

THE NEW ARRIVAL

BY G. G. RUSSEY

Maya had never visited the public library before, and at this rate it looked like she never would. She knew it was around here somewhere, but the fog was so thick she could barely see her sneakers. Putting off her homework had been a mistake, but getting lost in her own neighborhood? That was just embarrassing.

She realized she'd been anxiously squeezing and bending her mom's library card. Maya put it in her pocket so she wouldn't snap it in two.

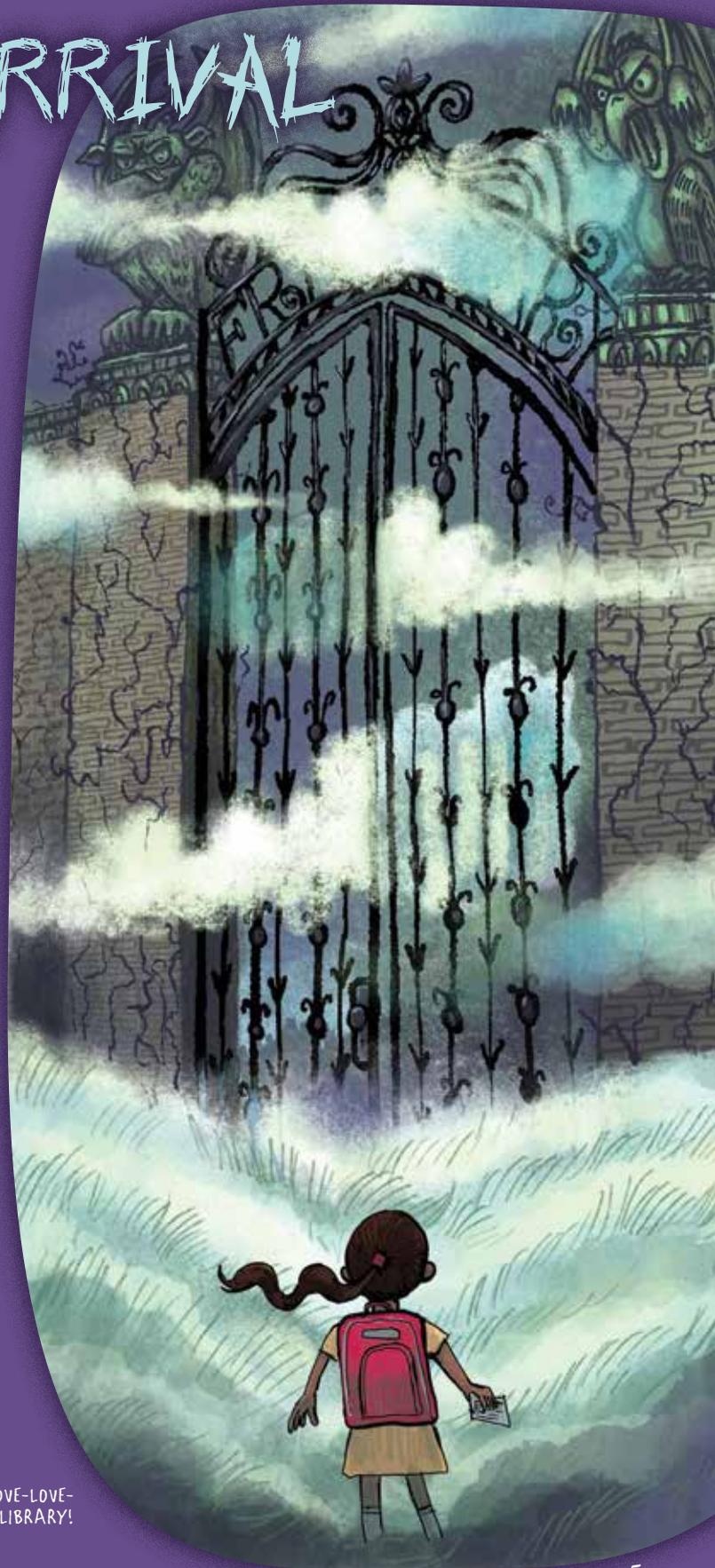
She looked to the right and saw she was standing in front of a black iron gate. The fog hid everything but the first and last two letters on the arch above her: "FR" and "RY."

