

Vital signs:

TITLE: MARLENE'S HANDBAG

GENRE: DRAMA/COMEDY

PERIOD: CURRENT DAY

MAIN CHARACTER: MARLENE

WANTS: TO GO HOME

CHALLENGE: HER SON DOESN'T WANT TO TAKE HER

HOW TO OVERCOME: SHE KEEPS COMPLAINING ABOUT IT UNTIL HER SON TAKES HER HOME.

The conflict revolves around MARLENE who wants to go home, and her son PAULO. MARLENE is in the early stages of dementia, so she keeps forgetting about things. One of those things is her son's birthday. She is very defensive about forgetting things which is a typical thing in these kind of diseases. She also treats her son differently from her daughter. PAULO is waiting for his mom to wish him a happy birthday but she keeps insisting that it isn't his birthday creating tension between the two.

**MARLENE** (80) is sitting by the table in the living room, next to her sits **STEVIE** (78). They are chatting relentlessly about clothes. Since they both have dementia, they have been talking about the same skirt for a while. In the couch, watching the TV sits **FERNANDO** (79) he's quiet trying to ignore the banter. There's also **PAULO** (53) his son **BERNARDO** (21) they are also watching the tv. PAULO is MARLENE's son and it is his birthday. **CARLA** (52) and **DARLENE** (60) are talking softly about the mental decay of MARLENE and STEVIE, whilst sitting next to them. MARLENE and STEVIE are going deaf.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON**

MARLENE

I've been tired of that awful, dreary black handbag.(BEAT) But I won't be needing another one.

STEVIE

Nonsense, you have always loved that handbag.

MARLENE

It's getting too worn out. It's no good anymore.

CARLA

I've bought you a new one last Christmas, but you never use it.

MARLENE

When?

Made in Highland

CARLA  
Last year.

MARLENE  
No you didn't, besides I don't  
need a new one. The one I have is  
perfectly fine.

STEVIE  
You were just saying that you  
wanted a new one.

MARLENE  
Who, me?

CARLA, DARLENE and STEVIE nod their heads.

MARLENE CON'T  
That's not true. I never said  
that ! Stevie you old fart - you  
are getting deaf.

STEVIE  
Deaf? Who, me?

MARLENE  
Huh?

STEVIE  
You are the one who's getting  
deaf you old turd.

MARLENE  
What?

STEVIE  
(SCREAMING)  
You're the one who's getting  
deaf!

MARLENE  
Oh yes absolutely and today I  
forgot to bring my hearing aid!

DARLENE  
And why did you leave home  
without it? It's one of the most  
important things!

MARLENE  
(ANNOYED)  
Mind your own business girl! Can  
we go now?

STEVIE  
You mustn't forget it!

MARLENE

Who said I forgot it? I left it home on purpose. I hate having it with me... Makes me feel so old...

PAULO

(From the couch)  
It's supposed to help you.

MARLENE

Help me? No one helped me when my... Where is my handbag?

BERNARDO

It should be in the closet.

MARLENE gets up and goes to the closet to check on the handbag. Meanwhile CARLA and DARLENE comment on the situation softly.

DARLENE

It is worst than I expected.

CARLA

Last week she wanted to hit Paulo in the head while we where taking care of her medicine.

MARLENE comes back to the living room.

CARLA CON'T

When we were taking her home.

MARLENE

Can't find my handbag! Did someone saw it?

MARLENE overhears CARLA's final part of the comment.

MARLENE CON'T

What? Do you want me to go back home? I just arrived! But fine, I'll get my handbag and we can go. I suppose you are tired due to all the hard work Carla.

CARLA

No that's not what I was saying...

MARLENE doesn't listen what CARLA said.

MARLENE

Thanks for the lunch! The cake was very good!

EVERYONE looks at each other in confusion.

MARLENE CON'T  
It feels like someone's birthday!

MARLENE is putting her coat on.

PAULO  
Yes mum, it's my birthday.

MARLENE is struggling to get her coat on, is helped my STEVIE.

MARLENE  
(LAUGHTING)  
You and your jokes Paulo.

STEVIE  
He isn't joking. Marlene.

