

The World's Worst Novel: An Interlude, in which the Author apologizes, at once and more than once.

I must apologize twice, and I do, once to the Reader who is about to be terribly confused, and once to John Gardner, who wrote the terrific *October Light*, which I am clearly about to "reference". I said I wouldn't do this, but October is turning to November, and it can't be helped.

Chapter Twenty-Two: In which the reader gets terribly confused, the author references *October Light*, and the warm Bahamian waters are traded for the cold condominium towers of cement.

Sylvia put down the novel she had been reading, and took another sip of her scotch, a fine *Lagavulin*, as she heard the whirr of the car elevator smoothly stop at their floor. The double pocket doors opened quietly and her husband walked in, the faint smell of exhaust wafting in with him. She felt a little nervous, as she always did, hoping his day at the investment house had gone well. What he actually did, she wasn't so sure. She used to understand, but lately things had seemed a little crazy and she tended not to ask, in case she got an answer.

"Hello, dear," she said getting up and giving him a slight kiss on the cheek. "Can I get you a drink?"

"Yes, and make it a stiff one," her husband, James Talford replied. "Sorry to be so late but things are hot at the office. Over-night trading has become one of our prime money-makers. Did you get something to eat?"

"Sarah made me supper around 5:30," Sylvia answered, and immediately regretted mentioning the time in case he took it as a rebuke. He seemed to take it calmly, and she relaxed and handed him the double scotch she had poured him.

James sat down in the chair she had clearly just vacated and picked up the novel she had been reading. He glanced at the back cover, closing the book and losing her place.

"Why do you read this crap?" he asked with his usual tact. "Shouldn't you read something improving?"

Sylvia was used to his bluntness, but lately there really seemed to be an unpleasant, personal, edge to his comments and she hesitated to respond in kind lest his mood prove irascible. She thought of the kinds of statistical mathematics she used to study and wondered, not for the first time, whether she wasn't selling herself a little short despite the insane income her current husband earned.

Instead she handed him the day's *New York Times*, drivel to her mind mostly, and a copy of *War and Peace* she thought to herself, knowing that he was about to turn on the business news.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," Sylvia said, walking towards the kitchen end of the condo.

James grunted by way of response as he reached for the remote, his attention already glued to the massive flat screen that was slowly revealed above the fireplace, masked when not in use by a copy of [J.E.H. MacDonald's Mist Fantasy](#).

Sylvia loved that painting and she watched as it disappeared to be replaced by an enormous talking head, the news made ludicrous by the eighty-five inch screen. Soon James would pop an Ambien and sleep (or drive) like a [Kennedy](#) or [a zombie](#), or both at once. She walked out of the room and through the kitchen to the balcony and little garden space amidst all the concrete of the neighbouring towers where she had carved out a tiny green oasis. Sylvia pulled out her secret stash of Moroccan hash and sat smoking under the faint stars, dimmed by the glow of the city, while planning her escape.

