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Dramatic Publishing

*Tony-award Winner
Tom Conti – Best Actor
in "Whose Life Is It Anyway?"*



Whose Life Is It Anyway ?

A Full-Length Play
By
BRIAN CLARK



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

Whose Life Is It Anyway?

Drama. By Brian Clark. Cast: 9m., 5w. A brilliant battle of wits takes place in this extraordinary play. Ken Harrison, a successful sculptor, is paralyzed in a car accident and kept alive by support systems in a hospital. Outwardly he's cheerful and often very funny, but he's overwhelmed by the fact that he has lost control of his own life. As the play begins, he is coming to the decision that if he can't live as a man, he does not want to exist as a medical achievement. His physician, however, is utterly determined to preserve Ken's life, regardless of its quality. Finally, despite the pleas of the doctor and his involved nurse, Ken invokes the law of habeas corpus and a judge joins the battle to determine *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* Area staging.

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Whose Life Is It Anyway?

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WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?

by

BRIAN CLARK



Dramatic Publishing

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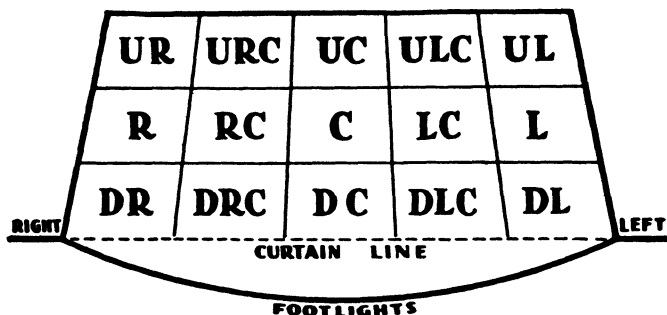
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(WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?)

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CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?

A Full-length Play
For Nine Men and Five Women

CHARACTERS

KEN HARRISON..... the patient
SISTER ANDERSON ward sister
KAY SADLER..... nurse
JOHN..... orderly
DR. JOAN SCOTT..... doctor
DR. MICHAEL EMERSON consultant physician
MRS. GILLIAN BOYLE..... medical social worker
PHILIP HILL Ken's solicitor
DR. PAUL TRAVERS..... consultant psychiatrist
PETER KERSHAW Ken's barrister
MR. JUSTICE MILLHOUSE judge
ANDREW EDEN..... hospital's barrister
DR. BARR consultant psychiatrist
NIGHT SISTER

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A hospital somewhere in England.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *SISTER ANDERSON and NURSE KAY SADLER enter with trolley.*

SISTER. Good morning, Mr. Harrison. A new face for you today.

KEN. That's nice.

NURSE. Hello.

KEN. Hello. I'm afraid I can't offer you my hand. You'll just have to make do with my backside like all the other nurses. *(They lower the bed.)* Going down—Obstetrics, Gynecology, Lingerie, Rubber wear. *(They roll KEN over and start to massage his back and heels with spirit and talc.)* It's funny, you know. I used to dream of situations like this.

SISTER. Being injured?

KEN. No! Lying on a bed being massaged by two beautiful women.

SISTER *(mock serious)*. If you go on like this, Mr. Harrison, I shan't be able to send my young nurses in here.

KEN. They're perfectly safe with me, Sister. *(The phone rings outside.)*

SISTER. Can you manage for a moment, Nurse?

NURSE. Oh yes, Sister.

SISTER. Wipe your hands and put the pillows behind Mr. Harrison; we don't want to have him on the floor.

KEN. Have me on the floor, Sister, please. Have me on the floor. (*SISTER goes out.*) What's your name?

NURSE. Kay.

KEN. That's nice, but don't let Sister hear you say that.

NURSE. What?

KEN. What's your second name?

NURSE. Sadler.

KEN. Then you must answer "Nurse Sadler" with a smile that is full of warmth, but with no hint of sex.

NURSE. I'm sorry.

KEN. I'm not. I'm glad you're called Kay. I shall call you Kay when we're alone, just you and me, having my backside caressed...

