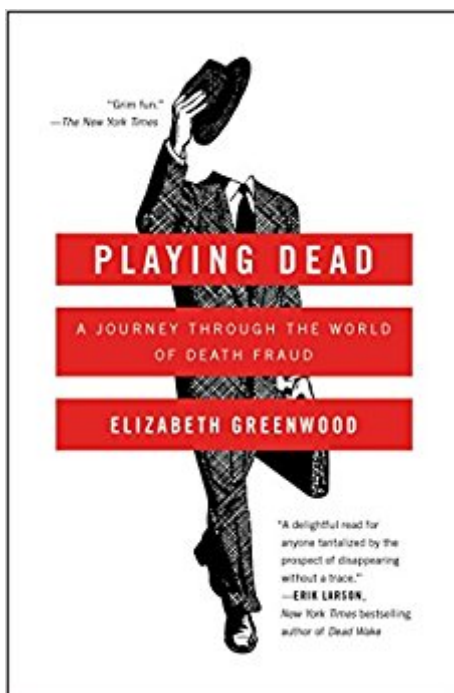


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# Playing Dead: A Journey Through The World Of Death Fraud



## Synopsis

“A delightful read for anyone tantalized by the prospect of disappearing without a trace.”  
• Erik Larson, New York Times bestselling author of *Dead Wake*  
“Delivers all the lo-fi spy shenanigans and caught-red-handed schadenfreude you’re hoping for.”  
• NPR  
“A lively romp.”  
• The Boston Globe  
“Grim fun.”  
• The New York Times  
“Brilliant topic, absorbing book.”  
• The Seattle Times  
“The most literally escapist summer read you could hope for.”  
• The Paris Review  
Is it still possible to fake your own death in the twenty-first century? With six figures of student loan debt, Elizabeth Greenwood was tempted to find out. So off she sets on a darkly comic foray into the world of death fraud, where for \$30,000 a consultant can make you disappear—but your suspicious insurance company might hire a private detective to dig up your coffin...only to find it filled with rocks. Greenwood tracks down a British man who staged a kayaking accident and then returned to live in his own house while all his neighbors thought he was dead. She takes a call from Michael Jackson (no, he’s not dead—or so her new acquaintances would have her believe), stalks message boards for people contemplating pseudocide, and gathers intel on black market morgues in the Philippines, where she may or may not obtain some fraudulent goodies of her own. Along the way, she learns that love is a much less common motive than money, and that making your death look like a drowning virtually guarantees that you’ll be caught. (Disappearing while hiking, however, is a way great to go.) *Playing Dead* is a charmingly bizarre investigation in the vein of Jon Ronson and Mary Roach into our all-too-human desire to escape from the lives we lead, and the men and women desperate enough to give up their lives—and their families—to start again.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A beguiling foray into the wacky yet somehow ever-fascinating realm of death fraud."

— Maria Konnikova, New York Times bestselling author of *The Confidence Game*

"Mesmerizing." — Elle "Wonderfully weird." — Deborah Blum, New York

Times bestselling author of *The Poisoner's Handbook*

Elizabeth Greenwood is as entertaining and gifted an archeologist of subcultures as she is an able explorer of issues like anonymity, the right to privacy, and how much control people can ever exert over their identities. An energetic and insatiable writer, her generous mind infuses every page of this astonishing book."

— Heidi Julavits, author of *The Folded Clock* "Exuberant and ironic, witty and compassionate, various and keenly-focused, *Playing Dead* is eccentric investigative journalism. A terrific subject, where the deadly (excuse the pun) serious and absurdly comic meet and mesh."

— Margo Jefferson, author of *Negroland*

"Riveting." — The Huffington Post "Ghoulishly

existential." — Bloomberg Businessweek "Quirky, engaging, and surprisingly uplifting...

