

THE PROSE POEM: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Volume 8 | 1999

Plume Had A Sore Finger

Henri Michaux

© Providence College

The author(s) permits users to copy, distribute, display, and perform this work under the following conditions: (1) the original author(s) must be given proper attribution; (2) this work may not be used for commercial purposes; (3) the users may not alter, transform, or build upon this work; (4) users must make the license terms of this work clearly known for any reuse or distribution of this work. Upon request, as holder of this work's copyright, the author(s) may waive any or all of these conditions.

The Prose Poem: An International Journal is produced by
The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress)
for the Providence College Digital Commons.
<http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/prosepoems/>

Henry Michaux

PLUME HAD A SORE FINGER

Plume's finger felt a bit sore.

"Maybe you should see a doctor," said his wife. "Often it's just a matter of some lotion...."

Plume took her advice.

"Take off one finger," said the surgeon, "and everything's perfect. With anesthesia, the whole thing takes six minutes at the most. And, since you're a rich man, you really don't need so many fingers. I'll be delighted to do the operation, and then I'll show you several sorts of artificial fingers, some of them truly exquisite. Oh, maybe a little expensive. But of course expense isn't really an issue here, not when we want to provide you with the very best."

Plume, looking wistfully at the guilty finger, humbly objected:

"Doctor, it's the index finger, you know? A very useful finger. As a matter of fact, I was just about to write to my mother. I use my index to write. My mother would be anxious if I put off writing her any longer. I'll come back in a couple of days. She's a very sensitive lady, easily shaken."

"It's nothing," the surgeon told him. "Here's some paper, some good white paper, without any heading at all. Just send her a few reassuring words and she'll be happy as ever. Meanwhile, I'll be calling the clinic to make sure everything's ready: all they'll need to do is sterilize some instruments and pull them out. Back in a moment...."

The surgeon was back almost as soon as he'd left, saying, "Everything's set. They're waiting for us."

"Excuse me, Doctor," said Plume, "but you can see how my hand is trembling. It's all too much for me. ..."

"Yes, yes," the surgeon replied, "you're right. It's best not to write your mother at all. Women are so touchy, and mothers most of all. They're always picky about what their sons are up to. They make mountains out of molehills. You and I, we're never more than their little darlings. Here's your cane and here's your hat. There's a car waiting for us...."

Soon it's the operating room.

"Doctor, listen! I mean, really...."

"Quit worrying!" the doctor exclaimed. "You have so many

scruples! We can write this letter together, if that's what you want. I'll think about it while I'm doing the operation."

Fixing his mask to his face, he put Plume to sleep.

"You might've asked me for *my* opinion," Plume's wife said to her husband. "Don't think that a lost finger is something you can easily find again. A man with stumps? I'm not too happy with the idea. Once that finger's chopped, don't count on me anymore. I mean, cripples turn evil; they get sadistic, and I wasn't raised to live with sadists. I guess you thought I'd be a saint, and see you through the whole thing. Well, you were wrong, and you should have thought about it all beforehand...."

"Listen," said Plume. "Don't make a big fuss over the future. I've still got nine fingers, and your character may change, after all."

Translated from the French
by **Sydney Lea**