NURSE. I'm rubbing your heels.

KEN. Well, don't spoil it. After all, it doesn't matter. I can't feel anything wherever you are. Is this your first ward?

NURSE. Yes. I'm still at P.T.S.

KEN. What's that? Primary Training School?

NURSE. Yes. I finish next week.

KEN. And you can't wait to get here full time.

NURSE. I'll be glad to finish the school.

KEN. All students are the same.

NURSE. Were you a teacher?

KEN. Tut tut; second lesson. You mustn't use the past tense.

NURSE. What do you mean?

KEN. You said, "Were you a teacher?" You should have said, "Are you a teacher?" I mean, you are now part of the optimism industry. Everyone who deals with me acts as though, for the first time in the history of medical

science, a ruptured spinal column will heal itself—it's just a bit of a bore waiting for it to happen.

NURSE. I'm sorry.

KEN. Don't be. Kay, you're a breath of fresh air.

(SISTER comes back.)

SISTER. Finished, Nurse?

KEN. What do you mean? Have I finished Nurse. I haven't started her yet!

NURSE. Yes, Sister. *(They roll him back and remake the bed.)*

KEN. I must congratulate you, Sister, on your new recruit. A credit to the monstrous regiment.

SISTER. I'm glad you got on.

KEN. Well, I didn't get quite that far. Not that I didn't try, Sister. But all I could get out of her was that her name was ...Nurse Sadler...and that she's looking forward to coming here.

SISTER. If she still feels like that after being five minutes with you, we'll make a nurse of her yet.

KEN. I don't know quite how to take that, Sister—lying down, I suppose.

SISTER. Night Sister said you slept well.

KEN. Ah-thew! I fooled her...After her last round, a mate of mine came in and smuggled me out...We went mid-night skateboarding.

SISTER. Oh, yes...I hope it was fun...

KEN. It was all right...the only problem was that I was the skateboard.

SISTER. There, that's better. Comfortable?

KEN. Sister, it's so beautifully made, I can't feel a thing.

SISTER. Cheerio, Mr. Harrison. *(They leave.)*

NURSE. Won't he ever get better, Sister?

SISTER. No.

NURSE. What will happen to him?

SISTER. When we have him fully stabilized, he'll be transferred to a long-stay hospital.

NURSE. For the rest of his life?

SISTER. Yes.

(JOHN, an orderly, comes along the corridor carrying shaving tackle on a tray.)

JOHN. Morning, Sister.

SISTER. Morning, John. Are you going to Mr. Harrison?

JOHN. That's right.

SISTER. He's all ready.

JOHN. Right. *(JOHN goes into the sluice room to collect an electric razor.)*

NURSE. How long has he been here?

SISTER. Four months.

NURSE. How much longer will he be here?

SISTER. Not much longer now, I should think. Take the trolley into the ward, Nurse. I should start on Mr. Phillips.

(SISTER goes into her office. JOHN goes into KEN's room. He plugs in the razor and shaves KEN.)

JOHN. Good morning, Mr. Harrison ...

KEN. Come to trim the lawn?

JOHN. That's right.

KEN. Good...Must make sure that all the beds and borders are neat and tidy.

JOHN. That's my job.

KEN. Well, my gardening friend, isn't it about time you got some fertilizer to sprinkle on me and get some movement going in this plant?

JOHN. Ah, now there you have me. You see, I'm only a laborer in this here vineyard. Fertilizers and pruning and bedding out is up to the head gardener.

KEN. Still, you must be in charge of the compost heap. That's where I should be.

(SISTER puts her head around the door.)

SISTER. John.

JOHN. Yes?

SISTER. Don't be long, will you? Dr. Scott will probably be early today; there's a consultant's round this morning.

JOHN. Right, Sister. *(SISTER goes back to her office.)*

KEN. The visitation of the Gods.

JOHN. Eh?

KEN. The Gods are walking on earth again.

JOHN. Oh, yes—they think they're a bit of all right.

KEN. What happened to the other chap—Terence he was called...I think?

