As the Chicago skyline gradually disappeared, everyone breathed sighs of relief aboard the charter yacht. Our hearts had been racing before, eyes staring out between the murky waters and the city’s twinkling lights retreating behind us.

It didn’t take until dry land disappeared that everybody calmed down though. Everyone expected a barrage of helicopters or speedboats to teleport from nowhere, then sink our vessel. Having spent countless months and days in the confinement of hotel rooms made us all feel uneasy, especially with little lighting as we sped off into the middle of Lake Michigan.

I fell asleep on the stern with my parents. The adrenaline had been too much for us, as well as the rest of the yacht’s other passengers, who either searched for a place to power nap, or simply fought against the exhaustion. During my sleep, in which I’d taken over a whole couch while my mom and dad figuratively crashed together on an opposing couch, Lowell had returned topside. He likely didn’t want to disturb me, because I woke up to peeking rays of sunlight and feeling the timber wolf’s head lying against my stomach. Stretching my limbs, I sat upright while carefully guiding him to lounge beside me on the makeshift bed.

My paw held him closer to my chest, our tails wagging together as he tiredly yawned into my neck, cuddling me close. “Looks so blue,” I murmured to the awakened canine.

“Huh?” He cracked a stiffness in his neck, then followed my gaze. “Oh, yeah…it is.”

Oftentimes, I forgot Lake Michigan existed unless I saw it with my own eyes. It looked so vibrant and blue, like the ocean. It looked like a wonderful place to swim in. The only signs of life were an occasional flying bird in the distance or the foam being produced by the yacht’s engine’s by the bottom of the stern. Had the yacht not been traveling at what seemed like top speed, let alone the Devout government trying to hunt us down, I would have felt like diving in with Lowell. After all the stress of the previous night, it didn’t hurt to imagine a mundane thing for kids our age to do. Feeling him breath against my chest, inhaling into my neck and nuzzling into my jawline as we stared out the back of the quiet yacht reinforced it for me.

“Whatcha thinking about?” Lowell asked me tiredly, finally resting his chin on my smaller shoulder. “Worried about the future?”

“Worried about many things,” I confessed after mulling the options. My left paw snaked around his lower back as I held onto his paw with my other. “Mostly wondering if we’ll ever get to act like men our age.”

“Our age?” He perked an ear up. “Like how?”

“Worrying about paying college loans, getting a job, bugging our parents about moving out soon, looking for apartments we can actually afford in the city,” I listed them off. “Stuff like that, I guess. Never honestly thought I’d be all the way out here at this point…y’know, in life.”

“Me neither, but I figured it’d happen at some point,” Lowell sighed, then gave a small chuckle. “At least we’ll no longer be dealing with bland walls and keeping our voices down anymore, eh?”

I held back a snicker. “Not sure about being as loud as we want, but sure.”