

# NEWS FROM EREWHON

by

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1.

## États d'Âme d'une Femme Ordinaire

Another **train strike**, said Melinda, as if Paris weren't slow enough already. It is so **humiliating** to be faced with angry picketers when all you want is the RER to Passy to buy some vegetables. All immigrants drunk on a mixture of **rums** from Roumania, if such even exists, Melinda fumed under the "*Defense de Fumer*" sign in the station. Maybe this time they'll fire the whole **cabinet**, and not just the Finance Minister. She looked up at the grimy **windows** above the departures sign, and sighed. It was better in Mitterand's time, and now, with each new government, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, déjà vu all over again. Then abruptly she slipped on a banana peel (at least that was how she'd tell her daughter about the fall in the *Gare du Nord* caused by a used condom), and **lacerated** her knee, **enlivening** the evening of some laughing young striking *cheminots* who thought her the funniest thing since last night's ravioli commercial, and how they **blamed** the bosses for this and the government for that and got madder and madder, but as a skywriter **blazed** across the sky advertising "Linguini For All," they realized that one silly woman could lift the weight off their foreheads like a crane raising a prefabricated **cement** staircase off a pile, soon to be added to the **unrelenting** stack of the rising HLM housing blocks that were polluting the neighborhood with their **poet** tenants and sacrificing-sheep-for-Id tenants, and all those sundry lowlifes held down to the poverty level by **gravity** and the weight of all the successful people piled on top of them, like so many potatoes.

– MN

## A Nice Glass of Rum

If you insist on calling a blue heron a **train strike** no one will understand a single thing you're saying, Ellis complained to Miranda with that **humiliating** reasonableness that made her want to kill him. Instead she asked, Why don't I bring you one of your favorite **rums**? with a smile that made him think he should skip the drink this evening. Leave it in the **cabinet** for now, he said. Maybe I'll have one later. OK she said, just don't toss your cookies out the **window** on the downstairs neighbor's balcony the way you did last time. Time changes won't repair that break in social decency and I haven't forgotten the tongue **laceration** I endured in the elevator because of your **enlivening** liqueur. Don't **blame** me he said.. My love for you will **blaze** orange and red beneath the gibbous moon. As long as the liquor you serve me is as pure as your **cement** and concrete heart, your **unrelenting** and apparent good will match a **poet's** metaphors. Thank you for comprehending the **gravity** of the situation Miranda replied. Now go take a nap.

– MD

2.

## Douglas on the Dole

**Pink slips** slide down the skyscraper's facade thrown by angry redundant workers who are as useless to their employers as a **Sherman Tank** in the battlefields of the twentieth century. More useless even. At least a tank can squash **tendrils** of the enemy's grass whereas a falling pink slip is only litter on the green **earth**, punishable by fine just like when you walk Fido without his pooper scooper on the city streets. No **pony tails** allowed in the unemployment line after Douglas's failed attempt to strangle himself using the purple hair of the woman in front of him, the **cornflowers** in her hair clashing color-wise but they were a cast-off from Lenore's corsage and so could not be omitted. **Smoothing** her purple locks, the woman fell backwards on Douglas who did not choke but instead asked her for her phone number in order to **refute** the libelous charges his step-daughter leveled at him about not being assertive enough to ask out even a sanitation worker or the elevator girl at the **Center** for the Study of Bald Men where Douglas used to earn his living as a test subject.  
– MN

## Pink

“**Pink slips** with lace? or the pink slip of ‘goodbye?’” Priscilla inquired with all the subtlety of a **Sherman Tank** when she came back from lunch an hour late that Friday afternoon from the lingerie sale at Freedman's on the Mall. Not even **tendrils** of responsibility snaking down the street could bring her back before she was done, and now the **Earth** shook beneath her well-shod toes in pink leather thongs as she awaited the answer from **Pony Tail**, her boss. “Not even blue **corn flowers** will reveal my meaning, he said to her, sneering with his ears, his hairy hands **smoothing** his non-existent beard. “It's the twenty-first century now and up to you to see with your mind's eye what I am thinking without **refuting** my shirt or tie. Surely, I am the **center** of your mind and heart -- am I not? The feather floating on the swampy surface of your rotting soul?”  
– MD

