From the bushes, we watched surreptitiously as my mother knelt by the lake, illuminated by the eerie blue glow of the water. Slowly, she bent forward, submerging her face, the water turning golden around her.

“Would you like to see what she’s seeing?” he asked me. Ever a curious fool, I nodded. With a gentle flourish of his wrist, as though he were plucking a flower petal, the water danced up into a mist, recreating my mother’s vision.

The golden spray became a magnificent version of my mother, her worn-out housedress now an elegant gown, her hair, thicker and curlier, cascaded down her glowing shoulders. She was receiving a standing ovation, a packed theater, roses flying at her feet. A happiness I had never known on her face, now radiated- it broke my heart to see. The focus shifted then to show our family, front row and center. My brothers looked almost silly to me in their dandy clothes as they applauded enthusiastically. I looked to my father, eager to see his bourgeois form- but in his place stood a stranger and immediately, my chest tightened as my eyes darted to the third child to see, in my place stood a daughter.

Choked by the horror, my thoughts tumbled out like loose rocks.

“Is this

what her life

would be like

had I never been born?”

Surprised, he put a large comforting hand on my shoulder. “**No**, Sam**.** People often blame their troubles on one crossroads decision. They ignore the pitfalls of the path not taken and see only the potential. Such is the nature of regret. This was one *unlikely* outcome of fourteen million…but it’s the one that sucks your mother in the deepest… and the lake feeds on souls. Many have drowned here, simply by forgetting to breathe.”