MARLENE  
And where is my handbag?

BERNARDO gets up and goes to the closet to get the handbag  
MARLENE follows.

MARLENE  
Thank you sweetie.

BERNARDO grabs the handbag and hands it to his grandma  
MARLENE

MARLENE  
How did you do it?

BERNARDO  
Lucky guess.

MARLENE  
Lucky indeed to have such a nice  
grandson!

MARLENE kisses him. BERNARDO smiles at her turns his back, as he does this the smile vanishes immediately. He sits back in the couch watching TV.

PAULO  
Mom! Why are you with your jacket on?

MARLENE  
What?

MARLENE puts the handbag in the floor.

PAULO  
Why are you with the jacket on?

MARLENE

Because it's freezing in this room. It's unbearable! Can't you afford to have at least a heater on?

PAULO

It's expensive mom.

CARLA

I can get you a blanket if you'd like.

MARLENE scoffs at CARLA's offer.

MARLENE

I came here to have lunch with you all, was offered this awful cake, that's not even sweet. I'm freezing to death, and besides someone stole my handbag!

PAULO

You have diabetes! You can't eat sweet things!

BERNARDO

It's on the floor.

CARLA

I made this special cake for you, so it does not have any sugar.

MARLENE

Well, if it's cake like this you might as well not do any cake. It was terrible.

CARLA

It was so that you could eat some of your son's birthday cake, you know for good luck!

MARLENE

It's not my Paulo's birthday. What on earth are you talking about? You should be ashamed of yourself for not knowing your husband's birthday.

PAUSE

MARLENE CON'T

Trying to trick me like this! With this kind of food.

PAULO

Mom, you have diabetes!

Made in Highland

MARLENE

Maybe I do, maybe I don't. Were you with me during the doctors appointment?

PAULO

No I wasn't...

MARLENE interrupts PAULO.

MARLENE

Then you don't know what you are talking about!

PAULO

You told me yourself!

MARLENE

You liar!

STEVIE

Marlene, you have diabetes.

MARLENE

And you only tell me now? I've been eating cake all afternoon! I can die! Does anyone have insulin? Call 999, for heavens sake!

MARLENE'S purse is vibrating

BERNARDO

Grandma, someone is calling you.

MARLENE grabs her purse without looking.

MARLENE

Oh heavens! Who might it be?

MARLENE grabs her phone. Puts the handbag back in the floor.

MARLENE CON'T

Oh it's your sister PAULO! What do I tell her?

PAULO

I don't know?

MARLENE

Why do you always make it so complicated to your sister? You never invite her to these luncheons.

PAULO

I did, she just left, had to go with Pedro to his parent's house in the north.

MARLENE  
Nonsense! I would remember if  
your sister was here.

PAULO  
Pick up before she hangs up.

MARLENE picks up the phone.

MARLENE  
Hello darlin. Where are you? In  
Aveiro? Really? That was really  
fast. Call me when you get there!  
Bye now! Bye...

MARLENE hangs up.

MARLENE CON'T  
They are already in Aveiro.

PAULO  
That's impossible mom, they left  
30 minutes ago.

MARLENE  
What are you talking about? They  
left at least 1, 2 hours ago.

CARLA  
It's true they just left.

MARLENE  
Sandra just told me they are in  
Aveiro.

STEVIE  
Marlene, that's impossible.

MARLENE  
Are you calling me a liar? My  
family is not one of liars!  
Always questioning me! The  
nerve...

BERNARDO  
Aveiras, they are in Aveiras.

MARLENE  
Ah yes of course, makes sense.

PAULO  
When your grandson tells you  
something he's always right.

MARLENE  
What?

PAULO  
Nothing mom, nothing.

MARLENE

I hate winter, it gets dark so fast.

STEVIE

Me too. And the cold is terrible for my knees.

MARLENE

Yes. (BEAT) Oh well, we should get going.

PAULO

No we have to wait for the traffic in the bridge to die down a bit.

MARLENE

Why?

PAULO

Do you want to be stuck in traffic for 2 hours?

MARLENE

You want me stuck here with all this cold.

PAULO

Bernardo, get your grandma the heater.

