

YOU CAN'T KILL MICHAEL MALLOY: PROJECT BRIEF

Format: Feature Film

Genre / Tone: Dark Comedy / Crime / Thriller

Fargo meets *The Banshees of Inisherin*, with the grimy period brutality of Depression era New York.

Budget / Buyer Lane: Low to mid budget / contained period crime comedy

Searchlight, Focus Features, Bleecker Street, FilmNation, Topic lane

Core Hook: A desperate speakeasy owner and a sociopathic undertaker insure the life of a homeless drunk, then spiral into madness when the man simply refuses to die.

One Sentence Pitch: In 1932 New York, a failing speakeasy owner and a ruthless undertaker take out life insurance policies on a cheerful vagrant named Michael Malloy, only to discover that killing him is nearly impossible and their own greed may be easier to destroy than their victim.

Why It's Timely: It is a stranger than fiction crime story about desperation, poverty, greed, and the way people become disposable when money gets tight enough. It also turns a true historical murder plot into a darkly funny morality tale about men who think they can outsmart death.

Main Characters

Tony Marino: A speakeasy owner drowning in debt and running out of choices. He is not a born killer, but the Depression has narrowed his world until another man's heartbeat feels like the thing standing between him and survival.

Francis Pasqua: A cold, precise undertaker who treats death like accounting. He gives Tony's desperation a structure and becomes the architect of the murder scheme.

Michael Malloy: A homeless Irishman with a radiant smile and a legendary thirst. He trusts the men trying to kill him, which makes the comedy darker and the crime more obscene.

Red Murphy: A broken drifter and the closest thing the group has to a conscience. He is pulled into the scheme, but his guilt becomes more dangerous than the police.

Detective John Cullen: A tired investigator who sees through Tony's sad little kingdom. He represents the law arriving slowly, then all at once.

Story Snapshot

1. In the Bronx during the Great Depression, Tony Marino's speakeasy is dying, his debts are growing, and he is desperate for a way out.
2. Francis Pasqua proposes a clean scam: insure the life of Michael Malloy, open a permanent free tab for him, and let alcohol do the killing.
3. Malloy drinks impossible amounts of rotgut, poison, antifreeze, turpentine, and worse, but keeps waking up with a smile and asking for another glass.
4. The plan grows more violent as Tony, Pasqua, and the others move from passive murder to active attempts, including exposure, poisoning, and finally blunt force schemes that still fail to finish him.

5. As Malloy keeps surviving, the conspirators lose their grip. Red's guilt grows, Cullen closes in, and Tony realizes the scheme that was supposed to save him has made him monstrous.

Ending / Final Image

Malloy's impossible survival finally ends, but the victory is hollow. The murder that was supposed to solve everything exposes the whole "Murder Trust," and the men who treated Malloy as a policy number are swallowed by the crime they built around him. The final impression is not that Malloy was unkillable. It is that his killers destroyed themselves trying to prove he was worth more dead than alive.

Theme in One Line

The moment a man becomes more valuable dead than alive, everyone around him starts dying too.

Positioning

It's a darkly funny true crime story about Depression era desperation, a cheerful man who will not die, and a group of small time vultures who discover that murder is much harder when the victim keeps asking for another drink.

Materials Available

One-pager and full screenplay available upon request or through the private script library.

RYAN CLARKE

Screenwriter & Playwright | Albuquerque, NM

Dark Comedy | Satire | Character Drama | Social Thriller

Ryan Clarke is an Albuquerque-based screenwriter and playwright whose work blends dark comedy, social satire, and intimate character drama. Across a slate of 20+ feature scripts, his stories often follow deeply flawed people pushed into impossible situations, finding humor, tension, and humanity in characters who are entirely in over their heads.

His screenwriting recognition includes Grand Prize Winner, 30th Annual Fade In Awards Comedy Competition (*#FightForNoah*); Semifinalist, 30th Annual Fade In Awards Comedy Competition (*The Trencherman*); 2026 Top 10 Finalist, ISA Table Read My Screenplay at Cannes (*A Walking Shadow*); 2026 Quarterfinalist, Finish Line Script Competition (*#FightForNoah*); two-time Semifinalist, ISA Emerging Screenwriters Competition (*Flashbang* and *Ghost of the Highway*); and four additional 2026 Honorable Mentions from Finish Line (*The Finalists*, *How to Be a Human: A Musical with No Songs*, *Ghost of the Highway*, and *Dead Signals*).

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