### 3.

#### The Municipal Worker's Lament

The **Parks** commissioner had many perks. He had a garbage truck with his own personal seal emblazoned on it, in which he rode, chauffeured by a **rhetorically**-challenged gardener in a uniform of Kelly green, an underling that he **ordered** around in stentorian tones. **Jittery** with his morning's coffee, the underling said "yes, Mr. Commissioner," and "as you like, Mr. Commissioner," and never offered any opinions of his own. That is, he never offered a less-than-subservient thought until the Commissioner's wife was **hospitalized** for a serious gastroenterological condition that was marked by frequent and malodorous farting. "Howdy, Mr. Commissioner," he'd said that day, "the air's mighty fresh in this here park as you certainly must appreciate given your wife's unfortunate illness!" The underling was fired on the spot but was reinstated after appealing to his **Senator**, who was also his third cousin twice-removed. After that, he was afraid of losing his job on a trumped-up charge, so he carried a **camera** wherever he went to weed and plant, keeping notebooks full of before and after pictures (on **opposite** pages) of each small herb garden or hedge. The life of an underling is not to be envied, and soon he suffered a nervous **collapse**, leading him to document every daily task in case he should be accused of shirking. Each morning, he'd snap a picture of himself brushing his teeth so that he could prove to his dentist that he had followed the recommended dental hygiene. Being an innocent man and not of the social class which is most familiar with therapy, he had no **preconceptions** about what to expect when his personnel officer told him to go see a psychiatrist because his work output was slowed down by his obsessive photography. Alas, the Park Department's Employee Assistance Program's psychiatrist was a terrible diagnostician but he had an excellent malpractice **attorney**, as he readily admitted in the first session. The underling therefore made no objection when Dr. Fishbein took off his glasses, and went to sleep on his own couch, telling his patient to free associate for fifty minutes and then leave quietly so as not to disturb the his nap.

– MN

#### The Parking Ticket

I **parks** where I wants, the uppity and ungrammatical unicorn said when he found me tagging his cart on Linwood Avenue. Well, who would want a parking ticket? I asked **rhetorically**. It's not what anyone in his right mind would have **ordered**. See here, the unicorn responded, **jittery** with rage. I am not who you think I am. I am a recently-**hospitalized** politician, and this is a test of your integrity. You know that giving me a parking ticket is wrong. Parking tickets are for illegally placed motor vehicles, and as you can readily see, my cart has no engine. It is powered solely by my horn. Well then, contact your **senator**, I said. See if she cares. Whether you pay your fine or not does not make my pay. With that, the unicorn whipped a **camera** out of his mouth and aimed it at my nose. Just what do you think you are doing? I brawled, your picture-taking is exactly the **opposite** of my desire, especially in the financial district where you have parked this cart. Your ticket, the unicorn said, illustrates the **collapse** of moral integrity in this community. If you had any ethics at all, you would consider my appeal absent any **preconception** of my cart's innards. Now see, I replied, your horn has made your point and your motor mouth is the equal to any pickup truck's **attorney**. Thus, you lose.

– MD

4.

### **Cream-Colored Paradise**

The mice lived in a **cream-colored bungalow** under Mrs. Johnson's sink. Or so at least it seemed to them. Others less culturally attuned might have seen only some half-eaten Triscuits and the remains of a sesame bagel. Welsh **rarebit** was the mice's favorite meal, but Mrs. Johnson was a vegetarian, and more over, for three years now, she and her husband Chuck had been subscribing to Meals-on-Wheels, ever since their **ghost** of a Chevy just gave out one evening, without even a **scuff** on its hood, just gave up the ghost, it did, like their bridge partner Sally's Phil who expired one day at the bowling alley, just like that, never got to try for a spare, and here she was **mocking** Chuck for his cholesterol when poor old Phil never ate any saturated fats and where did that get him? A one-way ticket to the afterlife and wasn't it a pity because now there'd be no more bridge only Sally dreaming of her dear departed in the **pastures** of Heaven close unto the Lord (but not too close, Sally hoped, for he always liked a nice fat joint of a summer's night and she supposed there'd be *some* **backlash** if the Almighty busted him with his stash of pot, what, at his age (if indeed the dead have an age, she thought as an afterthought, glumly)). Near **midnight** the mice made merry as the Johnsons slept fitfully, each drawn into slumber by their respective medications. Chuck rolled over, **flattening** one of Mrs. Johnson's origami birds under his fat thigh. So much for peace, he thought as the bird's scratchy tail against his scrotum awakened him. The **foliage** outside bristled with voles, close cousins (poor relations from the country, in fact) to the mice under the sink. "God save all the creatures who crawl under the moon, and all of their offspring," murmured Chuck in a non-denominational **invocation** of the Divine. He would feel differently in the morning when he **blistered** his toe in the empty mousetrap from which the clever mice had stolen the cheese. "God Fuck!" he would swear into the **mirror**, cursing his fate as he brushed the All Bran from his teeth. **Boisterously**, the rodents would then celebrate in their hide, thanking the Lord who gives them each day their daily cheese and saves them from all harm.

