

Each Moment a White Bull Steps Shining into the World

by Jane Hirshfield

If the gods bring to you
a strange and frightening creature,
accept the gift
as if it were one you had chosen.
Say the accustomed prayers,
oil the hooves well,
caress the small ears with praise.
Have the new halter of woven silver
embedded with jewels.
Spare no expense, pay what is asked,
when a gift arrives from the sea.
Treat it as you yourself
would be treated,
brought speechless and naked
into the court of a king.

And when the request finally comes,
do not hesitate even an instant—
Stroke the white throat,
the heavy, trembling dewlaps
you've come to believe were yours,
and plunge in the knife.
Not once
did you enter the pasture
without pause,
without yourself trembling.
That you came to love it, that was the gift.
Let the envious gods take back what they can.