JOHN. They come and they go...I think he left to get married up north somewhere.

KEN. Terence, getting married? Who to? A lorry driver?

JOHN. Catty!

KEN. No. Bloody jealous. From where I'm lying, if you can make it at all—even with your right hand—it would be heaven...I'm sorry...feeling sorry for myself this

morning ...can't even say I got out of the wrong side of the bed. Are you down to the bone yet? ...Anyway, how long will you be staying?

JOHN. Just till we go professional, man.

KEN. Doing what?

JOHN. Music. We got a steel band—with some comedy numbers and we're getting around a bit... We're auditioning for Opportunity Knocks in four months.

KEN. That's great... Really great... I like steel bands... There's something fascinating about using oil drums—making something out of scrap... Why not try knocking a tune out of me?

JOHN. Why not, man!

(He puts down his razor and, striking KEN very lightly up and down his body like a xylophone, sings a typical steel band tune, moving rhythmically to the music. KEN is delighted. DR. SCOTT comes in. JOHN stops.)

DR. SCOTT. Don't stop...

JOHN. It's all right... I've nearly finished. *(He makes one more pass with the razor.)*

KEN. I was just making myself beautiful for you, Doctor.

JOHN. There... Finished. *(He goes to the door.)*

KEN. Work out some new tunes... Hey, if Dr. Scott could drill some holes in my head, you could blow in my ear and play me like an ocarina.

JOHN. I'll see you later. *(He grins and goes out.)*

DR. SCOTT. You're bright and chirpy this morning.

KEN *(ironically)*. It's marvelous, you know. The courage of the human spirit.

DR. SCOTT (*dryly*). Nice to hear the human spirit's okay.
How're the lungs? (*She takes her stethoscope from her pocket. She puts the stethoscope to KEN's chest.*)

KEN (*sings*). Boom boom.

DR. SCOTT. Be quiet. You'll deafen me.

KEN. Sorry. (*She continues to listen.*) And what does it say?

DR. SCOTT (*gives up*). What does what say?

KEN. My heart, of course. What secrets does it tell?

DR. SCOTT. It was just telling me that it's better off than it was six months ago.

KEN. It's a brave heart. It keeps its secrets.

DR. SCOTT. And what are they?

KEN. Did you hear it going boom boom, like that? Two beats.

DR. SCOTT. Of course.

KEN. Well, I'll tell you. That's because it's broken, broken in two. But each part carries on bravely yearning for a woman in a white coat.

DR. SCOTT. And I thought it was the first and second heart sounds.

KEN. Ah! Is there a consultant's round this morning?

DR. SCOTT. That's right.

KEN. I suppose he will sweep in here like Zeus from Olympus, with his attendant nymphs and swains.

DR. SCOTT. I don't think that's fair.

KEN. Why not?

DR. SCOTT. He cares; he cares a lot.

KEN. But what about?

DR. SCOTT. His patients.

KEN. I suppose so.

DR. SCOTT. He does. When you first came in he worked his guts out to keep you going; he cares.

KEN. I was a bit flip, wasn't I...

DR. SCOTT. It's understandable.

KEN. But soon we shall have to ask the question why.

DR. SCOTT. Why?

KEN. Why bother. You remember the mountain labored and brought forth not a man but a mouse. It was a big joke. On the mouse. If you're as insignificant as that, who needs a mountain for a mummy?

DR. SCOTT. I'll see you later ... with Dr. Emerson.

KEN. And Cupbearers Limited.

DR. SCOTT. Oh, no... I assure you... We're not at all limited.

(She goes out. She opens the door of SISTER's room. The SISTER is writing at the desk.)

DR. SCOTT. Sister, It's Mr. Harrison. He seems a little agitated this morning.

SISTER. Yes, he's beginning to realize what he's up against.

DR. SCOTT. I'm changing the prescription and putting him on a small dose of Valium. I'll have a word with Dr. Emerson. Thank you, Sister.

(She closes the door and looks up the corridor towards KEN's room. NURSE SADLER is just going in with a feeding cup.)

