



Stella Bellarosa: Tales of an Aspiring Teenage Superhero

Julie Krantz

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A wallet, a thief, and a brilliant plan--what could possibly go wrong? At least that's what Stella thinks--until she and Pin Pin get caught with the goods, that is, and all heaven, hell and whatever's-in-between breaks loose, forcing the best friends to hit the road. Tag along as Stella and Pin Pin runaway to midtown Manhattan, all the while battling archrival Teresa Como for the title to SOHO's Annual Food Drive, their ticket to Regis Academy--a posh high school for girls, hidden far, far away in the Catskills. Oh-la-la, for the chance to leave home--for good! Problem is... the road isn't much safer than home, especially when the runaways attract the attention of police, museum officials and--worst of all--Stella's unforgiving father. Also pitted against their extravagant dream is the threat of Pin and her family's deportation, including baby sister, Audrey, who lies at the heart of this quirky coming-of-age novel--STELLA BELLAROSA: Tales of an Aspiring Teenage Superhero, a serious MG with a funny-bone. Read this excerpt from the novel to see how Stella and Pin Pin deal with the many social issues they face, including the challenges of immigrating to a foreign city, bullying, making friends, and teens and preteens coming of age. "So ... how was your day? Anything new?" I was surprised at Pin's perkiness, considering how glum she'd been this morning. "Nope. Nothing's new. No thing what-so-ever." Ha. That's when I knew she was lying. Pin Pin's always emphatic when she lies. "Oh," I replied coolly. The best way to get info from Pin's to act disinterested. It drives her nuts. "Well, 'nothing's' better than 'something bad' I guess." Pin looked at me sharply. "What do you mean? Did you hear something?" Hmmm. Now she was being cagy, so I baited her. "Nah. Well, yeah, nah. Not really. You know--no big deal." When she didn't bite, I tried a more direct approach. "Oh, well. Okay. You know what my day was like--regurgitated eggs, chunks of..." "Okay, okay. I... confess.... Because you are making me sick, Stella Bellarosa. Sick in my gizzards." Heheh. Pin's word choice killed me. But the second way to make her talk was to gross her out. Which I'd done, at least in part. So I prodded some more. "Confess, Pin? Confess to what?" "Oh. Didn't I tell you?" She tried to act blasé, but her right eye kept blinking. Pin had a tic or something that twitched when she was upset. Like when she talked about China. Or home. Or Audr—. Suddenly I knew this had something to do with her family. "Tell me what?" I said. "Oh, yeah... you were probably puking when it happen." "When what happened?" I said in a clipped voice. Pin's coyness was starting to irritate me. "It," she said, shrugging. "I take it." "Take what?" "Mrs. Tucci's wallet." I needed a calming breath, but gulped in a mouthful of rancid city air instead and choked. Shock does that to a person. And, believe me, 'shock' is mild for describing how I felt. "What do you mean you took Mrs. Tucci's wallet?" "It was easy," she continued, shifting her weight in a decidedly uneasy way. Easy? Yeah, I could believe it. We'd known Mrs. Tucci forever. She was the oldest substitute at Holy Infant Elementary School--maybe in the world. She wore pointy glasses with rhinestones in the corners and carried a purse as big as a dumpster. Must've eaten truckloads of spumoni as a kid, because she had three gold teeth. "So?" A lump of mucous formed in my throat, but I ignored it. "How? And, oh my god... why?" "Well. Mrs. T's a rich woman, right?" Pin explained. "You've seen her pocky-book. It's huge. She has gold in her mouth and diamonds everywhere. She's probably a millionaire. No big deal." "No big deal?" I could feel another lump rising in my gullet. Continue reading to see how 13-year-olds Stella and Pin Pin struggle to come of age in the midst of challenges as diverse as immigration, growing up in a foreign city, and bullying.

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