

SCENE 23

I Hate My Purse

NORA. I hate my purse. I absolutely hate it. If you're one of those women who think there's something great about purses, don't even bother listening because I have nothing to say to you. This is for women who hate their purses, who are bad at purses, who understand that their purses are reflections of negligent housekeeping, hopeless disorganization, a chronic inability to throw anything away, and an ongoing failure to handle the obligations of a demanding and difficult accessory — the obligation, for example, that it should in some way match what you're wearing. This is for women whose purses are a morass of loose Tic-Tacs, Advils, lipsticks without tops, little bits of tobacco even though there has been no smoking going on for at least ten years, tampons that have come loose from their wrappings, boarding passes from long-forgotten airplane trips, hotel keys from God-knows-what-hotel,

leaky ballpoint pens, Kleenexes that either have or have not been used but there's no way to be sure one way or another. This is for those of you who understand, in short, that your purse is, in some absolutely horrible way, you. (*Beat.*) I realized many years ago that I was no good at purses, and for quite a while, I did without one. When I went out at night, I managed with only a lipstick, a \$20 bill and a credit card tucked into my bra. But unfortunately, there were times when I needed to leave the house with more than just the basics. So I bought an overcoat with large pockets. This, I realize, turned my coat into a purse, but it was still better than carrying a purse. Anything is better than carrying a purse. Because here's what happens when you buy a purse: you start pledging yourself to neatness. You start small. You start pledging yourself to neatness. You start vowing that This Time It Will Be Different. You start with a wallet and a few cosmetics. But within seconds, your purse has accumulated the debris of a lifetime. The cosmetics have somehow fallen out of the shiny cosmetic bag, the coins have tumbled from the wallet, the credit cards are somewhere — where? Where are they? There's a half-drunk bottle of water, along with several snacks you saved from an airplane trip just in case you ever found yourself starving and unaccountably craving a piece of cheese that tastes like plastic. Perhaps you can fit your sneakers into your purse. Yes, by God, you can! Before you know it, everything you own is in your purse. You could flee the Cossacks with your purse. But when you open it up, you can't find a thing: your purse is a big dark hole full of stuff that you spend hours fishing around for.