Owl Question

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FIELDS

*For Henry and Irene Spruill*

My great grandfather had some fields in North Carolina and he willed those fields to his sons and his sons willed them to their sons so there is a two-hundred-year-old farm house on that land where several generations of my family fried chicken and laughed and hung their laundry beneath the trees. There are things you know when your family has lived close to the earth: things that make magic seem likely. Dig a hole on the new of the moon and you will have dirt to throw away but dig one on the old of the moon and you won’t have enough to fill it back up again: I learned this trick in the backyard of childhood with my hands. If you know the way the moon pulls at everything then you can feel it on the streets of a city where you cannot see the sky. My mother says the moon is like a man: it changes its mind every eight days and you plant nothing until its risen full and high. If you plant corn when the signs are in the heart you will get black spots in your grain and if you meet a lover when the signs are in the feet he will never take you dancing.

When the signs are in the bowels you must not plant or your seed will rot and if you want to make a baby you must undress under earth or water. I am the one in the post office who buys stamps when the signs are in air so my mail will learn to fly. I stand in my front yard, in the suburbs, and wish for luck and money on the new of the moon when there are many black nights. I may walk the streets of this century and make my living in an office but my blood is old farming blood and my true
self is underground like a potato. At the opera
I will think of rainfall and vines. In my dreams
all my corn may grow short but the ears will be
full. If you kiss my forehead on a dark moon
in March I may disappear—but do not be afraid—
I have taken root in my grandfather’s
fields: I am hanging my laundry beneath his trees.