

Glaucus and Scylla



GLAUCUS, a god of the sea, was once a mortal man. He lived in the island of Euboea, and even then, in his mortal life, he was devoted to the sea, and spent all his time upon it, sometimes dragging in his nets full of fish, sometimes sitting on the rocks with rod and line, looking out over the blue water to the mountains and the islands.

There is a part of the shore where green grass runs down to the water. Here no horned cattle have ever grazed, nor have peaceful sheep cropped the grass, nor hairy goats. No busy bees have ever crossed the meadow in search of honey, nor have human hands plucked the flowers for garlands. It is a deserted place, and Glaucus was the first ever to sit down on the soft turf, where he spread out his lines and wet nets to dry, and began to count the fish that he had caught, laying them all out upon the grass in rows.

While he was doing so, he was amazed to see that the fish, as soon as they were laid on the grass, began to stir and to wriggle; then they began to move about on land as

GLAUCUS AND SCYLLA

though they were on water, and soon they all moved down again to the sea and swam away.

Glaucus stood for a long time in amazement, wondering what could be the reason for this strange happening. Was it one of the gods who had given this power to the fish? Or was it the effect of some magic in the grass? He decided to see whether the grass would have any effect on him and, taking up a handful of grass and flowers together, began to eat it. Hardly had he begun to taste the strange juices when he felt his heart trembling and longing for an entirely different way of life. "Farewell, Earth!" he cried out. "I shall never come back to you again." And he plunged into the sea.

The gods of the sea welcomed him and made him one of them. They purged away from him everything that was mortal, first by repeating over him nine times a magic charm, then by washing his body in the streams of a hundred rivers. As the rivers poured their waters over his head, Glaucus lost consciousness. When his senses came back to him, he found that both his body and his mind had changed. Now he had a long streaming beard, dark green hair that floated beside him in the waves, huge shoulders, sea-blue arms and curved legs that ended in the fins of fishes. Blowing on a horn made of a deep-sea shell, he swam and dived with the Nereids and other gods and goddesses of the ocean.

There was a mortal girl, Scylla, who, in her pride, had refused all offers of marriage, and who used to come and talk with the nymphs of the sea. Glaucus fell in love with her and told her his story, wishing to show her that, though

he was a god, he was also able to understand mortals. She, however, fled from him, as she had fled from everybody else, and Glaucus, angry and bitter at being refused, went for help to the wonderful palace and island of the goddess Circe.

With his huge arms and sinuous legs and tail he swam past Sicily and Italy and came to the grassy hills and woods where Circe had her palace. In the woods were bears and lions, panthers, tigers, beasts of all kinds—all once men, but now turned into these shapes by Circe's enchantments. Circe welcomed him and he said to her: "O goddess, have pity upon a god. You alone, if you think me worthy of your help, can help me in my love. I myself know the power of magic herbs, since it was by them that I became a god. Now I am in love with a mortal. Her name is Scylla and she lives on the coast of Italy, opposite Sicily. I beg you to use some charm or some magic herb to help me. I do not want you to cure me of my love, but to make her love me with at least a little of the feeling that I have for her."

Circe, however, was a goddess whose heart was very easily moved to the love either of gods or of men. When she saw Glaucus, she desired to have him for herself and said to him: "It would be much better to leave someone who does not want you and to follow someone who does. You who might be wooed yourself ought not to waste your time in wooing. And to give you confidence in your own charm I tell you that I myself, the daughter of the sun, a goddess, would like to be your love."

To this Glaucus replied: "I can tell you that, so long as



Scylla is alive, leaves will grow in the sea and seaweed on the tops of the mountains before my love changes."

Circe was angry. She could not hurt him, and perhaps since she loved him, she did not want to. All her anger turned against the woman who had been preferred to her. At once she mixed together the juices of terrible herbs and, as she did so, she muttered charms that are used by Hecate, the goddess of witches. Then she put on a blue cloak and went out through the wild beasts that licked her hands and fawned upon her as she passed. She walked over the waves of the sea as though it was dry land, just skimming the surface with dry feet, and she came to the channel where Italy looks across at Sicily.

There was a little rock pool shaped like a crescent moon, a place where Scylla loved to come and rest. Here she used to refresh herself in the heat of midday, and in this pool, before Scylla arrived, Circe put the terrible poisons which she had brought, again murmuring over them her charmed words.

Then Scylla came and had gone into the pool as far as her waist when, looking downwards, she saw all round the lower part of her body the shapes of barking monsters. When first she saw them she could not believe that they were actually parts of her body, but fled away terrified at the sight of the fierce dog's heads. As she fled, however, she drew with her what she was running away from. Putting down her hand to feel the flesh of her thighs, her legs and her feet, all she felt was the gaping heads of dogs, fearful as Cerberus himself. Instead of feet she stood on the hairy necks and savage faces of wild beasts.

GLAUCUS AND SCYLLA

Glaucus, who loved her, wept for her and fled far away from Circe who had used her charms so cruelly. As for Scylla, she remained fixed to the rock in that place. Opposite her was the fig tree and great whirlpool of Charybdis. Later, when she had a chance, she tried to revenge herself on Circe by destroying the sailors of Ulysses, who had been Circe's friend.