—MN

### **Mirror of my Mind**

A **cream-colored bungalow**? How could you? It will curdle in the sun, and this is July, she said. It's the color of the **rarebit** my uncle cooked for us when we were young and minus the **ghost** of good taste. Look out, she continued, you've **scuffed** my cream-colored floor. Now that is where cream color belongs. Either on the floor or in the refrigerator. Neither of those cream colors **mocks** my sense of order, but your choice of summer retreat has convinced me your mind is out to **pasture** or is swimming in yesterday's fried eggs. He looked at Maybelle with **backlashed** eyes, his cream-colored skin ashen with dismay. At **midnight**, my dear, he implored, we'll sleep in anxious jubilation beyond colors or good sense. **Flattening** me against the pillows will not suffice, Maybelle replied. The **foliage** will know how you've disappointed me with bland desire when it was volcanic red I desired. Your **invocation** of natural disasters has **blistered** the **mirror** of my mind, he moaned. Then **boisterously**, he took his leave abandoning her on the cream-colored sand beneath the gibbous moon.

—MD

5.

## Jesus Land

Ever since the house got running water, the **chamber** pot in the corner had been planted with geraniums. Which didn't stop Uncle Stu from using it for its original purpose on **sleepy** occasions when he thought no one would find out. It fertilized the geraniums, and poisoned the **ants**, he reasoned, or what passed for reason with him, for Stu was somewhat advanced in years and he remembered well every penny he'd been **promised** by business partners long dead, and every service his children told him they'd provide in his old age, but he was getting a little fuzzy on daily matters such as whether he needed to go and lately his fingers acquired a **burnt** tinge of yellow from the cigarettes he forgot to extinguish even as they burned down to glowing hot stubs in his fingers. Now it was the high **pollen** season again, and Stu was sneezing, as were they all of course, being a most sensitive family, but Stu had a habit of leaving his snot-rags (as he insisted on calling them) in the kitchen, and when called to answer for this lapse, he said his manners were good enough for the **world** he'd been born to, and he didn't understand why the younger generation had to go and get so uppity. Yet his **eye** was sharp when it came to noticing innovations in his granddaughters' appearance, such as the blue tattoo of male apparatus (his vocabulary) which pulsed and throbbed when the girl flexed her biceps. Oh how the **terrain** of our lives has changed, he thought, **weighing** each thought like a pound of flour on a possibly dishonest scale. He'd been satisfied to pick tobacco 'til the day he died, but now the subsidies paid them to plant nothing and his granddaughter watched CSI and dreamed of becoming a **forensic** scientist. We are all **forsaken**, he thought forlornly, gazing at the asphalt-covered fields he had transformed into parking lots for the nearby Jesus Land amusement park, whose prime attraction was the giant Mount Calvary roller coaster with three dimensional surround-sound re-enactments of the Crucifixion.

– MN

## The Last Days

When I entered the **chamber** of the four-star general, I discovered her deep in the **sleep** of an **ant** who has just attended choir practice after a heavy meal in the sun. But a **promise** is a promise and so I sat down on the Tabriz cushion at her feet, and I waited, the message I carried **burnt** into my brain like an overdone hamburger of the soul. This is not my lucky day, I thought as curtains of **pollen** attacked my lungs and this in the desert no less. The **world** is not for me, I moaned, sinuses swelling in protest beside the dusty rug. Nonetheless, I kept my **eye** on the general. Once she awoke, I would unload my burden and my brain's **terrain** would revive. I would leave the military **weighing** my heartfelt survival against the message of doom I carried. If missives cannot save me, I thought, **forensics** will. Gold is my opportunity for eternity, I thought. There is no reason to wait around just to tell her we have **forsaken** the army and her ways. She slept while we did all her work. When she wakes up, she will be alone with the sand and stones.

– MD

6.

### The Black Sheep

The **Agricultural** College in Missoula took one look at Bruce and sent him a thin envelope suggesting he go back to the farm and learn to play **pattycake** with his younger cousins if he wanted to improve his soil management skills. And so he did, kneading the mud with his hands until it looked like the chocolate-covered **laxatives** that Aunt Amy was always chewing after a particularly fatty breakfast. It's the dawn of a new **millennium**, and still Amy was upchucking and Bruce played in the yard trying to dig to China despite being long out of his **milk**-teeth and overgrown in his man's overalls. Amy tried to be **gracious** about the boy, after all he wasn't a horse thief like the nearest neighbor's black sheep son, and he wasn't a poet like the son of that unlucky couple down the river who'd have no one to take over the land in their old age and were thinking of selling all for an apartment with a shag rug and heavy **traffic** of recreational vehicles and hearses going by outside the window. But when he set **fire** to the silo with one of his model rockets, she drew the line. The boy would have to go. Yet she feared that if she did him in with the chainsaw as she was so tempted to try, he'd come back, **Lazarus**-like, in the night and slit their throats. This was unfair since Bruce was a gentle soul who took dizzy fits when he saw the **red** blood of the slaughtered pigs and couldn't even keep his head when Amy strangled the chicken each Sunday afternoon for dinner.

