

Mind Over Matter – character notes

Carl (m) – resident, former electrician.

Harry (m) – resident, former civil servant.

Karis (f) – late 20's, care assistant.

Joanie (f) – resident, former florist.

Penelope (f) – resident, former teacher.

Mel (f) – mid-40's, care home manager.

Simon (m) – resident, former policeman.

AND

Lily (f) – early 20's, new care assistant.

Carl

- On for Act 1, 2 and 3. Medium to small part.
- Quiet, reserved; keeps himself to himself. Not a great conversationalist but has a very sharp mind. A very practical and quietly intelligent man, e.g. keen chess player, excellent reader of people, etc. People tend to listen to him when he speaks (if he speaks). Not someone you would willingly make idle chit-chat with, unless you didn't know him. Borderline alcoholic. Suspected medical issues with his liver. His health visibly worsens as the play progresses (fine in Act 1, walking stick Act 2, wheelchair Act 3).

Harry

- On for Act 1, 2 and 3. Total: Large part.
- Ebullient, energetic and polite; a pleasant breath of fresh air in the home. He is our primary window into the lives of the residents as he bonds quickly with Lily. Well educated, but not a snob, he always makes time to talk to the other residents and can rightfully consider himself to be everyone's best friend. The reason why Harry is stuck in a retirement home is deliberately obscure; despite him being a civil servant, nobody else really knows that much about him. Harry is never drawn into a prolonged conversation about his past.

Karis

- On for Act 1 and 3 – **NO ACT 2**. Total: Small part.
- Passive, not cold or naïve. She's only here to do her job. End of discussion. She cares for the residents, but cares about getting paid at the end of the month a little more. She's not completely heartless with her interactions between the residents, and warms to them gradually as the play progresses, but of course by that stage, it is possibly a little too late for bridge-building. Ends the play regretting her past outlook on her job. Karis is almost a vision, a "ghost of Christmas yet to come" for Lily; a warning of how she might end up.

Joanie

- On for Act 1, 2 and 3. Medium to small part.
- Lonely, bored, perhaps even a little embittered at being stuck in a retirement home; the resident nosey parker of the home. A family woman, much more so than the others. Likes the sound of her own voice, not necessarily in a horrible way, but because there is never anyone else worth listening to. Arthritis and numerous other ailments are used as reasons for her confinement to a retirement home, but the true cause is the trauma of her husband's death that she has never quite recovered from, which she tries desperately to hide from the others.

Penelope

- On for Act 1, 2 and 3. Large part.
- A kind, quiet, slightly withdrawn but ultimately harmless old lady. Fiercely intelligent, another good reader of people. Her and Joanie bicker and argue like cats and dogs, chiefly because they are so different in character, not because of any past indiscretions. Cares a great deal about her half-brother Simon and will not let anyone or anything get between her and his wellbeing. Has ended up in the retirement home mostly because of Simon and her wish to look after him. Again, Penelope's health is a deliberately vague feature of the play. It is not really until the very final scene that we begin to understand and appreciate just how difficult her life has been.

Mel

- On for Act 1 and 3 – **NO ACT 2**. Small part.
- The kingpin of the retirement home; brusque, clinical and very matter-of-fact. Treats the residents as a shepherd would treat their flock; as their primary source of income. Not a cold person, or a bully, or a tyrant; in fact, perhaps the only thing she is truly guilty of is taking her job, and herself, a little too seriously. She has a horrible life outside of the walls of the care home and sometimes takes it out on the residents. She is ultimately the "villain" of the piece; however, it is imperative that she is not deliberately portrayed as one. Everyone should be able to identify a feature of Mel in a boss they have previously worked for / work with currently.

Simon

- On for Act 1 and 2 – **ONLY WALK-ON ACT 3**. Small part.
- Slightly overweight, slightly forgetful, absolutely heart-warming. We need to gravitate towards Simon as moths to a light. Very much in the grip of dementia, after years of successful service in the Police force. Treated with a degree of sympathy by the other residents, an attitude that winds up Penelope and confuses Simon. Does not seem to mourn his loss of independence as the others do, and in his more lucid moments, is truly appreciative of the company around him. He is another whose health deteriorates rapidly as the show progresses (like Carl); but this is much more of a mental deterioration than a physical one. His breakdown at the end of Act 2 is the last defining moment of his life.

Lily

- On for Act 1 and 2 – **NO ACT 3**. Large part.
- The glue of the show; youthful confidence and innocence personified. Gradually encourages everyone out of their respective shells, although this isn't fully realised until after she has gone in Act 3. Forms close bonds with everyone, either through her actions or through her conversations with them, a feature appreciated by all the residents as well as her honesty, her openness, and her willingness to treat them all with dignity. Despite Mel's warning, it is obvious that she cares too much about the residents, so much so that, ultimately, it costs her a job – let's not forget, she inadvertently triggers Simon's meltdown, driven by her desire to get to know him better. Her good deeds and honest actions do not always lead to positive outcomes for everyone.