

Arrogant Poet

Detective Bert Kowalski slumped forward at his desk, running his hand through his short, black hair. He took a sip from his coffee mug and pretended to shuffle through an old case file, careful not to make eye contact with anyone walking by. It was early Monday morning, and he wanted nothing more than a few minutes of peace and quiet to shake the cobwebs from his mind. He glanced over at the largest stack of papers on his desk and became irritated at the initials "AP" scribbled in block letters on the top folder. Without warning, a deep, commanding voice broke the silence behind him.

"Young buck, how was the weekend?" boomed his partner, Detective Bill Callahan. He was large in stature, with silver hair and an imposing presence that made evident his many years on the job. Kowalski sighed to himself. He took another swig of his coffee and spun around in his chair.

"Not too bad, Callahan. I stayed up too late last night watching Sunday Night Football, and now I'm paying the price. How about you?"

"I watched until about halftime before turning in. I still can't believe the Lions blew that lead. How the hell did that happen?"

Kowalski took a long sip from his mug and chuckled. "Uh, I guess turnovers will kill you. Big interception, I think? Early in the fourth quarter maybe...but honestly, I don't remember. I mostly just watch it for my fantasy football teams."

"You kill me Kowalski. Always staying up late, and you can barely remember the final score of the game," Callahan quipped. "You really need to get more sleep. You look like you're struggling again this morning."

Kowalski chuckled and replied, "Whatever you say, old man. Can I please just finish my coffee before you get on my case?"

Callahan began to respond when his phone rang. Kowalski's head ached and he felt a disconcerting feeling in his stomach as Callahan silently put the phone up to his ear. "Callahan here." Staring straight ahead, he listened intently for a minute, then slammed the receiver down with force.

"Grab your jacket, let's go," he growled to his partner.

Kowalski stood up slowly and muttered, "Please tell me it isn't the AP again."

Callahan shrugged. "Grab your Interscamper."

Kowalski compared destination coordinates with Callahan and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and held down the flashing green button. Typically, he was able to teleport with no trouble at all, but this morning was not one of those trips. The pressure on his head and chest pushed down like a ride on a lightning fast roller coaster. In a flash, he felt the solid ground of his destination and immediately dropped to a knee. The unique smell of sulfur and burnt rubber from the Interscamper teleport hung heavy in the air. He looked up to find Callahan staring down at him stoically, with an almost imperceptible glimmer of a smirk on his lips.

“You haven’t even had your breakfast yet, young gun, and you’re gonna lose your lunch already?” Callahan let out a booming laugh and walked away briskly. “Keep up.”

Kowalski did feel nauseous, but he jumped to his feet. He jogged to catch up to his partner, exasperated at where his gut told him this might be headed. “It’s the Poet again, isn’t it?” cried Kowalski.

Callahan accelerated as he approached a filthy alleyway on his left. He purposely didn’t acknowledge his partner’s question, which only further annoyed Kowalski.

Kowalski continued, “You know, everyone is talking about this guy almost like he’s some sort of mythical folk hero. Like he’s some sort of evil genius or something. He’s a psychopath. You know that, right?”

Callahan shot a quick glance over at his partner. “You don’t say. You’re letting this guy get in your head. Keep your focus.”

As they briskly walked down the alleyway, they had to push through a small crowd of curious bystanders. Kowalski grabbed his Sylix glasses from his jacket and hastily threw them on. He tapped them on the side and linked them to his thoughts. He scanned the crowd as he passed by and overheard a few quiet conversations.

“Look at the police, they’re everywhere. I heard that body was found less than an hour ago.”

“I’d be shocked if it wasn’t the Arrogant Poet. I heard someone say they saw a crumpled up sheet of paper near the victim’s heart!”

As the detectives passed through the police barricade deeper into the alley, the disgusting smell of garbage and grime filled the air. There was an overflowing dumpster about 20 meters ahead on their right, and at its base was a young man, bloody from multiple stab wounds. Kowalski approached, careful to avoid the broken beer bottles and unknown liquids strewn about the alley. He touched his glasses to connect back to the station.

“Ava, please confirm connection,” he quietly murmured as he paused to look at the victim. His head was leaning against the filthy dumpster, and his body had shards of glass protruding from the stab wounds. The vile stench churned his stomach, and he took a step back to collect himself.

“You okay there?” asked Callahan, who hadn’t bothered to look up from his notepad as he scribbled away.

