

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.