

JERRY SPINELLI



PORCUPINE NECKTIE

When I was little, my uncle Pete had a necktie with a porcupine painted on it. I thought that necktie was just about the neatest thing in the world. Uncle Pete would stand patiently before me while I ran my fingers over the silky surface, half expecting to be stuck by one of the quills. Once, he let me wear it. I kept looking for one of my own, but I could never find one.

I was twelve when we moved from Pennsylvania to Arizona. When Uncle Pete came to say good-bye, he was wearing the tie. I thought he did so to give me one last look at it, and I was grateful. But then, with a dramatic flourish, he whipped off the tie and draped it around my neck. "It's yours," he said. "Going-away present."

I loved that porcupine tie so much that I decided to start a collection. Two years after we settled in Arizona, the number of ties in my collection was still one. Where do you find

a porcupine necktie in Mica, Arizona—or anywhere else, for that matter?

On my fourteenth birthday, I read about myself in the local newspaper. The family section ran a regular feature about kids on their birthdays, and my mother had called in some info. The last sentence read: “As a hobby, Leo Borlock collects porcupine neckties.”

Several days later, coming home from school, I found a plastic bag on our front step. Inside was a gift-wrapped package tied with yellow ribbon. The tag said “Happy Birthday!” I opened the package. It was a porcupine necktie. Two porcupines were tossing darts with their quills, while a third was picking its teeth.

I inspected the box, the tag, the paper. Nowhere could I find the giver’s name. I asked my parents. I asked my friends. I called my uncle Pete. Everyone denied knowing anything about it.

At the time I simply considered the episode a mystery. It did not occur to me that I was being watched. We were all being watched.

"Did you see her?"

That was the first thing Kevin said to me on the first day of school, eleventh grade. We were waiting for the bell to ring.

"See who?" I said.

"Hah!" He craned his neck, scanning the mob. He had witnessed something remarkable; it showed on his face. He grinned, still scanning. "You'll know."

There were hundreds of us, milling about, calling names, pointing to summer-tanned faces we hadn't seen since June. Our interest in each other was never keener than during the fifteen minutes before the first bell of the first day.

I punched his arm. "Who?"

The bell rang. We poured inside.

I heard it again in homeroom, a whispered voice behind me as we said the Pledge of Allegiance:

"You see her?"

I heard it in the hallways. I heard it in English and Geometry:

"Did you see her?"

Who could it be? A new student? A spectacular blonde from California? Or from back East, where many of us came from? Or one of those summer makeovers, someone who leaves in June looking like a little girl and returns in September as a full-bodied woman, a ten-week miracle?

And then in Earth Sciences I heard a name: "Stargirl."



A *New York Times* Bestseller
A *Parents' Choice* Gold Award Winner
A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year
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★ "A magical and heartbreaking tale." —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred

"Spinelli has produced a poetic allegorical tale about the magnificence and rarity of true nonconformity." —*The New York Times*

Stargirl. She's as magical as the desert sky. As strange as her pet rat. As mysterious as her own name. And she captures Leo Borlock's heart with just one smile.

But when the students of Mica High turn on Stargirl for everything that makes her different, Leo urges her to become the very thing that can destroy her: normal. In a celebration of nonconformity, Newbery Medalist Jerry Spinelli weaves a tense, emotional tale about the perils of popularity—and the inspiration of first love.

Look for the reading group discussion guide at the end of this book.

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