"Finally!" she said. The Franklin Library.

She saw a dark, boxy shape ahead. As she walked closer, she found it was the entrance to a stone building. Barred glass doors swung open with a loud creak to greet her. A few dry leaves followed her in.

Is this it? she wondered as the doors squealed closed behind her.

The air was cold and stale. The only light came from the doors behind her and a tiny stained-glass window in front of her. It was a small, stone room—barely big enough to fit a car. It was empty except for a wide desk that looked like it was solid stone.



OOOO, I LOVE-LOVE-
LOVE THE LIBRARY!

Illustrated by Bats Langley

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HI THERE! DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE BOOKS ABOUT HORSES, OR PONIES?



HEY! QUIT THAT RACKET!

Maya bent down to get a better look at something carved into the front of the desk.

“Prudence Proudsort, Librarian,” she read, squinting in the dim light.

“Yes?” a quiet voice replied.

Maya straightened up, startled. “I didn’t see you there!”

“I must ask you to keep your voice down, young lady,” Prudence Proudsort said, standing behind the desk. Her voice was just above a whisper, and her hair was pulled back in a tight, gray bun. Her stiff, heavy dress looked like something out of the old pictures hanging in Maya’s grandma’s house. “Now, how may I be of service?”

“Well, I—” Maya began at her regular volume.

The librarian glared.

Maya began again, dropping her voice to a whisper. “I have to do a report on local history. My teacher says all our sources have to come from a public library. We’re not allowed to use the Internet.”

“There’s no ‘Internet’ here, whatever that is. You’ve come to the right place to dig into

local history, though,” the librarian said. “The collection is downstairs. Let’s get you checked in so you can join them. Name?”

“Oh, I don’t need a library card—I have my mom’s.”

“This isn’t for a library card, dearie. It’s for our collection records. Your name?”

Ugh, thought Maya, can’t I just work on my stupid report?

“Maya Mays.”

“Date of publication?”

“Publication?”

“Your birth date, Miss Mays.”

Do all librarians talk like this? wondered Maya.

“May 6, 2009.”

“2009? *Tempus fugit!* A child of the new millennium!” the librarian whispered loudly.

“Subjects?”

“Subjects?”

Maya asked back.

This was not her best conversation.

“What do you know more about than most people? What could people learn about from you?”

“Well, I’m vegan, like my mom. Not many people around here are.”

The librarian tilted her head to the side, looking puzzled.



TEMPUS FUGIT MEANS TIME FLIES—AND IT DOES! ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU’RE HAVING FUN. OR WHEN YOUR LIBRARY BOOKS ARE COMING DUE...





“It means I don’t use anything that comes from animals. Food, drinks, clothes, whatever.”

“And you’ve been able to *survive* like that? How remarkable—you’ll make an excellent addition. Let’s take you down to the rest of the collection.”

Finally, thought Maya.

Prudence Proudsort lowered out of sight. Maya came around the desk to what looked like an open manhole.

“Come along, child,” came Prudence Proudsort’s quiet voice from the darkness below.

Maya started to get a bad feeling about this cold, dark place. Why was this librarian so weird? How could anyone living today not know about the Internet? And why were the books kept underground?

Still, it was the only public library around, and her report was due tomorrow.

Maya crouched over the manhole and gave a few sniffs. It didn’t *smell* like a sewer. . . .

Maya stepped down a circular metal staircase into the darkness. The temperature dropped several degrees, and the floor below was surprisingly soft. Her eyes tried to adjust, but she couldn’t see a thing.

“Too dark?” the librarian asked, and a dim, purple glow slowly filled the space.

Maya saw she was standing in a vast underground chamber. The floor and distant walls were dirt. Small roots hung from the low dirt ceiling.

And all around her, as far as she could see, were rows of long boxes. There were metal boxes and wooden boxes. They were all about the same size and shape as Prudence Proudsort’s desk. Or what Maya had *thought* was a desk. . . .

“Are those—”



"Coffins?" finished Prudence Proudsort. "Oh, yes. A fine collection of Franklin citizens going back more than two hundred years. Many subject experts among them, and each a wealth of information about local history."

