

Cast of Characters for Harvey

Ethel Chauvenet – Mrs. Chauvenet is an old friend of the family. She is a member of the town's social circle, which Veta wants Myrtle to break into, and so they both flatter her and curry her favor. She is delighted to see Elwood, whom she has not seen in a while, until he introduces her to Harvey: then, suspecting his sanity, she hastily apologizes and leaves.

Betty Chumley - Dr. Chumley's wife Like Veta, she is more concerned with socializing than with science: told that her husband has to examine a patient, she tells him, "Give a little quick diagnosis, Willie — we don't want to be late to the party." She has a conversation with Elwood while he is looking for Harvey, and then later, when everyone at the sanitarium thinks that it is Veta who believes in the imaginary rabbit, she mentions his friend Harvey, making them all realize that they have mistakenly committed the wrong person.

Dr. William B. Chumley - Chumley is an esteemed psychiatrist and the head of the sanitarium, "Chumley's Rest," to which Veta has Elwood taken. He is a difficult, exacting man, feared by his subordinates, unwilling to tolerate his mistakes. After a night out drinking with Elwood, though, Dr. Chumley comes to see Harvey, and after that, he discusses Harvey's attributes with Elwood. Told that Harvey can stop time, allowing one to leave their ordinary life for some time and go somewhere else, he describes an elaborate fantasy that has apparently been fomenting in his mind for a long time. In his fantasy, he would go to a campground outside of Akron, Ohio, and live with a beautiful woman, who would drink beer with him and listen to all of his innermost secrets and stroke his head and say, "Poor thing! Oh, you poor, poor thing!"

Elwood P. Dowd - Elwood P. Dowd is the central character of the play, a friendly eccentric who spends his days and nights in the taverns of his unnamed town. Elwood's best friend is Harvey, an invisible six-foot-tall rabbit. The play leaves open several possibilities regarding exactly what Harvey is, whether he is a figment of Elwood's imagination, as the psychiatrists would like to believe, or he is, as Elwood asserts, a supernatural being known as a pooka. The relevant events in Elwood's past that would account for his relationship with an imaginary, giant rabbit are only hinted at. No information is given about any job he may have ever been employed at, only that he took care of his mother until the time that she died and that she left "all of her property" to him, which implies that the family is rich and that he may have never worked.

Elwood is a charmer, always pleasant when talking to people, even those who, like Wilson, address him gruffly. He has a stack of calling cards in his pocket and takes one out to offer to each new person he meets. He invites strangers to dinner at his house, including a woman who calls selling magazine subscriptions and a cab driver who brings Elwood's sister, Veta, out to the sanitarium. He is gallant toward Nurse Kelly, picking flowers for her and complimenting her on her beauty.

There are hints that Elwood has known disappointment in his life, and that Harvey may be a manifestation of this. He is clearly displeased with his past when he says to Nurse Kelly, "For you I would do anything. I would almost be willing to live my life over again. Almost." Speaking of the choice between being smart or pleasant, he tells Dr. Chumley, "For years I was smart. I recommend pleasant," indicating a break with the past. The most significant indication of his self-image comes in Act II Scene II, when he describes the "golden moments" that he has with strangers in taverns, who tell him about the

big things they have done and that they intend to do, and then, as he sees it, they are impressed with Harvey because he is “bigger and grander than anything...”

Judge Omar Gaffney - The judge is an old family friend of the Dowds, a representative of the people in town who are accustomed to seeing Elwood talking to Harvey and who do not think anything of it. He is the family’s lawyer; so, when Veta wants to commit Elwood, it is up to Judge Gaffney to arrange the commitment papers, and when Veta wants to sue Chumley’s Rest for wrongly committing her, it is also his case to file.

Ruth Kelly - Nurse Kelly is a sympathetic character, a pretty young woman who appears to have some sort of love/hate relationship with Dr. Sanderson. Describing him to Veta, she exclaims, “He’s really wonderful” — (Catches herself.) “to the patients.” When it seems that they have incarcerated the wrong person, Kelly apologizes and offers to take the blame, but Sanderson meets her concern with sarcasm: “Beautiful — and dumb, too. It’s almost too good to be true.” When they are trying to stall Elwood from leaving, Sanderson suggests that she can captivate him with her good looks, telling her to “go into you old routine — you know — the eyes — the swish — the works.” She is simultaneously flattered and insulted. Of the people at the sanitarium, it is Nurse Kelly that Elwood responds to — he holds her hand (asking permission first) and recites love poetry to her. Although the play offers no actual conclusion to her flirtation with Sanderson, there is the implication that Elwood’s interests will make her more self-confident in the future.

