The Duelist stepped out onto his balcony at dawn, just like every morning. He liked almost nothing more than to step out onto the terrace and look at the land and the people that were his. Everything was his, the streets, the houses, the farms, and yes, of course the people. After a sufficiently long amount of time, he stepped back inside, satisfied by what was his.

He clapped his hands twice, and without two seconds going by, his servant was there with his clothes. He wore black. Every day he wore black. Today it was black leather pants, stitched with crimson string, and a black tunic, open to about the center of his chest. He donned his black riding boots, pulled on his thin, form fitting gloves, and then pulled a long black cape around his neck with a flourish.

He dismissed the servant with a wave of his hand, and the small man shuffled away, holding his head to the floor. There was only one thing left to do this morning, and The Duelist would not allow anyone to help him with it. He strode over to the far side of the room, his high boots resonating with each step, until he reached an ornate case. It was beautifully crafted, and intricately carved with an image of the Duelist in battle with a man. It was from this man that he had won the contents of the chest, his prized possessions.

He opened the lid, and a sly grin crossed his face. He reached inside and pulled out his pride and joy. Lying inside was a slender rapier, with a beautiful golden handle, and a small matching dagger. He lifted them out, sword in his right, dagger in his left, and held them a while, testing their balance. He lunged into a flurry of phantom thrusts and stabs, a routine as beautiful as any dance. He moved with grace and balance, and quickly dispatched his invisible opponent.
Content with this morning’s work, he strapped the sword to his left hip, and the matching dagger to his right, then made his way downstairs. Today was a big day, his newest prize would be arriving, a troupe of entertainers he had won in a duel with their original master. He went down to his grand hall, where he found a motley crew of actors, musicians, and performers of all types waiting for him. He scanned them for what seemed like an hour, sizing them up, then asked with a commanding and sharp voice, “Which one among you is the poet?”

A small, but handsome man stepped forward, and responded with a confident and clean accent “Charles Henry I am, a poet indeed, and here I am, my master, to serve your every need.” He swept a large hat off his head, dipped into a deep bow, and came up with a wide grin. He wore a thin mustache on his upper lip, black, to match his shoulder length curly hair. His face was otherwise pretty typical, except for his fabulous blue eyes which had certainly captured the hearts of many young girls. That and the ear to ear grin he was wearing, there was something about that smile. But the Duelist was not so easily distracted. He had sought out this troupe, this man in particular, for one singular purpose.

“I have heard that you are the greatest wordsmith in the known world, and I have acquired you for just that reason. You see, I am the best at what it is I do, and I find myself bored because of it. No one will accept my challenge, and if they do, I dispatch them with hardly a thought. I have heard, however, a statement which I believe I can disprove. The pen is mightier than the sword. This is false. I’ve never seen a pen that could turn my thrust, or save a man from my steel. I wish to disprove this notion, and that, my dear poet, is where you come in.”

The Poet smiled his viscous grin, and responded “I am the best, I know this much, and I’ve heard the same for you, and so if you have a plan for me, just tell me what I’m do.”
The Duelist thought this a queer way to speak, but no matter. He met The Poet’s smile with a sharp one of his own, and said “I plan to duel you. Your pen against my sword. Whomever can defeat the other will show which is stronger. I will give you one year’s time to use your craft to defeat me. I will let you write three things, they can be whatever you like, but in one year’s time we will fight, and which ever champion wins will prove which implement is the stronger.”

Charles pondered this for some time, but then, with another flourish of his great brimmed hat, “I gladly accept your challenge, and I’ll see you in a year. I will write my three pieces, then like clockwork I’ll be here. So to my friends, and fellow bards, farewell, I leave you all my heart, for a mighty quest I’ve taken on, and I fear I must embark. So we’ll meet again, this life or the next, in Heaven or in Hell, for I must prove the pen is mightier, and I pray you wish me well.” With that, and another bow, he left his masters manor, to return in one year’s time.

The Duelist stepped out on his balcony and watched the mass of people slowly wind its way to the arena. Today was a big day. A very big day. Today he would prove that his art, the sword was far superior to the quill of the poet. He made his way inside, and donned his black attire. This time black on black. He went to his chest and produced his wonderfully crafted sword. He strapped it to his left hip, and his dagger to his right. He strode out of his manor, his high boots resonating with each step, and made his way across the city to the arena.

