



## From A Certain Quill<sup>1</sup>

by Henri Michaux

Translated from French by Dawson F. Campbell

### I

#### A Placid Man

Sensing hands outside his bed, Quill was amazed that he wasn't resting up against the wall. "Hold on," he thought, "the ants would have eaten it..." And he went back to sleep.

Soon thereafter, his wife grabbed and shook him: "Look, you layabout!" she said. "While you were busy sleeping, they stole our house." Indeed, a spotless sky stretched out all around them... "Oh well," he thought, "too late now."

Soon thereafter, a noise could be heard. It was a train headed toward them at top speed. "It seems quite hurried," he thought; "it will surely arrive before we do." And he went back to sleep.

Then, a chill woke him. He was drenched in blood. Several pieces of his wife were resting near him. "With blood," he thought, "comes a certain amount of grief; if only this train could have passed somewhere else; I sure would have been pleased. But, since it has already come and gone..." And he went back to sleep.

"Now," said the judge, "when we found your wife she was portioned into eight pieces. How is it possible that she could have been so terribly wounded, while you—who was right next to her—were unable to make a single attempt at preventing it? and not even knowing what caused it? It's a mystery. Yet the entire case depends on it."

"On that note, I cannot help," thought Quill. And he went back to sleep.

"The execution will take place tomorrow. Does the accused have anything to add?"

"Sorry," he said, "I hadn't really followed the case." And he went back to sleep.

<sup>1</sup>"Plume" the name of the main character of this collection of anecdotal stories—here in the title of the original French, "Un Certain Plume"—has been translated to Quill to signify both "feather" as well as "pen" or "the instrument of authorship," analogous to the definition of the original French "plume."