

## *The Thief Lord* by Cornelia Funke

**Subjects:** Runaways—Fiction; Robbers and outlaws—Fiction; Brothers—Fiction; Detectives—Fiction; Venice (Italy)—Fiction

**Award:** Mildred L. Batchelder Award

**Book List:** Europe, Grade 6



**Props:** Mustache, black hat, pictures of Venice

This is a tale about two orphans, 12-year-old Prosper and his 5-year-old brother, Boniface (Bo for short). Bo is adorable, his fair hair and disarming smile are irresistible. However, Prosper is more serious, and less irresistible. They are runaways. Their mother has recently died, they have no father, and although their Aunt Esther, upright, nervous, hairspray-sticky Esther, and their Uncle Max have decided to adopt Bo, they have run away and are living in an abandoned movie theater in Venice. They have run away because Prosper's aunt and uncle are going to send him to boarding school. He will only be allowed to visit Bo once a month. Well, Prosper doesn't want to be separated from his brother and attend some horrible boarding school. So he and Bo stole away in the night, running from their aunt and uncle and escaping to Venice, Italy.

Ahhh Venice, (*Put your fingers to your mouth, kiss and move your fingers away*) beautiful Venice. How often Prosper and Bo's mother had spoken of Venice. (*Show pictures of Venice*) She told them stories of winged lions, a golden cathedral, angels and dragons that perched on the top of buildings, and water nymphs that walked on the edges of the canals. When the boys had decided to run away, Venice was where they wanted to go.

However, it had been difficult at first. Prosper's allowance had not lasted very long and they did not have the proper clothes. It was cold and Bo was coughing badly. Prosper had almost given up and turned themselves into the police, but luckily Hornet found them. Hornet is a slender, brown haired young runaway herself who took them to her hiding place, an abandoned movie theatre. There they met other children, Riccio and Mosca and learned that the three were cared for by Scipio, the Thief Lord. The Thief Lord was not much older than Prosper but he provided the children with shelter, and brought them food and trinkets to sell for money. He was able to provide for them because he

was . . . well, a thief. To here him tell it, he was a Lord among thieves and very clever. The boys had found a home, a place where they felt safe and where they could stay together. Things were looking good. In fact, the Thief Lord had just robbed the Palazzo Contarini and had a lot of loot for them to sell. He told Prosper and Riccio to take the loot to Ernesto Barbarossa, the only person in town who would buy stolen property from a gang of kids. Prosper haggled with Barbarossa until he had a nice thick wad of bills.

Then the trouble started. On their way back to the movie theater with the cash, Prosper bumped into a small but stocky man with a moustache. The man stared at Prosper as if he was seeing a ghost. Prosper said, "Scusa," and continued walking. The man followed him. Getting scared, Prosper grabbed Riccio's arm and they ducked into a narrow alley. They waited and hoped that the man would walk past.

(*Put on mustache and hat*) Prosper is about to find out that Aunt Esther and Uncle Max have learned that he and his brother are somewhere in Venice. They have hired a private detective to catch them. They have hired me, Victor Getz, private eye at your service. I must say, during my career, I have found all kinds of things from lizards to turtles to husbands to suitcases, but I have never been asked to find lost children before. Phish, I figured, how hard could it be? And I was right, I just spotted one of the boys a minute ago. I'm Victor Getz, man of a million disguises, and I always get my man, or boy, in this case. Look out boys, it's time to go home to aunty. (*Take off mustache and hat*)

What will happen to Bo and Prosper, their new friends, and the Thief Lord? Beware; everyone and everything is not as it seems to be and help and harm will come from strange places and even stranger people. (*Hold up book*) *The Thief Lord* by Cornelia Funke.