Kowalski composed himself and began to scan the crime scene with his Sylix glasses. As he logged the evidence virtually, he mentally noted that there was no sheet of paper on the victim’s body. “Hey Callahan, no poem! Looks to me like a bar fight that ended here. We might have this one solved by dinner.”

Callahan grunted in Kowalski’s general direction, clearly not buying the overly simplistic explanation. Kowalski felt a vibration on his Sylix and heard Ava’s voice.

“Hey there Bert. I’m receiving your data now.”

Kowalski sent his commands to the Sylix and continued to scan the scene. “Ava, this looks like a pretty simple one. Brutal for sure, but this doesn’t look like the other AP crime scenes to me. This is too messy, and no pointless poetry anywhere to be found.”

Ava replied, "I wouldn't be so sure, Bert. From my preliminary calculations, there's an 80 to 85% chance it's a match to the Arrogant..."

Kowalski cut her off harshly, "Well, you're not here at the crime scene. I respect what you do, but not every murder has to be the work of that lunatic."

Ava took a long pause and muttered, "Sorry Bert, but your scans found something near the victim's right hand. In the neck of the broken beer bottle."

Kowalski stood frozen as Callahan slowly approached the victim. He carefully poked a blood-soaked sheet of paper out of the bottleneck. Kowalski's stomach turned, and his demeanor soured. Callahan began to read:

Sixty-two degrees

Everything in bloom

Silhouette of trees

Light fills up this room

Drowning in warm light

Cascades through my mind

Worries burning trite

Floating yet entwined

Bursting with this bliss

Now my thoughts float free

Tranquil reminisce

Pouring over me

Callahan finished reading the poem and glanced at Kowalski, who was frantically shaking his head.

"You have no idea how much I want to catch this madman," he grunted. "He thinks he's so smart. What the hell does that even mean? Drowning in warm light? Carefree feelings pouring over him? You know the media is going to eat this up. I don't get how anyone finds this lunatic remotely interesting. And why do we even release this garbage to the media?"

Ava chimed in through the Sylix saying, "You guys know that releasing this poem gives us the best chance of catching him, right? Based on historical probabilities, we increase our odds of finding the killer as quickly as possible if we make his work public and hope someone will recognize the verbiage. The Arrogant Po..."

Kowalski cut her off, saying, "Yeah, I remember what you actuaries said in the last staff meeting. If we don't release it, he'll leak it himself because he's a narcissist and wants the attention. Well, I know you have a certification from your little organization, but I have a degree from The Real World University. Back in Callahan's day, actuaries stayed behind the desk calculating insurance premiums where they belong."

Ava quietly muttered, "Bert, that hurts. You really don't seem like yourself today. I have an FSA as a Crime Scene Actuarial Analyst, and I've helped you solve numerous cases over the years just like this one..."

But Kowalski had stopped listening. He was walking toward the crowd of curious onlookers and tapped his glasses to begin a new scan. He had spotted a suspicious middle-aged man in a plain, black baseball hat in the crowd of bystanders, and his gut told him to take a closer look. As he approached the crowd, the man abruptly spun away.

"POLICE!!!!" shouted Kowalski as he dashed toward the crowd. He stumbled over the police tape and fought his way through. Losing sight of his target in the chaos, he sprinted out of the alleyway toward the main road. Unsure of which direction to turn, he snapped his head left and took a few steps forward. Not seeing anything, he spun around and saw a flash of yellow light a hundred yards away. He slipped as he tried to sprint and fell forward. Regaining his footing, he raced ahead, jamming away at his Interscamper all the while. He desperately hoped to catch the tail of the teleport to obtain the suspect's coordinates, but as he reached the vicinity of the flash of light, all that remained was the awful smell of sulfur and burnt rubber.

"AAAAHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!" he screamed in anguish. He paused, staring ahead in disbelief, when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He spun around to defend himself but recoiled from his partner's imposing voice.

"HEY, THAT'S ENOUGH," yelled Callahan, staring steely-eyed at the young detective. Kowalski dropped to a knee.

"I'm sorry, Callahan. I was so close. That was him, I know it."

"Bert, you do NOT know that. You just chased a random bystander. He was scared. I'm not surprised he ran. You had no grounds to do that."

Kowalski was fuming and began to snap back. His head ached, and he quickly reconsidered, saying, "Sorry Callahan. I just want to catch this guy so badly."