KEN. An acolyte, bearing a cup.

NURSE. I beg your pardon?

KEN. Nothing. I was joking. It's nothing.

NURSE. It's coffee.

KEN. You're joking now.

NURSE. I'm not.

KEN. What you have there is a coffee-flavored milk drink.

NURSE. Don't you like it?

KEN. It's all right, but I would like some real coffee, hot and black and bitter so that I could chew it.

NURSE. I'll ask Sister.

KEN. I shouldn't.

NURSE. Why not?

KEN. Because in an hour's time, you'll be bringing round a little white pill that is designed to insert rose-colored filters behind my eyes. It will calm me and soothe me and make me forget for a while that you have a lovely body.

NURSE. Mr. Harrison ... I'm ...

KEN (*genuinely concerned*). I'm sorry. Really, I *am* sorry. I don't want to take it out on you—it's not your fault. You're only the vestal virgin ... Sorry I said virgin.

NURSE. You'd better drink your coffee before it gets cold. (*She feeds him a little, sip by sip.*)

KEN. I was right; it's milky ... What made you become a nurse?

NURSE. I'm not a nurse yet.

KEN. Oh, yes, you are. (*NURSE SADLER smiles.*) Nurse Sadler.

NURSE. You must have thought me a real twit.

KEN. Of course not!

NURSE. The Sister-Tutor told us we could say it.

KEN. Well then ...

NURSE. But I was so sure I wouldn't.

KEN. You haven't told me what made you become a nurse.

NURSE. I've always wanted to. What made you become a sculptor?

KEN. Hey there! You're learning too fast!

NURSE. What do you mean?

KEN. When you get a personal question, just ignore it—change the subject or better still, ask another question back. (*NURSE SADLER smiles.*) Did Sister-Tutor tell you that, too?

NURSE. Something like it.

KEN. It's called being professional, isn't it?

NURSE. I suppose so.

KEN. I don't want any more of that, it's horrid. Patients are requested not to ask for credit for their intelligence, as refusal often offends.

NURSE. You sound angry. I hope I...

KEN. Not with you, Kay. Not at all. With myself, I expect. Don't say it. That's futile, isn't it?

NURSE. Yes.

(SISTER opens the door.)

SISTER. Have you finished, Nurse? Dr. Emerson is here.

NURSE. Yes, Sister. I'm just coming.

SISTER. Straighten that sheet. (*She goes, leaving the door open.*)

KEN. Hospitals are weird places. Broken necks are acceptable, but a wrinkled sheet! ...

(NURSE SADLER smooths the bed. She goes out as DR. EMERSON comes in with SISTER and DR. SCOTT.)

DR. EMERSON. Morning.

KEN. Good morning.

DR. EMERSON. How are you this morning?

KEN. As you see, racing around all over the place. (*DR. EMERSON picks up the chart and notes from the bottom of the bed.*)

DR. EMERSON (*to DR. SCOTT*). You've prescribed Valium, I see.

DR. SCOTT. Yes.

DR. EMERSON. His renal function looks much improved.

DR. SCOTT. Yes, the blood urea is back to normal and the cultures are sterile.

DR. EMERSON. Good... Good. Well, we had better go on keeping an eye on it, just in case.

DR. SCOTT. Yes, of course, sir.

DR. EMERSON. Good... Well, Mr. Harrison, we seem to be out of the wood now...

KEN. So when are you going to discharge me?

DR. EMERSON. Difficult to say.

KEN. Really? Are you ever going to discharge me?

DR. EMERSON. Well, you'll certainly be leaving *us* soon, I should think.

KEN. Discharged or transferred?

DR. EMERSON. This unit is for critical patients; when we have reached a position of stability, then you can be looked after in a much more comfortable, quiet hospital.

KEN. You mean you only grow the vegetables here—the vegetable store is somewhere else.

DR. EMERSON. I don't think I understand you.

KEN. I think you do. Spell it out for me, please. What chance have I of only being partly dependent on nursing?