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TALE FROM BALZAC: BETTE

A frog foretells the disease of the moon and a woman breathes love she doesn’t mean and yet I live, in a throat-stroking wind, watching grandpa seeds with their downy beards look for space among the weeds.

Her child’s face comes to me, bleached like mist. That energetic doom in her mouth when she paid too much for the family’s meat and her mother said, “I am sorry, dear.” She grew up sly as the shore-nibbling fish.

She hurts as many as she can, now pale like a cave-life, now lit like day-mist, and who am I to escape at last, sitting here instead with comrades of grass? She wants me hurt again in the split skin of a death.