"Let's get back to the station and regroup," said Callahan despondently. They grabbed their Interscampers and traveled back to the station.

Later in the day, the detectives met Ava in the Crime Scene Analysis lab for a debrief. Kowalski stared down at the floor while Ava waved her hands in the air and hovered various images from the crime scene in front of them. Callahan gently kicked Kowalski's shoe.

Kowalski stuttered, "Ava...I'm...I'm sorry about my comments earlier. I know how hard you worked to get your RSA credentials. And your team has helped us solve so many past cases. I'm just sick and tired of this guy creeping around under our noses. Let's work together to find this psycho."

Ava chuckled and replied, "FSA. And it's okay Bert. I know how hard it is for you to be at the scenes, doing the groundwork while I'm in the office crunching the data. But we're a team, and I want to catch this guy just as much as you do."

Callahan smiled and ruffled through his notebook. Ava and Bert caught each other's eyes and smirked at the veteran detective's antiquated methods, a vestige of a bygone era. Callahan slowly continued to flip through his notes and said, "So Ava, what's the probability that this murder was the work of the AP and not a copycat?"

"This is still just a preliminary analysis, but looking solely at the poem in isolation, it's a 90 to 95% match, based on the poems from the other six murders." Kowalski felt his body tense but allowed Ava to continue. "Adding the other evidence that you collected from the crime scene, the probability increases to almost 98%. Note the angle of the stab wounds, for instance."

Ava waived her hands and several of the images hovered toward them, expanding in size. "Note that the entry angles are indicative of a right-handed individual, and the depth of the wounds indicate a similar velocity as to murders 2, 3, and 4. Personally, I don't think that there's any chance that this is the work of a copycat."

"What about the poetry?" Callahan questioned. "Have you been working on a handwriting analysis or psychiatric profile?"

Ava responded, "We've been analyzing that as well. But we do agree with your previous theory that the AP might be ex-military or possibly even law enforcement, based on our underlying actuarial models."

Kowalski audibly sighed at that comment, and stammered, "Pfft, yeah, maybe. But why poems? What is he trying to prove? Is he trying to become famous? Does he actually want to get caught?" Kowalski's irritation grew as he continued. "Anyone can write meaningless poetry. Roses are red. Violets are blue. AP is a psycho. And I will catch you."

Everyone remained silent for a moment, until Callahan spoke up. "Bert, let's take a breather for a bit. Pick this one back up tomorrow with a fresh set of eyes. Go home and get some rest."

Kowalski nodded his head. "Fine. But I need a bite to eat and a distraction to take my mind off of this. Callahan, you should join us tonight at Piper's Pub. The Rams are playing the Steelers. It's a Super Bowl rematch from last year! I'll round up a few people, and we'll be there around 7 if you want to join us."

Callahan shook his head and chuckled, "Thanks, but no thanks. See you tomorrow, buddy."

"Always do," replied Kowalski.

Early Thursday morning, there was a yellow flash of light next to Kowalski's desk, and he stumbled forward, catching himself on his chair. He immediately sat down and put his hand to his forehead, praying that nobody would talk to him until he found some coffee.

"Hey Bert, can I have a quick word," screeched Ava's voice from behind. "Sorry, I hate to bother you before you get a chance to settle in, but I wanted to discuss the man in the black hat."

Kowalski's interest immediately piqued. If anything would snap him out of his sluggish daze, this was it. He quickly pleaded, "Please tell me you have a lead."

Ava avoided his intense glare, and she quietly stuttered, "Well...maybe. I mean...we think he may have been present at the scene after murders 1 and 3. And possibly 4. If it's truly him, he's very adept at avoiding detection from any surrounding cameras. We've tried everything to scan his face, but he seems to have avoided a direct scan at any of the scenes prior to the images that you provided me with your Sylix. The best that I can say is that the man in question at each of the crime scenes is consistent as he watches the police secure the perimeter. And once you or the other detectives arrive and find the poem, he quickly leaves."

Kowalski slouched in his chair, looking defeated. "Thanks, Ava," he replied. "Keep working all angles of the case but come to me immediately if you find anything about this suspect in particular."

"Sure thing, Bert," said Ava quietly. "And I hope you don't mind me saying so, but please try to get some rest. I know the AP is wearing on you, but we're all here with you, working toward the same goal. We need you thinking clearly if we're going to catch this guy."

