

A necessary slaughter

by [Christine Hemp](#) in the [September 30, 2015](#) issue

I must admit at first it threw me,  
competing with a portent. (What fools  
would treasure light instead of might?)  
Such naïveté: Scholars trekking here  
smitten with a star or some convergence  
of the cosmos. Yet another fire to put out.

I sent them on their way, their caravan rife  
with herbs I could have used myself. Camels  
balking and desert horses restless  
in the night. Meanwhile that star hummed  
like a lute, vibrating on a frequency I coveted  
but couldn't always hear. I slammed the door,  
closed the shutters. No way would it make  
a shadow out of me. My wife said,

"No worries. They'll be back.  
Anyway, what child can match your currency,  
your death squads? The bricks of that  
new temple? And Rome behind you? Get real."

I pulled her close, forgetting which wife  
she was (nine? ten?) and glad to have her.  
Weeks later, when those wanderers failed  
to return, I glanced into my looking glass.  
The eyes staring back at me were nothing  
but blank gold coins.