



## A HANDBAG

BY DAVID LOWE

This is a true story. It happened the other day. My wife was driving the car, I was sitting in the passenger seat trying to write a piece for TGV Mag, when all of a sudden her mobile telephone rang. By the sound of it, the telephone was in her handbag. My wife asked me if I could get it for her. This filled me with apprehension. I tentatively inserted my hand into the bag to feel around for the mobile. It was like penetrating the wardrobe in Narnia, the interior of the object seemed so much bigger than the object itself. A gateway to an enchanted world?

I rummaged around, teased by the incessant ringing of the elusive telephone. I put my head in the bag to try and find the thing. A pale bluish glow lit up the inside. Then in order to get a better view, I introduced a shoulder into the handbag, then the other shoulder. The whole of the top half of my body was now in the handbag trying to locate the increasingly annoying telephone. All of a sudden, the car veered violently to one side. It was an emergency. My wife suddenly had a doubt about her mascara and wanted to check it in the rear-view mirror.

The abrupt shock catapulted my whole body into the handbag and I started to fall down, down, down, just like Alice in Wonderland. I was tumbling down into the intimate space of my wife. I saw samples of perfume torn from magazine pages float by, parking fines which my wife had "forgotten" to give me, a broken hair clip, a wrinkled old tube of anti-ageing cream – another proof that it just doesn't work, I said to myself. Various receipts... 200 euros for a T-shirt! Bits of paper on which telephone numbers had been scribbled. Coralie 060867... must be a hairdresser or a beautician, I thought. The address of a woman from Sweden we met on holiday three years ago. An old horoscope and a photocopy of Exodus III, chapters 14 to 25. Superstition and religion. Witch and priestess.

For somebody who is quite tidy at home, there seemed to be a lot of disorder in here. I kept this to myself of course. There were two paracetamol tablets, a

complimentary nail file from a hotel, a pair of broken sunglasses, an ad torn from the Herald Tribune for a summer house in the Hamptons, and a piece of paper with 21 mars vendredi 10hr à 12hr scrawled on it – a rendezvous for what, where, and with whom? I found a charger for a Nokia, which rather surprised me since my wife hadn't had a Nokia for at least three years and, what's more, she last changed telephones because she couldn't find this very charger, insisting at the time that she hadn't lost it. She was right.

I noticed graffiti was scrawled on the inside walls of the handbag... NTM was rather ambiguous coming from the mother of my children. Emma Bovary was a bit of a tart, succinct literary criticism and the ominous words No woman's land. This was all written in lipstick. I remember her choosing that colour in a chemist's. We'd gone in for a box of aspirin and came out with the lipstick in question, make-up remover, an expensive skin fortifying cream that is only found in chemist's and is made of a mixture of cow's retinas and placentas, an eye-shadow that looked exactly like one she already had and some mineral water in spray form that cost more per centilitre than a decent Bordeaux.

I caught hold of a miniature Burberry umbrella, opened it breaking my fall. A whole range of fidelity cards floated by. Carrefour, Auchan, Shopi, Galeries Lafayette, Printemps, Bon Marché – I found this a bit worrying. How could my wife be so faithful to so many? I finally landed gently on a pile of handbag debris filtered down to the bottom of the bag over time – an old chewing-gum, the corner of an envelope, a used match, fluff from worn-out tissues. It was quite cosy this handbag world. All soft and fragrant, compared to the musty, stale, dirty-sock odour of the male. I heard the noise of a food trolley approaching. A hostess asked me if wanted something to drink. I asked for a beer, but she only had Coca-Cola light and rosé champagne... and fat-free sugarless biscuits containing no gluten.

I noticed the portable telephone on the floor of the bag, still ringing. I caught hold of it and, while nibbling the biscuit, reverted to my normal size, and found myself once again sitting in the passenger seat of the car holding out the telephone to my wife who didn't seem to have noticed anything unusual... I glanced at the screen. "Here you are darling, it's your mother."