Elizabeth Greenwood has written a book about death, faked and real, that teaches us much about

life." — Eric Weiner, New York Times bestselling author of *The Geography of*

*Genius* "Playing Dead marks the debut of a very talented author. Both the book and the

writer are cause for celebration." — Jeff Guinn, New York Times bestselling author of

*Manson* "A bizarre exposé of the disappearance industry." — Entertainment

Weekly "Wildly entertaining." — Tony Perrottet, author of *Napoleon's*

*Privates* "Slightly macabre, but ultimately very human; it is a questioning of how we seek satisfaction

in life, and when we cut and run. Greenwood's narrative voice is humble and approachable,

but as an investigator she is tenacious.... *Playing Dead* will please those attracted to the eccentric,

as well as anyone who has ever fantasized about leaving it all behind." — Shelf

Awareness "Belongs to that genre of popular nonfiction best exemplified by Jon Ronson....

It's a form that above all requires a likable, self-deprecating, curious narrator, and

Greenwood fits the bill." — Slate "Catnip." — The Guardian "Highly

entertaining." — Lenny Letter "Earnestly researched." — Kirkus

Reviews "From digging up suspect graves to buying her own death certificate, Greenwood

investigates the work of death fraud with probing comedic wit, and ultimately delivers a reflection on

the efficacy of escaping ourselves." [The DuJour](#) "A tragicomic study."

[Bust](#) "Entertaining and enlightening." [Booklist](#) "Greenwood explores this topic with wit, clarity and a gift for making a somewhat morbid subject into a fascinating read."

[La Crosse Tribune](#) "If your life totally sucks then simply end it and start a new one. Elizabeth Greenwood's creepy and hilarious foray into death fakery shows you how." [Simon Doonan](#), author of [The Asylum](#) and [Beautiful People](#)

Elizabeth Greenwood grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts. *Playing Dead* is her first book.

Just a chapter in and I'm totally hooked. Even found myself returning to it at the hotel bar last night over a glass of wine. It's a fun peek into the type of world we've all thought about and done from not only an existential standpoint but also, so satisfyingly, from a practical one. I love all the stuff about how people disappear. Like how do you really get off the grid and untraceable, especially with modern technology. Miss Greenwood's writing is just full of flavor.

I heard about this book after listening to the author on a podcast (a WNYC radio show); the idea of this book sounded fascinating. It's a wonderful read: informative and entertaining, and Ms Greenwood is a wonderful writer. It goes into depth about what one has to do to disappear, all the while pointing out that it's very hard to get away with this. Later chapters look at a few people who have tried to die, only to get caught, and it was interesting to read about their reasons and the psychology behind something like leaving your life behind. One chapter about people who think Michael Jackson is still alive could have been cut; it focused on one woman who clearly has issues with reality, and it didn't seem germane to the topic. But overall, this is a fine book on a topic I wouldn't have otherwise been curious about. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll take my leave...

I've only ever thought about death fraud when a new Tupac "posthumous" album gets released. But now that I've read *"Playing Dead,"* I'm absolutely fascinated by pseudocide. I was laughing out loud halfway through the introduction and continued to laugh through the rest of the book (which I read in four nights, with many "I'll just read one more page" moments.) I can not wait for the next Elizabeth Greenwood book to come out. Her writing style keeps me entertained and interested. (It's a damn shame she didn't write my high school textbooks.) If you are feeling indecisive about which book you should read next, stop right now. Put this book in your cart. Now purchase. You're going to love it, I promise.

I rarely buy a book when it first hits the streets, but I heard the author being interviewed on NPR and was intrigued. I'm glad I bought it.

A stunningly well-crafted debut - Greenwood's voice really brings alive the reliably quirky personalities she profiles. Strongly recommend.

Greenwood does a nice piece of investigative journalism on a topic that is quite enthralling. She has sought out some eccentrics from the corners of the earth that share fascinating revelations that lead her to contemplate her own internal conflicts. She braves international travel, prison interviews, and stepping out of her comfort zone. Greenwood shows great determination in gleaning information from her subjects and is committed to telling their stories through their eyes. A big thumbs up!

Very much enjoyed this book! Fascinating exploration of the subject, clearly well-researched by the author. I will say that sometimes the writing seems a bit high school essay-ish (unnecessarily flowery descriptors, mostly), but overall I could not put it down. I originally ordered it for my book club - great choice for those in nonfiction or crime-themed clubs! So much to unpack and discuss.

The author is fascinated with her own thought process, which takes away from providing information about how to fake your own death. Also, the book very quickly becomes creepy when a reader discovers the despicable people who use this technique to escape responsibility for their crimes.

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