

Civil war has exhausted this generation and the next. The powers of Rome have no answer. We could defeat our Eastern neighbors. Withstand the threat of the central tribe and its crested king. Deny the City of Marshes and our militant Greeks rivals. Subdue the fickle northern savages and the blue Germans. Delay the African general whose name makes our parents shiver. The godless destroy us now, our once-devout blood made profane with age, the state held by barbarians. To the winner, ashes—a city ground beneath hoof, the bones of our founder unearthed from a sunless, airless grave. Perhaps it's best, then, for the best among us to escape. There is nothing more powerful than this sentence. Recall the seafarers who, refusing to submit to the Persians, abandoned their damned country and left their ancestral homes to boars, their temples to greedy wolves. Let our feet take us wherever. The waves know where to go. They may call us forward to the north or south to Africa.

Sound good? Do you have a better suggestion? Why wait like augurs for a second bird to lead the ship? By the law, swear:

“Only when the rocks rise again from the shallows do we return to the scene of this crime. We raise sails to home when Italy’s mightiest river washes onto Greek shores. When our mountains jut out of the sea. When lust unites the monsters. When the tigers and deer, the dove and hawk join in love. When herds welcome the lion, and goats dance in the salt of the ocean.”

Let the whole damn city flee, or at least the strong among us. The soft, hopeless dullards can lie in their wicked beds. You, who are virtuous, take up the women’s mourning and fly from these coasts. We will wander the oceans, pray for islands with rich, blessed fields. There, the land gives grain without plowing. There, the vines bloom without grafting. The olives branch and figs hang like ornaments. Honey flows from hollow oaks, and water trickles from the high mountains beside our

feet. There, the herds and flocks walk to the milking pail each night, uninvited and full to bursting. There, no evening bears growl. No vipers nest in the deep, swollen ground. Many surprises await us in this place where Eastern winds barely scrape our fields with showers, where our seeds are not burned to fat lumps, sun tempered by the king of the gods. It is a place where no Argonaut oarsmen ever stecred. Where Medea never set impure foot. Where neither cloth merchants nor sailors in Ulysses' band ever cast their yards. There, no plagues to ravish our herds. No burning stars to strike our flocks barren. Jupiter has set this beach aside for us, a loving nation. Stained by air, the Golden Age tarnished Bronze, then eternal Iron. Augurs, I am the second bird, and my prophecy is flight.