BERNARDO gets up and drags the heater next to his grandma he doesn't turn the heater on.

BERNARDO

It's kind of broken, it will take a while to heat up. Better get you a blanket.

MARLENE

Sure! By the way can you find me my purse?

PAULO

It's right beneath you mom!

MARLENE

What?

PAULO

(LOUDER)

Your handbag is right beneath you mom!

MARLENE scans the room for her bag.

MARLENE

Where I can't find it!

Made in Highland



STEVIE

On the floor woman!

In her confusion, she looks down and grabs it with two hands and holds it up high somewhat like the lion king.

MARLENE

Finally found it!

STEVIE starts clapping and is soon after followed by everyone in the room, except for FERNANDO.

STEVIE

You should give it a scrubbing or something like that. It's kind of dirty.

MARLENE

Oh no, I'll just throw it out.

MARLENE proceeds to throw the bag unceremoniously into the floor.

BERNARDO and PAULO are scared. FERNANDO who is sitting between them doesn't move and is laser focused on the game.

PAULO

Why would you do that mom?

MARLENE

Just a bit of flamboyance.

PAULO

You never did flamboyance mom.

STEVIE

Yes you never did that.

MARLENE

Oh yes I did!

STEVIE

Oh yes she did!

PAULO

Oh no she didn't!

Everyone stops for a bit, reflecting. Except for FERNANDO who is not even listening.

MARLENE

Stevie, there's something wrong with your husband?

STEVIE

With whom?

MARLENE

With Fernando! He's awfully quiet.

STEVIE and MARLENE both look at FERNANDO conspicuously.

MARLENE CON'T

What happened to him? He didn't even told us one of his stories.

STEVIE

I think it is the weather.

MARLENE

Oh yes, this weather makes me so depressed. It gets dark at 5 now!

PAUSE

MARLENE CON'T

By the way can you guys take me home?

MARLENE looks at FERNANDO.

FERNANDO sits silent.

MARLENE CON'T

Stevie, your husband might be dead.

STEVIE

No he isn't.

Looks at FERNANDO.

STEVIE

Clearly not. He's just watching the TV.

FERNANDO stays put.

MARLENE

Are you sure?

FERNANDO starts to nod off.

MARLENE

(excited)

Look! He's falling asleep!

FERNANDO wakes up and composes himself quickly.

STEVIE looks at her husband.

STEVIE

No he isn't!

MARLENE

Oh yes he is!

PAULO

Do you mind to stop with the panto bullcrap?

CARLA

At least they are having fun.

DARLENE

And not talking about handbags.

STEVIE

Oh yes, by the Marlene did you find your handbag?

MARLENE

It's here next to me on the floor.

STEVIE

No it isn't! That's mine!

MARLENE

What the heck are you talking about woman?

STEVIE

You have found a wrong purse!

MARLENE

It's not a purse it's a Handbag!  
(BEAT) See it's not yours you don't even know what it's called!

STEVIE

I call it whatever I want!

PAULO

Can you shut up about the purse!

MARLENE

Handbag!

PAULO

Bernardo, go and get aunt Stevie's purse.

MARLENE

Handbag!

STEVIE

No, since it's mine it's a purse!

MARLENE

Oh yes you're right!

BERNARDO gets up and goes to the closet to find STEVIE's purse.

He comes back empty-handed.

STEVIE  
You couldn't find it?

STEVIE grabs MARLENE's handbag of her hands.

STEVIE CON'T  
Such a pity Marlene, some one  
nicked your purse...

MARLENE  
Oh no! Not again!

MARLENE runs off trying to find her handbag.  
MARLENE's handbag starts to buzz. It's her phone.

CARLA  
Stevie, the purse is buzzing.

MARLENE  
(Softly)  
Handbag.

STEVIE  
Who might it be?

STEVIE pick up the phone.

STEVIE CON'T  
Hello? Oh Sandra! Nice to hear  
from you! You want to talk with  
your mom? Sure!

PAUSE

STEVIE CON'T  
(Screaming)  
Marlene it's for you!

MARLENE (off screen)  
(Screaming)  
Who's calling me?

STEVIE  
It's your daughter!

