Whose Life is it Anyway?
By Brian Clark

Characters: Mrs. Boyle – A social worker, she tries to do her job in a caring but professional way.
Ken Harrison – A car accident has left him paralyzed from the neck down. Depressed and bitter, he wants to be allowed to die.

Situation: The scene takes place in a private hospital room.

Mrs. Boyle: Why don’t you want any more treatment?
Ken: I’d rather not go on living like this.
Mrs. Boyle: Why not?
Ken: Isn’t it obvious?
Mrs. Boyle: Not to me. I’ve seen many patients like you.
Ken: And they all want to live?
Mrs. Boyle: Usually.
Ken: Why?
Mrs. Boyle: They find a new way of life.
Ken: How?
Mrs. Boyle: You’ll be surprised how many things you will be able to do with training and a little patience.
Ken: Such as?
Mrs. Boyle: We can’t be sure yet. But I should think that you will be able to operate reading machines and perhaps an adapted typewriter.
Ken: Reading and writing. What about arithmetic?
Mrs. Boyle: (Smiling) I dare say we could fit you up with a comptometer if you really wanted one.
Ken: Mrs. Boyle, even educationalists have realized that the three r’s do not make a full life.

Mrs. Boyle: What did you do before the accident?

Ken: I taught in an art school. I was a sculptor.

Mrs. Boyle: I see.

Ken: Difficult, isn’t it? How about an electrically operated hammer and chisel? No, well. Or a cybernetic lump of clay?

Mrs. Boyle: I wouldn’t laugh if I were you. It’s amazing what can be done. Our scientists are wonderful.

Ken: They are. But it’s not good enough, you see, Mrs. Boyle. I really have absolutely no desire at all to be the object of scientific virtuosity. I have thought things over very carefully. I do have plenty of time for thinking and I have decided that I do not want to go on living with so much effort for so little result.

Mrs. Boyle: Yes, well, we shall have to see about that.

Ken: What is there to see?

Mrs. Boyle: We can’t just stop treatment, just like that.

Ken: Why not?

Mrs. Boyle: It’s the job of the hospital to save life, not to lose it.

Ken: The hospital’s done all it can, but it wasn’t enough. It wasn’t the hospital’s fault; the original injury was too big.

Mrs. Boyle: We have to make the best of the situation.

Ken: No. “We” don’t have to do anything. I have to do what is to be done and that is to cash in the chips.
Mrs. Boyle: It’s not unusual, you know, for people injured as you have been, to suffer with this depression for a considerable time before they begin to see that a life is possible.

Ken: How long?

Mrs. Boyle: It varies.

Ken: Don’t hedge.

Mrs. Boyle: It could be a year or so.

Ken: And it could last for the rest of my life.

Mrs. Boyle: That would be most unlikely.

Ken: I’m sorry, but I cannot settle for that.

Mrs. Boyle: Try not to dwell on it. I’ll see what I can do to get you started on some occupational therapy. Perhaps we could make a start on the reading machines.

Ken: Do you have many books for those machines?

Mrs. Boyle: Quite a few.

Ken: Can I make a request for the first one?

Mrs. Boyle: If you like.

Ken: “How to be a sculptor with no hands.”

Mrs. Boyle: I’ll be back tomorrow with the machine.

Ken: It’s marvelous, you know.

Mrs. Boyle: What is?

Ken: All you people have the same technique. When I say something really awkward you just pretend I haven’t said anything at all. You’re all the bloody same... Well, there’s another outburst. That should be your cue to comment on the light-shade or the color of the walls.
Mrs. Boyle: I’m sorry if I have upset you.

Ken: Of course you have upset me. You and the doctors with your appalling so-called professionalism, which is nothing more than a series of verbal tricks to prevent you relating to your patients as human beings.

Mrs. Boyle: You must understand; we have to remain relatively detached in order to help...

Ken: That’s all right with me. Detach yourself. Tear yourself off on the dotted line that divides the woman from the social worker, and post yourself off to another patient.

Scene