

# NARCISSUS

Narcissus was the son of a river god and a nymph. He was a charming child who grew up to be a particularly vain and foolish adult. Narcissus's problem was his beauty. Blessed by the good looks of the gods, he stood out in a crowd and he knew it. He realized early on that he did not have to rely on anything other than his beauty to get what he wanted out of life and the people around him.

But as Narcissus grew older, he began caring less and less about anyone or anything other than himself. Young women would travel across the country to profess their love for him, yet he would ignore them. Narcissus found no need for human companionship. In his eyes, none of the women were worthy enough—no one in the world would ever be.

Such a mixture of outer beauty and inner ugliness began to produce consequences. Many of Narcissus's former friends despised him for the way they had been treated. One such former friend appealed to Artemis, goddess of the hunt, for revenge. Artemis responded immediately. She cursed Narcissus to fall in love, but only for love that would be eternally unfulfilled.

Soon after, Narcissus was walking in the woods when he caught sight of something that made him stop abruptly. He moved closer, only to find that what he had seen was his own reflection in a nearby stream. He was transfixed. Narcissus felt as if he had never been able to fully appreciate his own beauty until that moment. He fell in love with his own face.

Hours passed, and then days. Narcissus did not eat or drink. Finally, he died of dehydration and starvation. The last thing he saw was his beautiful face, wasted by his own foolishness.

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why was Narcissus so unusually beautiful?
2. What caused Narcissus's former friends to despise him?
3. Why would Artemis agree to help punish Narcissus?
4. Why didn't Narcissus eat or drink after he discovered his own reflection in the stream?

