

BEECHWOOD

# Dead Happy

MURDER OR MERCY? · SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

*“Planning for death has never been so life-affirming.”*

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Feature film · Black comedy · Satirical · Original screenplay

## LOGLINE

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*Determined to die with dignity before Alzheimer’s steals her memories, an elderly widow hires her own hitman — only to unleash a string of grinning corpses that leaves baffled detectives asking: why are they all dead happy?*

## SYNOPSIS

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Kathleen O’Neill is a hard-edged New York corporate lawyer — brilliant, ruthless, and allergic to sentiment. When her father Michael, owner of a Sydney funeral parlour, dies suddenly, Kathleen flies home expecting to sell up and leave. Instead, she discovers a dying wish, a family secret, and a reason to stay.

The secret is in Michael’s leather-bound journal: a generations-old Irish remedy — brewed from a plant thought extinct — that brings a peaceful, euphoric death to those who are suffering. Kathleen decides to honour her father’s promise and use it.

The problem is that Jerome T. Spitz — a flamboyant American funeral entrepreneur with a thug for an assistant — is systematically terrorising Sydney’s independent funeral directors into selling. He wants O’Neill’s, and he isn’t asking nicely.

As Kathleen’s mercy killings leave a trail of grinning corpses, Detective Inspector Ian Thompson begins to connect the dots. His colleague Peter Wilson, a forensic pathologist who has quietly fallen for Kathleen, recognises the telltale plant on her windowsill and must choose between love, law, and conscience.

When Spitz finally corners Kathleen and helps himself to a very special whisky, the case resolves itself in the most satisfying possible way — leaving Thompson with no evidence, no suspects, and an inexplicable urge to go fishing.

## KEY THEMES

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**Mercy versus murder** — where does compassion end and crime begin? The film refuses to answer simply.

**Family legacy** — a daughter who spent her life running from her father's world discovers she is exactly like him.

**The dignity of death** — a darkly comic argument for the right to choose, wrapped in farce and funeral parlours.

**Greed versus grace** — the contrast between Spitz's predatory capitalism and Kathleen's inherited sense of duty.

## KEY CHARACTERS

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### **Kathleen O'Neill**

Corporate lawyer turned undertaker — formidably intelligent, morally fearless, and heir to a very unusual family tradition.

### **Jerome T. Spitz**

Flamboyant American funeral entrepreneur — charming, ruthless, and fatally fond of a good whisky.

### **Peter Wilson**

Forensic pathologist — the man who knows exactly what killed them and chooses not to say.

### **DI Ian Thompson**

Detective on the verge of retirement — sharp enough to know, wise enough to let it go.

### **Jock Strapp**

Ageing Hell's Angel with a terminal diagnosis and a very dry sense of humour.

## STORY STRUCTURE

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### ACT ONE

#### **The Inheritance**

Kathleen flies to Sydney after her father's death, expecting to sell the funeral parlour and return to New York. Instead she discovers his journal, his dying promise, and a family remedy that has been quietly easing suffering for generations.

### ACT TWO

#### **The Remedy**

Kathleen honours Jock Strapp's desperate request for help. A private act of mercy spills into public farce when the wrong person drinks the remedy — and dies grinning. DI Thompson begins his investigation. Peter Wilson begins to suspect the woman he loves.

### ACT THREE

#### **Dead Happy**

Spitz corners Kathleen and forces her to sign away the business — then makes the fatal mistake of helping himself to her whisky. Justice is served without a courtroom. Thompson goes fishing. And somewhere in Sydney, the happiest corpses in the southern hemisphere are still smiling.

### COMPARABLE TITLES

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Kind Hearts and Coronets · Knives Out · Calendar Girls · The Full Monty · Succession (tone)

### PROJECT DETAILS

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**Format** Feature film

**Genre** Black comedy · Satirical

**Setting** Sydney, Australia

**Tone** Dark, witty, morally complex — farce with a conscience

**Status** Seeking representation & development

## WRITER'S NOTE

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*Dead Happy began with a question I couldn't shake: what would it look like if the people who help us die were also the ones helping us live with dignity? The funeral parlour felt like the right setting — a place where life and death meet, where commerce and grief collide, and where a black comedy could find its most uncomfortable and honest register.*

*Kathleen O'Neill is not a murderer. She is a woman who inherited a problem and chose, as her father did, to solve it with compassion. Jerome T. Spitz exists because every moral story needs someone who has none. The film asks serious questions about mercy, family, and the right to choose — and answers them with a dark comedy that, I hope, leaves audiences laughing and thinking in equal measure.*

— **Warwick Jaggard**

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