E. J. Lofgren - At the end of the play, it is the cab driver, Lofgren, who makes Veta realize that the treatment that is supposed to make Elwood stop seeing Harvey might drain him of his kind personality. He explains that all of the people that he drives out to Chumley’s Rest for treatment are kind and cheerful on the way out, but on the way back, after their treatment, they are angry, mean, and no fun. “Lady,” he tells her, “after this, he’ll be a perfectly normal human being and you know what bastards they are!”

Dr. Lyman Sanderson - Dr. Sanderson is young, for a psychiatrist, but very qualified — Dr. Chumley has picked him out of the twelve possible assistants that he tried. He is just as infatuated with Nurse Kelly as she is with him, but he only reveals his concern indirectly. When she tells him to tell Dr. Chumley that the mistake of locking up Elwood was her fault, he says out loud, “I never mention your name,” but then adds, when he has moved away from her, “except in my sleep.” At the beginning of Act II, Scene II, the two of them have their most direct confrontation, discussing the dates that they saw each other with the previous weekend, but Dr. Sanderson continues to insist that his interest in Nurse Kelly is purely as a psychiatrist.

Myrtle Mae Simmons - Myrtle is a young woman, the daughter of Veta. The main reason why she and her mother are concerned about their standing in the community is that they both are concerned that Myrtle find a man to marry. They are afraid that prospective suitors will be frightened away when they find out that Elwood has an imaginary friend. Myrtle is less charitable about Elwood’s odd behavior than Veta, expressing the wish that he might be hit by a truck and making arrangements to sell the house as soon as he is taken off to the sanitarium. Ironically, Myrtle finds a man who is attracted to her because of Elwood’s case; she and Wilson, the hospital orderly, fall in love before the play is over. She does have some awareness of Harvey’s supernatural existence, because she is the one who explains that whatever Elwood says Harvey predicted actually comes to pass; however, Myrtle is too concerned with herself and her own prospects to think that there is anything too odd about this.

Veta Louise Simmons - Elwood's sister, Veta, is an important character in this play because she joins the play's two opposing forces, logic and imagination. It is her embarrassment with Elwood and her fear that her daughter, Myrtle, will not be able to land a suitable husband because of his eccentricities, that has her take him to Chumley's sanitarium to be committed. Veta throws society functions that are covered by the local newspaper, and she is terrified that her social position will be subject to ridicule or scandal. Elwood embarrasses her. But Veta is a comic character and is just as unstable in her own way as is her brother. In fact, Veta admits at one point that she has actually seen Harvey on a few occasions, indicating that she and her brother share a common state of mind. When she tries to explain Elwood's condition to Dr. Sanderson, she describes Harvey in such a confusing way that the doctor thinks that she is the one who imagines him, and so he has Wilson capture her and lock her up. Veta enlists an old family friend, Judge Gaffney, to sue the sanitarium, but her threat is eventually forgotten. She does, however, empathize with her brother in the end, after the cab driver has told her that the sanitarium's treatment will stop his eccentricity but make him mean and dull, and she interrupts the treatment before it can change him.

Wilson - Wilson is the muscle of Chumley's Rest, a devoted orderly responsible for handling the patients who will not cooperate voluntarily. When Dr. Sanderson thinks that Veta is supposed to be committed, Wilson captures her, carries her upstairs, and undresses her in order to put her in the "hydro-tub" for therapy. He is vulgar and crude and completely devoted to Dr. Chumley, almost frantic with concern when he thinks that Elwood may have hurt the doctor. When he goes to the Dowd house looking for Elwood, Wilson flirts with Myrtle — she seems interested in him. When he asks her out in the last scene it is her mother, Veta, who turns him down.

Miss Johnson - Miss Johnson is listed in the Cast of Characters as "a cateress," but her dialog in the play is tagged "Maid."