day after day he besought the lovely creature to have pity and to speak; but it mocked him with his own tears and smiles, and he forgot all else, until he changed into a flower that leans over to see its image in the pool.

There, too, was the sunflower Clytie, once a maiden who thought nothing so beautiful as the sun-god Phoebus Apollo. All the day long she used to look after him as he journeyed across the heavens in his golden chariot, until she came to be a fair rooted plant that ever turns its head to watch the sun.

Many like were there. Daphne the laurel, Hyacinthus (once a beautiful youth, slain by mischance), who lives and renews his bloom as a flower,—these and a hundred others. The very weeds were friendly....

But there were wise, immortal voices in certain caves and trees. Men called them Oracles; for here the gods spoke in answer to the prayers of folk in sorrow or bewilderment. Sometimes they built a temple around such a befriending voice, and kings would journey far to hear it speak.

As for Pan, only one grief had he, and in the end a glad thing came of it.

One day, when he was loitering in Arcadia, he saw the beautiful wood-nymph Syrinx. She was hastening to join Diana at the chase, and she herself was as swift and lovely as any bright bird that one longs to capture. So Pan thought, and he hurried after to tell her. But Syrinx turned, caught one glimpse of the god's shaggy locks and bright eyes, and the two little horns on his head (he was much like a wild thing, at a look), and she sprang away down the path in terror.



Begging her to listen, Pan followed; and Syrinx, more and more frightened by the patter of his hoofs, never heeded him, but went as fast as light till she came to the brink of the river. Only then she paused, praying her friends, the water-nymphs, for some way of escape. The gentle, bewildered creatures, looking up through the water, could think of but one device.

Just as the god overtook Syrinx and stretched out his arms to her, she vanished like a mist, and he found himself grasping a cluster of tall reeds. Poor Pan!

The breeze that sighed whenever he did—and oftener—shook the reeds and made a sweet little sound,—a sudden music. Pan heard it, half consoled.

"Is it your voice, Syrinx?" he said. "Shall we sing together?"

He bound a number of the reeds side by side; to this day, shepherds know how. He blew across the hollow pipes and they made music!

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom