# Interlude: Sae Sei

“Now that it’s come to this, Junsuke-san, we need to talk.”

That night, after dinner with the three of them, only Sae and Junsuke remained in the living room. Kaoru had fallen asleep early, exhausted from her first time.

“A secret from Kaoru, even now?”

“As you guessed. This is something she mustn’t know… about her father.”

Junsuke held his breath.

“I know the gist… he went fishing and…”

“It was his habit to go fishing on weekends. Sometimes he took Kaoru or friends, but usually alone, from morning.”

Junsuke’s brow twitched. He realized Sae’s husband had done this even during their marriage—and his affairs.

“The day before that day three years ago, he asked me to check on something at the yacht while I was out.”

Junsuke understood immediately.

“I checked the supplies, and though he didn’t ask, I noticed the fuel.”

Her expression darkened. A confession of guilt was coming.

“Yachts are fuel-efficient, so maybe that’s why… the tank was quite low. No spare fuel either.”

Junsuke swallowed hard.

“From vague memories of fishing with him, I thought there was barely enough fuel for a one-way trip to his favorite spot.”

A weary sigh. Her gaze drifted.

“I didn’t tell him when I got home.”

She waited for Junsuke to process her words.

“You… left him to… the sea?” He shook his head. “No, that wouldn’t…”

“I know. He could’ve checked the fuel himself. My knowledge was shaky—maybe there was enough. Even stranded, cell phones or radios work at sea. He could’ve called for help. It was just petty revenge, a foolish woman’s prank I didn’t think would work.”

She laughed bitterly. Foolish whims can breed sin.

“He left without noticing. His smartphone was left on the desk.”

“...!”

Junsuke tensed.

“I got worried. But I thought a search would find him quickly, even if it caused a fuss. I’d checked the food and water—he’d be fine.”

Or so she thought.

“But the police said, ‘Clothing fibers were found on the railing.’ ‘He likely fell into the sea.’”

Silence gripped the room. Sae couldn’t face Junsuke, the man who loved her, as a sinner.

“It’s not your fault. You didn’t cause his fall.”

“Maybe. But the fuel issue might’ve rattled him.”

“That’s not a crime—”

Her desperate defense touched her shameful heart. This was her sin.

“It’s not a legal crime, perhaps. But if there was even a chance he was in danger and I ignored it, that’s on me.”

She raised a hand to silence Junsuke’s protests.

“Don’t worry. It’s not about that.”

“Huh…?”

“Since that day, raising Kaoru has been my atonement. Her happiness is my only purpose.”

She gripped his hand.

“Junsuke-san, if you’ll make Kaoru happy, remember my sin. Together, let’s atone for our wrongs and heal her wounds.”

His hand gently squeezed back. Beyond atoning for Kaoru’s pain…

“If you have any love left, please… love me too—”