

Echoes

Long ago, before the sun learned to set and the moon learned to hide, there lived a young girl. She lived high in the mountains in a small hut of good solid stone. This hut was just on the edge of a cliff; it was the tallest cliff in those parts, in fact. Every day the girl would wake and fill her small clay cup with water from the cool stream that flowed nearby. She would then sit on the edge of her cliff to sip her water and speak to the mountains. Always, the mountains spoke back and repeated what she said. The girl was not lonely on her cliff with the mountains to speak back to her and keep her company. Years passed and the girl grew older while the mountains continued to speak back to her, always repeating what she said to them.

One day the girl rose from her hut, filled her clay cup from the stream, and sat to speak to the mountains. "Hello." said the girl. She sat and listened, waiting for the faint sound of the reply. However, on this day there was no reply. She tried again, saying a bit louder "Hello, mountains." yet still she heard nothing. At last, she yelled out "Hello! Mountains!" from her clifftop. Just as before, there was no response. She was very puzzled at this. That was the first day that she was lonely, which she found to be a thoroughly unpleasant experience.

The next morning, she rose once more and spoke to her mountains, with the same result. "Maybe the mountains are thinking?" she thought to herself. "I daresay it would take a mountain quite a while to think." and she waited another day for the mountains to respond. On the third day she rose again and spoke from her clifftop. With no response, yet again, she determined to find out where the voice of the mountains had gone. But where to start? With no other ideas, she approached the stream where she filled her cup each morning. "Stream," she asked, "where has the voice of the mountains gone?" But the stream simply babbled nonsense and ran off down the mountain.

"If the stream doesn't know and won't stand still long enough to listen, maybe the sea knows. It's the biggest thing in the world and won't run away from me." the girl said to herself. She therefore followed the stream, listening to it as it babbled on and on about its journey to the sea. She followed it to a river who was slightly quieter yet still ran on with no time to listen to her questions. She followed the river far into the west. Month after month she walked. She asked the rocks and trees that she passed if they knew where the voice of the mountains had gone, and they didn't respond. She asked the animals along the way if they knew, but she couldn't understand them as she understood the land.

At last, after a year and a day of following the river west, she reached the sea. "Sea," the girl said. "can you tell me where the voice of the mountains has gone? I've asked the waters, animals, rocks, and trees, but you're the biggest of all things in the world. Can you tell me?" The sea pounded on the sand for a moment, before whispering to her. "I know nothing of the mountains. All I see is the very edge of land. I know the sand, and the birds, and the fish, but not the mountains. Go ask the wind. The wind knows of such things as mountains for it has been to all places."

"And how can I find the wind?" asked the girl.

"You must chase it and trap it of course." Said the sea. "Find a place that the wind can't escape if you want to ask it a question, otherwise it will blow away your words and you'll never hear its answer." With no other leads, girl walked off east following a gentle breeze that blew off the sea. On and on she walked, chasing the wind. She followed it through trees as it caught in the branches and rushed past the

leaves. She chased it for miles over the plains as it rolled over the grass. She even pursued it as it raged far off in great whirlwinds. Finally, after two years, she approached the foothills of the far east where the wind blew gently.

Following the breeze into the hills, the girl entered a low cave. The wind twisted and turned in here, weaving in and around the great stone pillars in the darkness. The wind, the girl realized, was the breath of the mountain. The girl stood in the soft darkness, listening to the breath. "Hello?" she asked. "Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello..." replied the darkness. The girl smiled. She had found the voice of the mountains. "Great voice, won't you come back to speak to me on the cliffs again?" she asked "Again? Again? Again? Again?..." replied the mountains. "Yes." replied the girl. "Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes..." came the answer in the darkness. Smiling, the girl left the cave with the sound of soft footsteps behind her.

On she journeyed back through the fields to the west until she came at last to the river she had first walked along. She followed it until she found her stream, still babbling away about its journey until at long last, many miles and years later, she came back home. She filled her cup from the stream, sat down on the edge of her cliff, and spoke. "Hello." she said.

"Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello..." the mountains answered.