Maya's heartbeat drummed in her ears. She knew she should run, but terror gripped her like a stone fist—she couldn't budge.

She watched Prudence Proudsort glide over to a coffin.

"Here's Mr. Myers, Franklin's first mayor."

An old man's head and chest popped into view, as if he had sat up *through* the coffin.

"Won't you let us rest in peace, Prudy?" Mr. Myers said, his great white mustache flapping. "We've no desire to be part of your ridiculous library!"

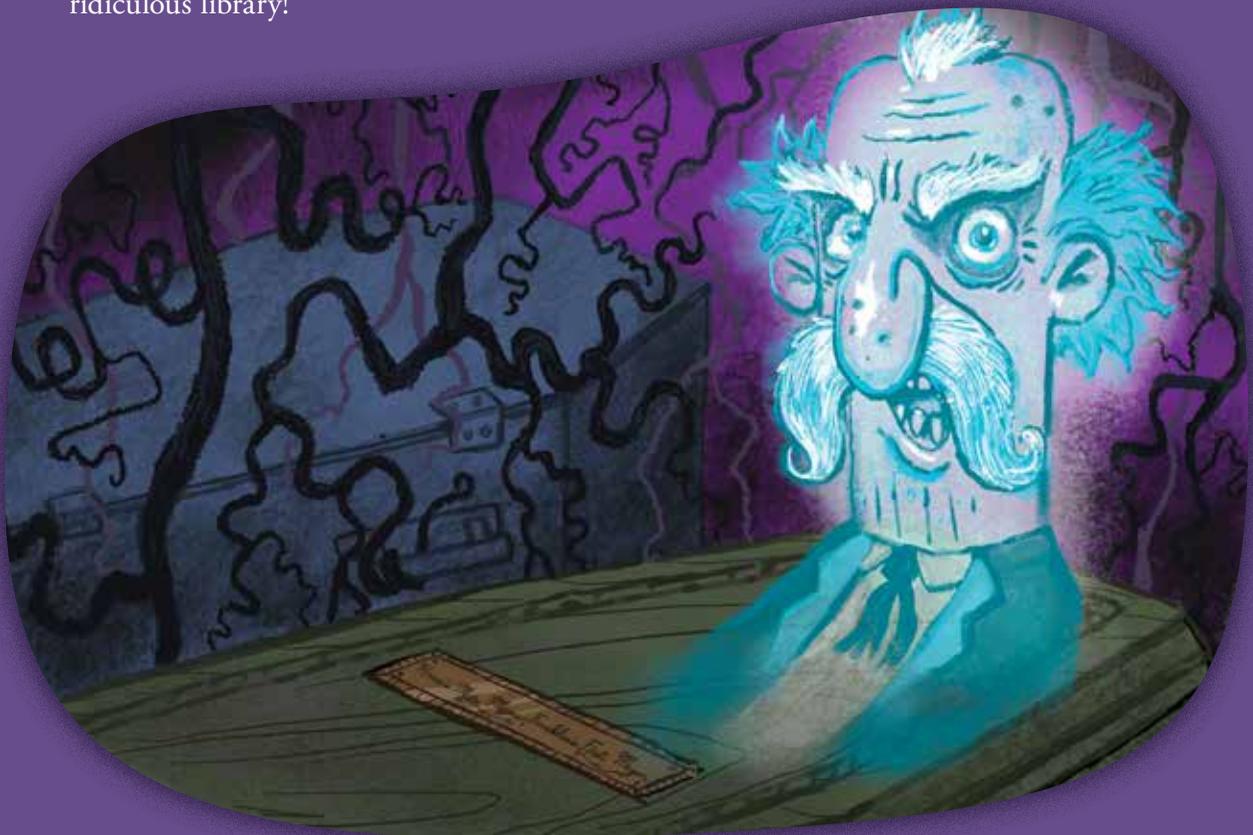
The librarian ignored him and gestured to another coffin.

"And here we have Mr. Cohen, who opened a kazoo shop in 1921."

The jolt of a high-pitched *ZRRRRR!* from Mr. Cohen's coffin was all Maya needed to get moving. She scrambled up the stairs as fast as she could, jumped over Prudence Proudsort's casket, and landed in front of the barred double doors.