Kowalski watched Ava scurry away, and he turned his attention to the ever-growing stack of AP folders on his desk. Every day felt the same with this case. He would go home and try to unwind, but he would find himself unable to stop thinking about the Arrogant Poet. He would brainstorm new angles to the case and new theories that he couldn't wait to discuss with Callahan and Ava the next day. But then the next morning would come, and each idea would yield to yet another dead-end.

Callahan's imposing voice abruptly entered his thoughts. "Hey Kowalski..."

"WHAT IS IT NOW," he snapped, before realizing how loudly he had raised his voice. He spun around in his chair to address his partner.

Callahan didn't respond, but simply pointed at the phone receiver in his hand. The nauseous feeling in Kowalski's stomach returned, and he looked down to the ground. "Okay, let's go."

Kowalski stood and gathered himself, and he jammed the button on his Interscamper. In an instant, he found his footing at the destination next to Callahan, amidst the teleportation odor of rotten eggs. He quickly scanned the area and realized that he was on the downtown riverwalk, adjacent to the casino. Once again, Callahan had already gained his bearings and had started toward the flashing police lights.

Kowalski sprinted to catch up to his partner. "So, what do we have on this one?"

"I was told that it looks like a robbery gone bad. No witnesses to the murder, but a few joggers heard a skirmish from a distance and saw a man teleporting away from the scene. They called the police and flagged down some casino staff until we arrived moments later."

"Any sign of rhyming filth?" asked Kowalski.

"You'll be happy to hear that no poetry was found." Callahan shot Kowalski a frustrated glance. "From my experience though, it does sound like the work of the Arrogant Poet."

Kowalski grimaced as they passed through the police perimeter. He saw the body on the ground approximately 30 meters ahead, but instead of approaching the victim, he paused to put on his Sylix and immediately reached out to Ava.

"I'm sending you scans of any bystander in sight. Copy when you receive them."

"Hey Bert. Images have been received, and I'll get right to it. I'll let you know the moment I find anything."

Callahan sighed and watched his partner storm off toward the small crowd, away from the victim. He fumbled with his own Sylix and connected to his partner through the tech. "Kowalski, will you stay focused!"

Kowalski shot back, "I'll be there in a minute. The dead body isn't going anywhere soon, now is it?"

Callahan approached the victim for closer inspection, describing the scene to his partner, who continued to scan the surrounding area. "Looks like the victim died from a single knife wound to the neck. There's a ton of blood here." Callahan continued, "Ava just sent me the closest security camera footage as well, and the murder took place in a spot on the riverwalk with just enough tree cover to hide everything."

Kowalski listened to his partner but remained silent while walking toward the casino. The windows reflected the trees and the river, but he could still make out the silhouettes of a few inquisitive gamblers inside, peering down at the crime scene.

He adjusted his Sylix and took a slow scan of the large, glass windows overlooking the riverwalk. "Ava, please enhance and analyze the bystanders in the casino and report back immediately."

After completing his scan, he quickly joined Callahan next to the body. "Any sign of a poem yet? This doesn't feel right. It's too convenient of a location with an audience. And why would the victim have so many casino chips on him outside. You would typically cash out before leaving..."

Callahan traced Kowalski's glance to the victim and instantly saw it as well. Scattered about the casino chips and \$100 bills was a single \$1000 bill, tucked partially underneath of the victim's hand. There was blood splattered on top of the bill, and the bottom half was flipping upward in the breeze. They could both see the familiar handwriting on the underside.

Callahan stooped down and turned to his partner, sighing. "Do you want me to scan this to the Sylix, or do you want to hear it too?"

Kowalski felt sick and stared intently at the casino window, saying, "Just get it over with."

Callahan began to read:

*With trembling hands I hold my medicine
It keeps me grounded but I'm just condemned*

*Eyelids press closed, and regret sinks in
Spiraling down, I'm a shell again
Resplendent light, to morphing abyss
Darkness sets in, and joy is amiss*

*Regret again, I show my colors
Let the light in, it always darkens*

Not a moment later, Ava's voice screamed through their Sylixes.

"Bert, second floor! Window near the blackjack table. GO NOW."

Callahan looked up to yell to his partner, but there was only a flash of yellow and a pungent odor remaining in the place where Kowalski had stood. Callahan snapped his gaze toward the second-floor window to see two more flashes of yellow, one preceding the other by mere seconds.

