

POETRY

**Glaucus**

(for Leslie Norris, 1921–2006)

*Patricia Gunter Karamesines*

*"I am no monster . . . nor a fierce beast, but a god of the sea . . ."*  
—Ovid, *Metamorphosis*

We can't say what Glaucus knew  
From watching storms crush and reshape  
The surge, what voices he'd heard  
When the tide swelled onto the beach,  
Or what he'd seen in fish guts dropped  
On sand. He merely husbanded the waves,  
Throwing his web over that endless face  
Of expression. Not a fisherman  
To prowl safe waters for dependable yield,  
He went daily before the backward stepping sea.  
That's how he came upon the water meadow  
Where no bees dipped the flowers.  
The grass had never borne a footstep.  
Glaucus was its only creature. He cast  
Net offshore, watched it sink away,  
And with a few lines running between himself  
And some place beyond clear prospect,  
Waded through eye-watering glare angling off  
The sea's hooked and changeful scales.

He laid his catch on the old grass,  
 Saw dead fish shudder, retake life, lift  
 Themselves upright. Dorsal, caudal fins  
 Manipulated air as though liquid,  
 And under his look, they swam overland  
 Back to the breathable deep.  
 It's hard to grasp how Glaucus thought, "The grass."  
 Harder still to imagine his eating it.  
 He must have decided during some untold history  
 To bid farewell forever, to leave lines and nets  
 Masterless upon the sand, and the swale  
 As he found it, at the edge of his gone world.  
 What should we make of the desire that took him?  
 We, too, have stood on the shore of the thousand-fold myth,  
 And still we stand, awaiting science or some parent.  
 What occurs instead is the muteness of vast event  
 And the crash of the breakers of mystery.

Thus Glaucus went beyond strands  
 Of the imagination, god with a raveling green beard,  
 Hair an undertow in itself, heroic shoulders,  
 Blue arms, and legs fused, each curving  
 Down thigh and ankle into a fluke.

But we can't envy him. If he came to us  
 We'd spurn him—like Scylla did—as a monstrous innocent,  
 The changed creature of some obscure devotion.