



The Cup of Choice

Seiny Araya



The grand hall glowed with the light of a thousand candles, their flames dancing and casting long, silent shadows across the stone walls. Dante moved through the crowd of laughing nobles like a ghost, his silver tray reflecting the fractured light of the wine goblets. He was the perfect servant, an extension of the castle itself, seen by everyone but noticed by none.



Hidden behind a pillar draped in thick green vines, Dante froze as he heard his master's voice, once warm but now cold and resolute. The master spoke of a prepared poison and a guest at the high table who must not leave the chambers alive. Dante's heart tightened, the weight of a terrible secret pressing down upon his soul.

DANTE – THE VEILED SOUL

Memories of his childhood flooded back, bringing the scent of ash and the sting of old tears from the day poison took his own family. It was this very master who had rescued him from that ruin, giving him a name and a second life. Now, Dante faced a cruel irony: to remain loyal, he would have to allow the same tragedy to befall another.



From across the room, Dante watched the intended victim, a young man who laughed with genuine warmth and raised his glass in a toast. The guest looked innocent, perhaps a father himself, reminding Dante of the life he had lost so many years ago. Every step toward the high table felt like walking through leaden water as his conscience warred with his debt.



The moment of truth arrived as Dante approached the high table, the poisoned cup sitting indistinguishably among the others. His master watched him with an impenetrable, calm gaze that had always commanded Dante's absolute devotion. The air in the room felt thick and suffocating, the cheerful music fading into a dull hum in Dante's ears.



As the guest reached out his hand, Dante made his move, a gesture so subtle it was almost invisible to the surrounding crowd. With a slight shift of the tray, he swapped the lethal goblet for a harmless one, altering the course of fate in a single heartbeat. He felt the world tilt as he committed the ultimate act of betrayal against the man who had saved him.



The guest drank deeply and laughed, unaware that death had just brushed past his lips. Dante felt his master's eyes bore into him with a piercing certainty, a look that held no confusion, only a profound and silent disappointment. The party continued, but for Dante, the vibrant colors of the hall had turned to shades of grey.



When the morning sun began to creep through the high windows, the castle fell into a heavy, uneasy silence. Dante wandered the empty corridors, the echo of his footsteps sounding like a judgment against his soul. He had done what was right, yet he felt as though he had severed the only anchor he had ever known.



A single command summoned Dante to the master's private quarters, a room that had once felt like home but now seemed cold and alien. He entered without guards, his head bowed under the crushing weight of his choice. The master stood by the window, his back turned to the room as he stared out into the fading darkness.



Why? the master asked, his voice devoid of anger but filled with a hollow grief that was far harder to endure. Dante spoke of righteousness and the ghosts of his past, his words feeling small in the vast, quiet chamber. The master finally turned, beginning to speak of names and histories that Dante had never known, revealing a truth far more complex than a simple murder.