Whose Life is it Anyway?

A summary of the play

Ken Harrison has been in an accident and he is in hospital paralysed from the neck down.

Although he seems cheerful he is really very unhappy and cannot face life as a quadriplegic. He chats to the nurses but he finds the Sister quite patronising to him and he does not like the fact that she is more interested in being efficient than treating him like a human being.

Ken tries to get Dr Emerson to discharge him but he refuses. Ken is shocked that Dr Emerson has the choice about whether he lives or dies and so he gets a solicitor, Mr Hill, to question the decision.

Dr Emerson asks Dr Travers, a psychiatrist at the hospital, to look at Ken and in the meantime he tells Dr Scott he is committing Ken under Section 26 of the Mental Health Act.

Mr Hill brings Mr Kershaw, a barrister who will represent Ken, to visit but the Sister insists she stays in the room as well, saying she must make sure Ken does not get over-excited. Ken knows that the Sister is really there to listen to what he says to his legal team and report back to Dr Emerson.

Mr Kershaw tells Ken they will apply for a writ of habeas corpus to get him discharged.

A Judge comes into the hospital to hear the case. He is very polite to all the parties involved. After hearing evidence from both sides he decides that Ken should be discharged. At the end of the play Dr Emerson appears to have lost all his earlier arrogance and tells Ken he can stay and die in the hospital. Dr Scott, who has been very understanding of Ken’s wishes, tries to kiss Ken but Ken asks her not to.

• After you have read through the summary of the play, make sure you understand the meaning of all the underlined words. If you don’t, look them up in a dictionary and make a note of the definition of the word.

• Once you understand all of the underlined words, try to think of similar replacement words, usually referred to as synonyms.