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## Atonement

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ATONEMENT

When I open my hand, she said, music comes out, and when I open my eyes an airplane lands in my mouth.

We were alone in a compartment on the Nice-to-Paris express, infamous for its dining car and its three-headed waiters.

I'm afraid I don't understand English, I replied, and stared out at the passing hills covered with cows.

In her lap sat a bowl of unripe cherries in which she had plunged both her hands. Her face, I noticed, was pale alabaster and her eyelids as white as eggs.

Are you a musician, I asked, at which she shook her head vigorously in denial and shouted, I have eaten Nerval's lobster!

Nerval, but he's been dead many years. I can't imagine...

Then she lifted her hands from the bowl, and in embarrassment I bowed my head and begged her forgiveness.