



RUN AWAY WITH ME

BY BRIAN SELZNICK

The Story

Danny is spending his sixteenth summer in Rome. As his mother spends the day at work in a mysterious museum, he wanders the ancient sites and streets. Soon after his arrival, he encounters a shadow . . . who becomes a voice . . . who becomes a boy his age. Angelo.

Soon Danny and Angelo are spending as much time as they can together, piecing together stories of the city while only gradually letting their own histories be shared. Attraction leads to affection, and affection leads to both an intimate closeness and a profound fear of what happens next. Danny has never really had a home, or known the love of another boy. Angelo seems to have more experience . . . but he also has secrets just out of Danny's reach.

Run Away With Me is a stunning creation, weaving words and illustration to tell the story of a transformative love over the course of one Roman summer.

Reading Group Questions

1. How does being in a foreign city challenge Danny in a way that might not have happened if he'd stayed home? What does he discover about himself in Rome?
2. There are many different love stories told within *Run Away With Me*. How do you see them connecting?
3. What is it about Danny that draws Angelo to him? What is it about Angelo that has the same effect on Danny?
4. In the book, there are many different ways that stories live on. In what ways do Danny and Angelo become involved in the act of storytelling, and its consequence?

About the Author



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Brian Selznick is the author and illustrator of many books for children, including *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, which won the Caldecott Medal and was made into the Oscar-winning movie *Hugo*; *Wonderstruck*; *The Marvels*; *Kaleidoscope*; and *Big Tree*. He and his husband split their time between Brooklyn, New York, and San Diego, California. For more about his work, visit thebrianselznick.com.

Author Q&A

The setting of the book is drawn from a very strange time you spent in Rome. Can you talk a little about why you were in the city, when, and how that led to this story?

On January 11, 2021, my husband David Serlin and I moved to Rome for nine months. He'd won the Rome Prize, and somehow they got us in at the height of the pandemic shutdown, along with the other winners and their families. Nearly all the winners were working on projects related to the city, and as we got to know them, they'd take us on tours through the empty streets. I learned about obelisks and architecture, art and history, and with each new anecdote I heard, or historical narrative I'd learn, I'd think to myself, *That should be in a book*. So I wrote that book.

This is your first novel for teen readers. How did it feel to be writing for this audience?

It was exciting, and scary, and inspiring. As I wandered through the oddly quiet streets of Rome, I kept imagining two boys falling in love among the ruins. As I began to write about these two boys, I found myself thinking a lot about my own lonely teenage years. I was in the closet and very far from actually having a relationship like the one I was imagining for *Run Away With Me*. I had very bad asthma, and I'd had serious surgery on my chest which made my body feel like enemy territory. At the time, I couldn't imagine ever falling in love, though I'm happy to say I did grow up and fall in love. I've now been with my husband for twenty-eight years. But imagining myself back to my adolescence, and remembering my fears and loneliness, and then allowing my characters (one of whom I gave my asthma and my surgery) to experience a first love that transforms both of them, felt wonderful. It was like I was telling myself then that I'm ok now.

Your Arbuthnot lecture was about kids' books engaging with queer themes and history, and in this book you put a lot of that theory to practice. What was it like to write such a tender queer love story at this point in your career?

It felt like it was the perfect time. My first book, *The Houdini Box*, came out in 1990. The main character was a ten-year-old boy named Victor. I loved being ten, and so many big things happened to me that year, so it felt natural to write about that age. Over the thirty years that have passed since then, the children in my books have slowly gotten older. Hugo in *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* is twelve, Joseph in *The Marvels* is thirteen, and I remembered how much I liked being those ages as well. In *Run Away With Me*, the two main characters are sixteen, an age I find much harder to think about, because my teen years were more difficult for me because I realized I was gay and found myself deep in the closet. I don't think I could have written this book without all the time I spent writing the other stories. They prepared me to finally look at this challenging time in my life, and to find a way to draw out of it a beautiful love story, one it took me a few more years to find for myself in real life.