The fog outside had cleared. Maya saw a building across the street with a sign that said "Franklin Public Library." Her eyes found the iron gate she'd come through. It didn't say "FRANKLIN LIBRARY"—it said "FRANKLIN CEMETERY."

Maya grabbed the doors by their metal bars and pushed and pulled as hard as she





could. The harsh clang of rattling metal and glass echoed in the small stone mausoleum, but the doors wouldn't open.

"You're making an awful lot of noise, young lady," said the quiet voice of Prudence Proudsort.

Maya spun around to face her. "Please, let me go."

"Go? What about your study of local history?"

"My teacher wanted us to use books and newspapers. I don't think we're allowed to use . . . ghosts."

"Dear child, don't you understand? You're part of the collection now, like everyone downstairs. You can study history for its own sake. And what better source than the people who lived—and died—through that history? I don't like to speak ill of the living, but your teacher is shortsighted. Fortunately, you'll never need to see that silly teacher again."

Maya had never wanted to see a teacher so much in her life.

"But *I'm* not a ghost."

"A few days here should fix that," the librarian said with a kind smile. "You'll be right as rain in less than a week."

Maya had to escape, but how? The window was too small. The doors were barred and locked. Maya guessed only Prudence Proudsort could open them, but the librarian wanted her here. The librarian also wanted her to be quiet. That was it! Maybe if she made enough noise, she'd get kicked out of the library!

"I want to leave!" Maya yelled.

"Your place is here now, and I'll thank you to keep your voice down. This is a library, after all."

"I said I want to GO!" shouted Maya. She kept shouting, took a breath, and shouted some more.

It was working! Prudence Proudsort was coming over to let her out!

Except that she didn't let Maya out. The librarian ran an icy fingertip across Maya's neck. Maya's shout became a croak as her throat grew cold and tight. She tried to yell again, but it came out a whisper.

Mr. Myers's head popped through the floor. "Goodness, girl! I'd say you were loud enough to wake the dead, but Prudy already woke us."

Maya's mind raced, trying to figure out another way to make noise. She thought about everything she had with her that might help. That's when she got a new idea.

"Can people check things out of this library?" asked Maya, as she started digging around in her pockets.

"Well, it's never come up before," Prudence Proudsort said, "but . . . yes, I suppose so."

Maya pulled out her mom's library card. "I'd like to check myself out then, please."

"*Yoursself?*" shrieked Prudence Proudsort. Mr. Myers smiled as the librarian blushed and smoothed her dress. "In all my years as a librarian, I have never had an item check *itself* out. It would be most irregular and quite out of the question."

Maya's shoulders slumped. Her throat felt thick and her vision blurred with tears.

MEW!



WAIT! YOU FORGOT
YOUR BOOKS. WE HAVE
"THE GIRL WITH THE
LADYBUG TATTOO"!



SORRY, GOTTA GO LOOK UP PRETTY
PONIES ON THE INTERNET!

"Oh, come on, Prudy," Mr. Myers said. "You've been pestering us for years about what a great library you're making. So is this a library or isn't it?"

Prudence Proudsort glared down at Mr. Myers's head. Mr. Myers glared right back up at her.

Without a word, Prudence Proudsort took a pad of paper and a fancy pen from her dress. She scribbled on the paper so hard Maya thought it might tear. The librarian tore the yellowed paper from the pad and handed it to Maya.

"See that you're back by the due date," the librarian said.

Maya felt warm air against the back of her neck. She turned and saw that the double doors were open. When she turned back, Prudence Proudsort and Mr. Myers had disappeared—she was alone.

Maya ran out of the mausoleum, through the graveyard, across the street, and up the steps of the *real* library. She stopped in the library's quiet reading room, catching her breath and waiting for her heart to slow down.

A young man in a cozy-looking chair looked at her curiously over his novel. Usually, Maya would have been embarrassed, but right now she was just happy to see someone else with a pulse. She was about to talk to a librarian—she still had that report to do—when she remembered the checkout slip from Prudence.

Maya was due back in seventy-five years. The overdue fee was a penny per day.

*I wonder how many times I can
renew . . .* 