MARLENE (off screen)  
(Screaming)  
Whose daughter?

STEVIE  
(Screaming)  
Yours you rolling turd!

MARLENE  
Oh!

MARLENE picks up the phone.

MARLENE  
Hello? Oh yes! Wh...What are?  
Sorry sweetie can't hear you very  
well. What? REAL?

STEVIE  
Vila Real, they probably are in  
Vila Real

PAULO  
That's impossible.

MARLENE gestures for them to shut up. She puts one finger in  
the ear, to block the noise.

MARLENE  
Vila Real de Santo António?

PAULO  
That's impossible mom. Why would  
they go down south?

STEVIE  
Well, you know your sister Sandra  
is quite the explorer.

PAULO  
Please, the only thing she  
explores is the back of her  
fridge . Looking for a piece of  
ice cream in hiding.

MARLENE  
Oh ok bye now!

MARLENE hangs up the phone and puts it in her pocket.

MARLENE CON'T  
They are going to Algarve! Lucky!

CARLA  
They are going to the north of  
the country!

STEVIE  
Yes they already are in Vila  
Real!

PAULO  
That's impossible!

A big discussion breaks out, which is stopped by BERNARDO.

BERNARDO  
(Screaming)  
Monte Real!

DARLENE  
Yeah that sounds right!

CARLA  
Yup.

Silence.

PAULO  
Mom, you really need to bring you  
hearing aid.

MARLENE  
Stop insisting!

PAULO  
No mom, beyond being dangerous  
for you to walk around without  
being able to listen to dangers,  
it is also a bit of a nuisance!

MARLENE looks at her son with a serious, saddened look.

MARLENE  
A nuisance? It is not my fault.

PAUSE

MARLENE CON'T  
It is not my fault. It is not my  
fault that my mother hit me in  
the head. No one helped me, no  
one defended me. She had a  
vicious knack for hitting me with  
a hand full of rings right here.

MARLENE points to the top of her cheekbone near to the ear.

MARLENE CON'T  
No one defended em back then. I  
was just a child.

PAUSE

MARLENE CON'T  
The doctors said that it  
contributed to becoming deaf.  
Then all those hours connecting  
calls, using those dreadful  
headsets. I can only remember the  
headaches I had the end of every  
shift. They weren't a nuisance.  
(MORE)

MARLENE CON'T (CONT'D)

No they were life hitting me in the head again. Everyday, relentless.

I found love in your father, a brilliant man, like you. Life found a different way, a twisted way of tormenting me. He had his own problems. Also like you.

MARLENE is fighting off tears.

MARLENE CON'T

Life messed with him as well. But it was in such a cruel way. He also hit me in the head. But you know that.

PAUSE

MARLENE CON'T

I have been beaten all my life. And now I've become deaf. The doctors said that all of this was a contributing to it. Becoming a nuisance.

SILENCE.

Everyone in the room is shocked with what happened. Fernando is still looking at the TV while a tear runs down his face.

MARLENE

I would like to go home.

FERNANDO still wiping his tears gets up. Puts MARLENE'S coat on her. Looks at STEVIE and DARLENE signaling it's time to go. PAULO also gets up, puts his jacket on and goes for the door. CARLA and BERNARDO look at each other and start to put the dishes and the cakes in the kitchen. The party is over. MARLENE leaves her handbag behind.

FADE TO BLACK.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

PAULO returns home. And is hugged by CARLA. When entering the living room he sees his mom's handbag left forgotten in the floor. As he picks it up he receives a phone call from MARLENE, he thinks that she's calling because she forgot her handbag. PAULO sighs before picking up the phone. The phone call is loud enough to be heard.

MARLENE

Hello?

PAULO

Yes mom. You forgot...

Made in Highland

PAULO is interruptor by MARLENE.

MARLENE  
I am so terribly sorry...

PAULO  
What, why?

MARLENE laughs.

MARLENE  
Why? Why you ask hehehe. It's  
your birthday son! (Beat) I  
forgot to wish you a happy  
birthday! I was so busy here at  
home today that I completely  
forgot!

PAULO smiles tenderly.

PAULO  
Thank you mom.

END.