– MN

### Academic Freedom

The **agricultural** scene turns me off, I said. There's been entirely too much of it around here of late, especially since the raccoon ate a fawn right under my dining room window. I'd rather play **pat-a-cake** than be exposed to that again. I don't care if you want to talk philosophy at me. It's **laxative** for the mind, that Wittgenstein stuff, and it was written a **millennium** ago. Everyone knows that's passe, bland as **milk**. What? Philosophy. We're talking philosophy. **Gracious**, not agriculture. You some undercover snoop from Cornell or something? I know where I/m tenured. I know it's at the A & M. Still, I'm entitled to my opinions, ain't I? Academic freedom hasn't yet been killed in **traffic** at Cornell. You'll **fire** me if I don't work more philosophy of farm animals into my syllabi? Let me tell you something, Buster. You're no **Lazarus** and neither am I. The ripe **red** of my imagining is apples for me.

– MD

7.

### Mr. Peterson's Afterlife

Attending **church** was not Mr. Peterson's idea of how to while away a Sunday afternoon in Duluth but it was always fun to observe the acid **animosity** which Pastor Funkhauser aimed at his godless congregation in their **sunhats**. The **army blanket** on his lap hid the intimate things Mr. Peterson's fingers did to the choir boy who sat next to him singing of **emerald** cities in the sky where those who are pure of heart go to their eternal sleep with only the 700 Club and Pat Robertson to view on their celestial **TV** sets— and no **Alice** to cuddle with at night after a fluorescent **cocktail** in O'Reilly's Bar watching the strip-tease. "Heaven will be boring," thought Mr. Peterson, "at least until I arrive. Then the situation will change. I'll make a bubble bath in the baptismal font on the main square and share it with **questioning** boys who died without knowing the joys of the jacuzzi. **Doggone** it, I'll turn paradise into a giant Las Vegas of the sky, with skywriters **outlining** the phone number of the STD clinic in nearby Hell."

– MN

### Shock and Awe

By God, it's religion again, a **church** alas, and probably with a steeple and an altar for the saved. **Animosity** -- which is so much more fun -- left outside to dry up in the **sun** under -- or is it on top of -- an **Army blanket** full of holes shot through at Normandy where I holed up in my bunker overnight, the shrapnel dropping like stars upon my wakeful head--**emeralds** flying through the sky trying to take me from there to Eternity and this before television showed **Alice** hawking Frigidaires on **TV**, before the days when generals met for **cocktails** before setting out to kill some other mother's child in a trumped up war of words turned nasty as Daisy Clippers pounding caves at night a parlous situation of life and death played out in black and white to drain the dead of blood in viewers' eyes. **Questioning** minds want to know, I said, Will I live or die tonight? but all I heard were **dogs** of war fighting over the hairy **outline** of my neighbor's hamster fleeing from its bombed-out cage.

– MD

8.

### Little George's Daily Devotions

“The brain is a **gelatinous** substance like aunt Mabel's Jello salads with the orange peels **dying** in green goo that Fred wouldn't eat because he said they tasted of Hudson River eels who **hump** in their Carribean mating ground step by step through *The Joy of Fish Sex*, one position a minute until Hubert's **hatchet** chops them into fine fillets for Ermentrude's brunch before they all play **dice**, risking their bras and underwear after the money is gone like charioteers in bronze **helmets** on the field of Ilion playing their games of chance between the purple tents,” as little **George Washington** recited during his ancient Greek lessons with the stout tutor who told on him after he denied cutting down the cherry tree. Man, he was so guilty that he'd need to do his **ablutions** five times over before he could pray, prostrate, facing the Federal Reserve with the dollar signs in his eyes glinting like the gold chalices in the Pope's personal **Vatican** chapel. Poor George was so well-**endowed** that it was scarcely possible to banish profane thoughts of **people in the street** fucking each other in raincoats underneath bus shelters.

– MN

### Autobiography

“**Gelatinous**,” she said. “You must hate me. You know I like my eggs **dying** on the vine with a dark **hump** in the middle where the yolk used to be. If you skip steps in the **hatchet** job your autobiography has become, **dicing** garlic should clear your head straightaway. You can wear your WWI **helmet** if you like while you do the job of killing off your family's reputation -- **George Washington** could do no better -- Martha's **ablutions** were off limits to him, while mine are not to you. The **Vatican** itself cannot save you from the consequences of your pen and **endowment** of your charms is out of order in this sea of **people in the street.**”

– MD