He walked onto the large stage, hushing the massive crowd. He didn’t expect to arrive before The Poet, but he was indeed standing by himself on the field of battle. This would not do,
he thought, he intended to command more of a presence. He stood by himself, angered now, by the writer’s absence, he began to pace the length of the arena.

Just when he felt that he could not wait any longer, he saw the doors open wide, and in strode Charles Henry, unexpectedly alone, dressed to match the duelist in all black. He still wore his large brimmed hat, and his thin black mustache. His curly hair was cut shorter now, going down only to the bottom of his ears, but it still fit his look. He strode up to about ten feet from The Duelist and drew his sword in salute.

Immediately the Duelist noticed the wonderful blade he now held in his hand. It was three feet long, and stained black as ink. Mesmerized, his eyes were drawn to the handle. It was beautifully crafted into a long white feather, carved out of ivory, and tipped with a black capstone of obsidian. “Where did you get that!?” he asked, surprised and angered by the sword that outshone his own.

Charles grinned, and flipped the sword so to show that the blade and handle where in perfect balance. “You gave me three things to write, and so I wrote letters, one, two, three. The other two, I won’t tell yet, but the first I’ll give to thee. I wrote to the city of Florence, to a man, both wise and old, he was touched by me, indeed he was, touched by the story I told. And so this man, a Florentine, a swordsmith of great skill, made for me this lovely arm, and the name he gave it, Quill.” After admiring it himself, he flipped it into the air, gracefully catching the feathered handle, and held it once more in salute, all to the crowd’s amusement.

The Duelist fumed. He hated this way that The Poet spoke. He wanted so badly to slice that smug grin from his face, to show Charles that even though he had a wonderful new sword, it would not save him from the skills that the Duelist had built up his entire life. He would finish
the Poet off quickly, in order to shut this crowd up, and prove his point without a doubt. He was still quite positive that the sword would win the day, as he always believed, as he always knew.

“It’s gorgeous, I’ll admit, but a waste of a letter. In fact, all three seem to be wasted, as you are here alone. You should have written to three masters to champion you. Maybe if you were lucky, one would have answered you, and he may have caught me off guard, and won you the day. But instead you show up alone. Armed, yes, but alone, and undoubtedly unable to wield such a magnificent instrument. If, you’ve any last words, say them now. I will not toy with you, and I feel your life will be over soon.”

Charles did not respond in his normal manner, he did not speak any words. He simply raised his salute once more, and smiled that smile that only he could smile. This enraged the Duelist, who did not return the salute, but instead came on like a Spanish bull, enticed by the red flag of a matador. He would end this quickly, with his signature combination. The same combination that had defeated so many great fighters before would surely be unstoppable to an amateur. He thrust high, then low, slashed left, then right, then right again.

The Poet back stepped, parried, countered up and down, and matched the Duelist’s sword blow for blow. He followed to the left, and then out wide right. Now it was the swordsman’s turn to smile, as his left hand came up to Charles heart, undefended, brandishing a dagger, ready to be plunged into the Poet’s soft skin. He had won, he knew. There was no way for Charles to pull his sword in close enough to turn the blow. Indeed there wasn’t, but the Duelist’s thrust stopped short, as the Poet’s hand closed around his wrist, bending his hand back, and forcing the knife from his hand, sending it across the floor, out of reach of either opponent.
The fighters disengaged. The Duelist, shocked by the speed and precision of the Poet, looked up to see Charles grinning once more. “How?” He asked, utterly confused. There was no way this writer had become so good, so fast, in only one year’s time.

“It’s simple,” replied the Poet, “The second letter comes to mind. To a certain Spanish master whom you had left behind. I wrote to your former teacher, and he obliged me too, so that he could teach me everything, which he had taught to you. I’ve trained, but I’m no master, I don’t need to be, I’m assured. For I am trained specifically, to fight against your sword.” He smiled again, and the crowd began to laugh and cheer with him. He had won over their weak minds with his fancy wording, and his charm and his wit. This had to end soon, if the Duelist was to keep any of the respect and fear he had earned from these plebeians before this accursed writer had stepped onto this stage with him.

This time he did salute. He had to play their game now, or else risk losing his dignity forever. “You are a worthy foe. I did not expect this much from you, I’ll be honest. But still, I was greater than my teacher. I knew it, he knew it, and all of the men who have fallen to my blade knew it.” You may be greater than I expected, but you will be dead before the end of this. I will be the one who comes out on top, the one who leaves this arena on his own two feet. So once more, I give you the option of last words, because I can assure you, there will be no second break. Make peace with this world Poet, it’s time I prove without doubt that the sword is greater.”

