



Dead Connection by Charlie Price

Subjects: Cemeteries; Murder; Spirits

Award: Best Books for Young Adults

Book Lists: Gifted, Grade 6

Props: Tombstones



Have you ever wondered if the dead cry? Do they ache in sorrow? Do they weep in helpless frustration? Of course, they do. Just ask Nikki, a high school cheerleader, she's dead. She'll tell you that the wait of the dead is the loneliest thing one could ever imagine. It is lonelier than thinking your friends are making fun of you, lonelier than sitting by yourself in the gym on a bottom bleacher while others dance. But if you could talk to Nikki, she would tell you she wasn't just lonely; she was angry, furious really. He had taken her, hid her and no one would ever know what had happened. No one would ever find her. Years would pass and the tracks would be covered with weeds, disappearing, with no one to stop there again. No one to tell the truth.

No one except maybe Murray. Murray likes to talk to the dead. He does it every day. The dead are his friends, his only real friends. After school he hangs out in the cemetery. He likes Forest Grove cemetery the best because that's where most of his friends are. (*Bring out tombstones*) Friends like Blessed Daughter, Born 1966. Dead from a brain tumor at age eleven. And Edwin, a young boy who died from polio in 1953. And of course, Dearly Beloved, died 1969 in a car accident as a teenager when she was thrown through the convertible's windshield and bleed to death. (*Put down tombstones*) He likes to spend time with the kids his age and the children. They almost all need someone to talk to—to comfort them. They hadn't been ready to die. They'll tell you that. They're not jealous or mean or scary like you might think. Just really, really lonely. Hey, everybody needs a friend, even the dead.

Certainly Murray knows that. Although he finds it easy to have a conversation with someone who is dead, the live ones give him trouble. The kids in school

tease him about, well, a few things. For instance, his name—Murray. They say it's expired, out of date. And somehow they found out about his mom. Maybe some kid's parent saw it in the paper when she was arrested for prostitution. She didn't have to go to jail, but still. And they make fun of his face. He's not sure why, he's spent some time looking at it in the mirror and he doesn't think he's that ugly.

No, he's happier with his friends at the cemetery. Besides, he figures he will join them soon. Probably just after high school. He promised his mother he would graduate, so he feels obligated to finish. If he does, he would be the first Kiefer with a high school degree. But more important than being a graduate are his friends and how he helps them. He listens to them. He comforts them. In fact, he has decided that on his tombstone he would like inscribed the words "The Listener; Friend to the Deceased". Yes, that would be nice.

But lately, something has been disturbing Murray. There is a new voice in the cemetery. He can't quite hear it. It is faint and it concerns him. He thinks it could be Nikki's. Nikki, the girl from school, who two weeks ago on a rainy evening left the school gym after cheerleading practice at 6PM. She said good-bye to the woman faculty advisor and to her teammates. She left the gym and walked downhill toward the parking lot, where she had put her car that morning. The car still sat there the following day and there was no evidence that she had reached it. No one has heard from her since that night. No one except, maybe Murray. Is it her voice he has been hearing? Murder is scary and dangerous for the dead and for the living. Can Murray help Nikki? Find the answers, (*Hold up book*) read *Dead Connection* by Charlie Price.