Kowalski landed on his feet near the blackjack table, his eyes scanning ahead as he picked up the traces of his target's previous teleport. The smell of burnt rubber permeated the area and he knew he was close. He sprinted a few steps forward, connecting to his Interscamper, and he was immediately teleported to a large poker room.

"POLICE! STOP!!!" he yelled, as he caught a faint glimpse of the man in the black hat, teleporting quickly to another destination. He charged forward, and his Interscamper was immediately locked in. Touching his Sylix, he appeared next to some slot machines. The flashing lights and sounds were overwhelming, but he locked onto the suspect's trail, confidently sprinting forward.

"STOP! DO NOT MOVE!" he screamed. He was quickly gaining ground and knew it was only a matter of time before he caught the suspect. He had competed in Teleportation in high school and even played a few years on the club team in college.

The next flash of light took him to a crowded area near the elevator, and he could clearly see the man's face. He stared into his soulless eyes and felt hatred and disgust. The man simply sneered back at him and disappeared into a yellow haze, this time only steps away.

Kowalski was quickly closing in, and he engaged his Interscamper, appearing in the casino lobby. There was a small crowd of people and a few flashes of yellow light, as the smell of sulfur hung thick in the air. He immediately recognized his target and followed in an instant. As he emerged, he sprinted forward a few steps and tackled the suspect with force.

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST. DO NOT ATTEMPT..." Kowalski's voice trailed off as he realized that the man pinned underneath of him did not remotely resemble the suspect. He realized his mistake and uttered an empty apology. He teleported back to the lobby where Callahan stood, along with a few other policemen.

"What happened? I had him," yelled Kowalski.

"The Arrogant Poet purposely led you here," Callahan replied. "He knew in your haste you would continue to follow any Interscamper trace, so he waited here and watched you hastily lock onto the first teleport you found. The woman at the front desk said that she watched the man in the black hat arrive and stand to the side, only to see you come and go, as you followed a random casino guest. The suspect is long gone by now."

Kowalski placed his hands on his knees, out of breath and seething with anger. "I had him. He was right in front of me."

"Well, WE would have had him, partner. You need to wait for back up. We've talked about this countless times before. You know that with two or three of us in chase, we can easily track his Interscamper. Ava can trace it anywhere if we give her the proper data."

"I'm sorry Callahan, I really am," pleaded Kowalski. He truly meant it, but his words felt hollow, knowing that he was the reason that the Arrogant Poet got away.

Callahan glared a hole through Kowalski. "This cannot keep happening. It's the same story every time. You say it won't happen again, yet it does. You act impulsively, and make the same mistakes over and over. You're a great detective, but these errors are unacceptable."

Kowalski had no reply and stared blankly ahead. Ava was speaking over Sylix, but Kowalski wasn't listening.

Callahan continued on. "Go home and get some rest. Do what you have to do to get your head right. Take tomorrow off too if you need to." He paused and glared intently at him. "I need you Bert, but this can't keep happening."

Kowalski nodded, and without saying a word, left in a flash of yellow light.

The next three weeks slowed to an excruciating crawl for Kowalski. He and Callahan followed a few promising leads but made no real progress. The media's coverage of the Arrogant Poet was unrelenting, which only angered Kowalski further. Each day came and went, and the detectives had nothing to show for their efforts.

On Monday afternoon, Kowalski was slumped in his chair with his eyes closed. Callahan turned to face his partner and could see the anguish on his face. He knew they needed a breakthrough in the worst way. He startled Kowalski slightly, saying, "So I've been thinking more about your chase with the AP at the casino."

Kowalski pulled himself upright in his chair and locked eyes with Callahan. "Oh, so now you're willing to admit it was the AP?"

"Well...honestly, I'm not sure what to make of the suspect. But...okay, yeah, let's say for argument's sake that he was the Poet. He has chosen mostly open locations for his murders. Places that are sure to gather a crowd when the body is found."

Kowalski became animated, and he said, "I know you're not sold, but don't forget that Ava has placed a 95 to 98% probability that my suspect is the AP. Look at the facts. He chooses murder locations that have cover from anyone's Sylix or any sort of recording device. He is obviously looking for attention, mocking us with his nonsense poetry. And he is surprisingly fast with the Interscamper."

Callahan chuckled, saying, "Okay, I agree that the evidence sure seems to point in that direction." He paused before continuing on. "Why do you suppose there hasn't been another murder recently? He's never gone silent for this long before."

Kowalski quickly answered, "He knows how close he was to being caught. He was faster than I thought, so he had the element of surprise. But if I get another chance, I'll use my Binding Beam the second that he's in my range. He caught me off guard last time, but it won't happen again."

Callahan's demeanor soured as he sternly responded, "You'll wait for back up next time, Bert. We've been over this countless times. You act too impulsively. Then you say you'll change, and I give you the benefit of the doubt. But here we are having the same conversation that we always have. I'll always have your back, Kowalski, but you can't do it alone."

Kowalski averted eye contact, and he considered apologizing yet again, but before he had a chance to respond, a tiny flash of yellow light appeared just above his desk. He recognized the teleportation scent and quickly spun around to see a small sheet of paper land on his desk. He immediately grabbed his Sylix, and barked, "Ava, trace the origin and standby."

He hurriedly grabbed the paper, and his stomach hit the floor as he immediately recognized the handwriting. "AP," he blurted out.

Callahan grabbed the note out of his hands and threw on his Sylix, scanning the cryptic message:

L RXKTM CA ELOMAS HX UI VAASF, MAHABHLWA,

CKH L FLUVTI MXO'H JZWA ZOI

"Ava, decipher this message immediately. And keep a trace on the origin of the source." He grabbed Kowalski and sternly commanded, "Stay close."

With that, they grabbed their Interscampers and were off in a cloud of light, transporting to the location of the message's origin.

Kowalski was the first to gain his bearings this time. He looked over at his partner who had just landed and was surveying his surroundings.

"Phipps Botanical Gardens," Kowalski shouted to his partner. "I don't like the feeling of..."

His words were cut off by frantic screaming in the adjacent room. The detectives sprinted past the orchid display into the next room. There was a small crowd forming near a young woman's body, lying prone near a display of hyacinth. She lay lifeless, stabbed multiple times in the torso.

Kowalski was the first to reach her, and he checked for a pulse but found none. He was linked to Ava through his Sylix, and she yelled, "I've already sent for back up. I'm sorry, but there's nothing you can do for her. The suspect has moved to the next room."

Next to the victim's right hand was a batch of purple hyacinth, stained red with blood. Under her hand lay a familiar looking piece of paper. Callahan grabbed it as Kowalski tore off to the next room. "WAIT!" he shouted.

Callahan hastily grabbed the sheet of paper to allow his Sylix to quickly scan it. "Ava, read this to us, and begin your analysis. I need to find Kowalski," he barked, as he pursued to the next room.

With Ava's help, Kowalski had already found the Arrogant Poet's trail and wasted no time with his first teleport. Skillfully, he landed and spun around in room full of colorful, floral displays. He quickly found the remnants of the suspect's previous teleport, and the scent was stronger than the last.

"Not this time," he said through gritted teeth.

Through his Sylix, he heard Ava's rhythmic voice:

*Regret creeping in, complacent heart.
Watch the hourglass, scatter apart.*

Kowalski grabbed his Binding Beam and set the charge to maximum stun as he chased on. He clutched tightly to his Interscamper and quickly traversed to a room full of bonsai. He immediately caught the gaze of the Arrogant Poet whose eyes shone with excitement. The Poet laughed maniacally and disappeared in a yellow flash. Kowalski had attempted to take aim, but he was a second too late to pull the trigger.

*Regret sinking in, though all the pain
Pounding and pleading, always in vain*

Kowalski teleported, while shouting, "AVA, NOT NOW. I DO NOT WANT TO HEAR THIS GARBAGE."

He landed in a hot and stuffy room, full of cacti. Just ahead, he saw a flash of yellow light. Without hesitation, he aimed his Binding Beam and shot a ray, connecting with his target.

To his horror, it was Callahan who appeared in the yellow fog. His body seized as he fell to the ground. His muscles painfully contracted, and he found himself temporarily paralyzed.

*Change flickers to hope, yields to folly.
Churning and burning, melancholy.*

Kowalski yelled in disbelief at his horrific mistake. "NOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

He spun around to find himself face to face with the Arrogant Poet. Before he could react, a knife drove deep into his side, causing a searing pain to shoot through his body. He fell limp to the ground, gasping for air. The Poet raised his knife again, his eyes flickering wildly with rage. Kowalski screamed out in anguish as the Poet drove the blade deep into his chest. He reached for the knife, but all hope was lost as he found a blood-soaked sheet of paper with familiar handwriting pinned tightly to his chest.