The Poet said nothing, only took his stance, and prepared for the onslaught that was to come. There was no smile this time. There was only the eerie calm and silence that precede a storm sent to cleanse the earth. The crowd stood in hushed excitement, waiting for the flurry of blows that were sure to come.
The Duelist calmed himself, and came forward, much more cautious this time, but no less determined. His first blow came in high, easily sidestepped by Charles, who came back with a thrust aimed for the Duelists flank. His sword came down in a flash, turning the thrust aside at the last minute.

The thrust was just a front, however, as the Poet’s true counter, a balled fist, found its way to the Duelist’s nose, easily breaking it, sending a shower of blood from each nostril. He staggered backwards, bringing his free left to his face in an effort to stop the bleeding. This time he saw it again, that smile, that evil, wicked smile. There was no crowd any more, no stage, no more wager, just the Duelist and that disgusting smile.

He came on in a flurry of rage, throwing heavy, sloppy blows, which the Poet easily turned aside. He kept on pushing, the only thing saving him from any counter was his rage itself, his powerful and quick barrage came too fast to allow any return. But, the Poet only had to bide his time, wait for the right mistake, to easily run his opponent through. The Duelist knew this, but still he came on, his rage outweighing any good sense he had. He didn’t want to win, he didn’t want to look good for the crowd, he only wanted to take that smile from the Poet’s face, and so on and on it went.

He slashed high and low, left and right. This was all that mattered, he had to take that smile. And so he kept fighting with abandon, no concern for anything except the killing blow. He thrust forward, and the Poet countered perfectly, pulling his own blade low, while opening an opportunity for a killing blow.

The Duelist knew this was the end. He drew his last breath, and prepared himself to fail. But the thrust never came. The Poet’s sword never ran him through, as he expected. His obvious
failure was not exploited by a simple parry and thrust, but rather was taken out wide. This was not a mistake on the Poet’s behalf, it was a death sentence. Any serious fighter would have countered this move with a finishing blow, but the Poet did not take advantage of the mistake, and instead allowed the Duelist to bring his own sword inside, and with barely any resistance, The Duelist took the Poet in the chest, ending his life.

Charles dropped Quill. He fell to his knees, the Duelist’s sword still in his heart. An audible gasp escaped the audience, a surprised disappointment as their champion fell. The Duelist had won, and so he smiled, happy that he had ended the grin he had found on the Poet’s face. But as he looked down, he saw that grin yet again. That sinister smile still found its way to his face, despite the fact that his life had been ended. The Duelist followed the smile to the Poet’s left hand, no longer empty, but rather filled with a small piece of parchment.

The Poet drew his very last breath, and with a smile on his lips, he fell over, releasing the letter from his grip. The Duelist picked up the parchment, unable to take his view from the grin on Charles’ now pale lips. Finally, he was able to rip his gaze away from that awful smile, and that’s when he saw the words.

“My dear Duelist”, it was odd that he should address him in such a manner, seeing that Charles Henry was aware of his name, “I will spare the rhymes with you, for I know you do not feel the same way for them that I do. I must confess, I wrote four things, when I should have written three, but seeing that you will read this after my death, I don’t truly believe that it will affect the competition. By now you know that my first two letters were to a swordsmith, and to your former master, and even though I have failed in battle, they were crucial, as I had to make things interesting. I had to draw a crowd, and I had to give them a show. And give them a show we did! For that I thank you. People will speak of this fight for years to follow, of the time that
The Poet nearly bested The Duelist. And their memory is surely to be enhanced by the story I wrote, the story which they, among many others, will receive.

“By the time you read this, I will be dead by your hand, but the story I wrote, the one about the two of us, will undoubtable be in full circulation. Many people will read it I am sure, you know I am actually quite popular. And in this story I, Charles Henry, shall be named quite often, while you, my dear adversary, shall neither be named, nor described. You will be a concept, ‘The Duelist’, no more. Not a single marker besides this will be left for you.

“So in case you don’t yet understand, I will leave you with this small bit of verse I have written.

Although you have killed me, I lift my pen up high,

Because even as I fall, and I kiss my life good bye,

Through my writing, through my pen, I will surely survive,

While you, with your blade, you will surely die.”