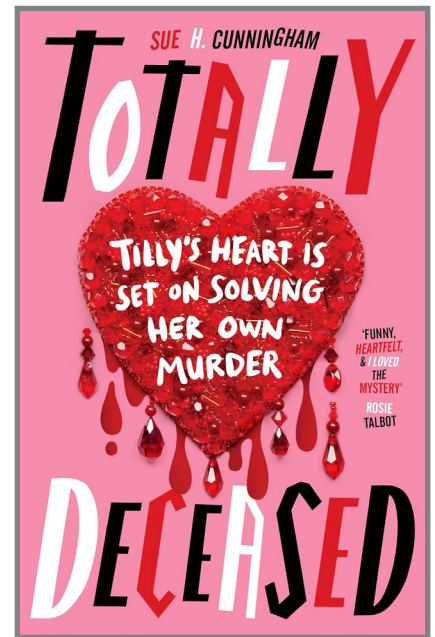


Totally Deceased

AUTHOR

SUE H. CUNNINGHAM



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Violence, Drug and Alcohol References)

SYNOPSIS

'How many weeks before the ghost of your unspeakably generous organ donor ascends the glitter escalator to heaven, Jess? Six weeks? Eight? Or maybe never unless you bloody well help her find out why she was murdered . . .'

Seventeen-year-old Jess wakes from an emergency heart transplant to discover she's being haunted by the disgruntled ghost of her donor—teenage socialite, Tilly. And she won't leave Jess in peace until they unravel the mystery surrounding her death. Their investigations take them deep into Tilly's luxurious heiress life—from private schools to Swiss banks and high-end hotels. But the clues lead somewhere darker than either of the girls could have imagined. And if Jess can't solve the murder in time, her own life may be at risk . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue H Cunningham writes YA with humour and a hint of magic. *Totally Deceased* is her debut YA murder mystery. She won the WriteMentor Children's Novel Award 2020, was featured in the 2022 SCBWI Undiscovered Voices Anthology and has been short/longlisted for other awards including Northern Writers and Bath Children's Novel Award.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - How would you describe the artist's choice of colour palette?
 - How would you describe the style of the cover artwork?
 - Based on the cover artwork and title, what do you hypothesise is likely to occur in this novel?
 - Who do you expect the protagonist of this novel could be? Discuss your hypotheses with the class, and identify the specific features of the cover artwork that inform your ideas.
 - Who do you think the intended audience of this novel might be, and why do you think this?
 - When do you think this novel is likely to be set?
 - Having read the text on the cover, have any of your hypotheses changed? Why/why not and if so in what ways?
- Having read the first chapter of the novel, as a class, discuss the hypotheses you made based upon the cover art and title. Consider how accurate or inaccurate they are so far, and create new hypotheses based on your current knowledge of the protagonist, setting and genre.
- How does the author set the scene in this novel? As a class, discuss how much you know about what is happening during the first few chapters, and how long it takes to you acquire a fairly comprehensive picture of the main

characters, when and where the novel is set, and the key events that have led up to the current circumstances.

- What literary techniques can you identify the author as having used in order to set the scene for the reader?
- Why do you think that Tilly keeps emphasising that Jess lives ‘up north’? As a class, discuss what you know of British social and geographic stereotypes, and how they differ between London and Manchester. Can you think of any other examples within modern media that emphasise someone being from up north/the north?
 - How are Northerners portrayed within British media and literature? How are Londoners depicted? Why do you think that this is such an important aspect of Jess and Tilly’s respective self-identities? If the book were set in Australia, where do you think the two characters could be from, that would have a similar impact on the reader— or is there no equivalent?
- What is parvovirus, and how might Jess have been likely to catch it? In small groups research parvovirus, how it is caught, its effect on those who catch it, and possible treatments for those afflicted.
- Where is Suffolk compared to Manchester, and why is Jess so appalled that Tilly expects her to travel there? Locate both places on a map of England, and compare the distances to places on a map of your local region. Try to identify a place that is a similar distance away from where you live, as Suffolk is from Manchester. In small groups or as a class, discuss how far away this location is, and whether you would consider it a long way to travel.
- Jess catches the train to Suffolk, and to London. If you were going to travel a similar distance without letting your family know, how would you get there? Would you be able to take public transport, or would you have to somehow go by private vehicle?
- Immediately after her surgery, Jess is told that she is very immunosuppressed, and the doctors don’t want her interacting with too many other people. Why would this be the case?
- Jess is extremely lucky in that she receives a heart transplant, and is expected to make a full recovery. When was the first heart transplant performed, and how successful was it? What other organs can now be transplanted?
 - What is the history of organ transplants, and what are some of the benefits and concerns that surround being a transplant recipient?
- Why does Jess need to take so many different medications now that she has had her surgery? In pairs or small groups, use your research from the previous activity to help you create a likely ‘future health prognosis’ for her, based on the common outcomes for heart transplant recipients today.
- What would be the worst part of being haunted by someone like Tilly? What do you think is the worst part for Tilly, of haunting someone like Jess? Write a short story of your own featuring someone who is being haunted. The ghost can be frustrating, frustrated or potentially both. Use your story to explore at least one of the difficulties that Jess and Tilly face with regards to haunting/being haunted. Can you think of some way or ways that they might have overcome that specific problem?
- Why would Tilly have a Swiss bank account, what is special about them, and why can Jess access it simply by quoting the number and password?
- Jess thinks that the St Agatha’s blazer is appallingly lurid, and it is described as being burgundy with pink piping. Individually or in pairs, design a fancy school blazer or uniform that would be as easily identifiable at a glance as the St Agatha’s blazer. You can choose to create a blazer or uniform that is tasteful as well as easily identifiable, or you can make it as garish and obnoxious as you wish. Create a labelled illustration showcasing your design, and write a fictional back-story to accompany your illustration, justifying all your colour and style choices.
- What does it mean when Tilly reassures Jess that any potential kidnapper would not be able to get here ‘past the M25’?
- Does the story finish the way you had thought it would? What had you predicted would be the outcome? Are you satisfied with the ending of the story? Is there anything that you would have liked to see happen at the end of the novel that didn’t?
- What do you think is likely to happen to Jess next? Why do you think this?
- What is, in your opinion, the funniest scene in the novel overall? What makes it amusing to you?
- How does the author construct and maintain plot/tension throughout the novel?
- Were you surprised by the identity of the murderer? If not, when did you first suspect that they were the villain? If so, who did you incorrectly suspect had arranged for Tilly’s death?

- What are at least three similarities between Jess and Tilly, and three differences? Focus on character traits rather than background as much as possible, and use evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- Write a review of the book, including a brief description of the characters of Tilly and Jess.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARYLE