

PROMPT #2: You open a book and a note with a letterhead falls out. At the top it says: If you are reading this, ...

## Spectacular

by **Laura Lee Cochran**

Long satin dresses worn by pristine young girls run about with skinny books in their hands. Stories of princes fighting for princesses, animals speaking to young girls, gardens with tiny fairies in them, and the idea of young love. Together, they sit in a circle on the grass, their panty hose showing as they attempt to sit cross legged, each with an open book. They point to numerous pictures and phrases. Oh how they giggle so effortlessly as they turn each page, gawking at the prince on one knee. So young, so full of light, so wrapped up in fairy tales.

However, our story focuses on a rather peculiar girl. One who dreams of adventure, not romance. A girl who is unlike the other girls, possibly because she can't manage to go a day without a mud stain on her dress. So, our story begins with Della, sitting on a bench by herself, away from the other girls, reading a much thicker book with little to no pictures.

As she sits on this bench surrounded by a garden of daffodils and greenery, a breeze blows through her hair. She looks over to see the other girls sitting in the circle. Although she doesn't like their books, a part of her wants to be with them; to be included. But instead, she looks to her book. Dark brown leather engulfs the book in a warm hug. It's the book her father gave her right before he went on his business trip. When she awoke that morning, the book lay there on her bedside table with a folded note on top reading:

*"For my dear Della.  
May your love for reading grow.  
With love, Father"*

The book she holds in her hands is written by her father, who happens to be a well known author in their city. Which is why he had to leave for several days, because his book is to be published soon.

Though Della hates when her father leaves. It makes mother so spazzy. She thinks to herself, is spazzy a word? If so, she likes it. Nonetheless, she loves her father, and her father has always found her love of stories endearing. In fact, he is the one who ignited this love with his stories of boys on voyages, girls fighting on the battlefield, and new worlds of wonder and imagination. Every story captivated her. She loved how creative her father was, and she too wanted to be just like him.

But there was one story, the one she knows is in this book laying in her hands, that stood out amongst the rest. The newest edition of her fathers collection of many written books. This book is called, *Endless Spectacular*. This one, she's only heard a few stories and snitbits of. Only peeks into the story at large.

Her father would often process his story with her, having her help with ideas thus sparking creativity and a bond between them. His story centered around a young girl in a world where anything could happen. Or that's how her father spoke it anyway. It was quite a strange story, one of magic. And magic excites our dear Della.

She holds the book to her chest, giving her father a hug by doing so, and goes to open the book. A smile glows on her face when she sees it is dedicated to her. She loves that she got to help her father make this book, and feels honored to be a part of it. Turning the next page she begins to read the beginning of the story.

*"Mary was a stubborn and feisty young girl. With much energy and spirit, she lived in a village protected by a special magic that was passed down in her family. Though magic being at the forefront of her life, it was rather quite ordinary. Though it wasn't until her 8th birthday when something spectacular happened. Here is the story of Mary, a young girl turned warrior when threats to her village, and the magic that protects it, put her and all she loves in jeopardy."*

Della could see herself as young Mary, of course they were the same age, but she also was a warrior, and Della wanted that. A life of adventure and magic. A life that was different from her own. Della wanted to be a warrior of a story, but most of all, she wanted something spectacular to happen.

Although most of her life revolved around consuming spectacular stories, her real life apart from them was rather bleak. Her mother, spazzy Della has now declared, is loving and kind. Her father, a writer. However, with a mother who is spazzy and stays at home, and a father who only writes, their family income is quite small. Together they live in a two bedroom apartment with dingy wood and little light. They often have soup for most meals and don't go about fun adventures in the city together.

It's very different from the girls in the circle with their picture books. Their dresses are quite bright in comparison. Their hair, much less matted. Their days are filled with parties and riding on trains. Her life seems separate from these girls, in every way possible. And although she enjoys being different, having more fight to her and a desire to learn, on a small level, she sees those girls and she thinks, *"their life must be spectacular"*

Della wants spectacular.

She looks at the girls once more, seeing them giggle and turn pages. A breeze blows through Della's curly brown hair again as she wipes it away to turn to the next page. However, this page has a piece of paper on it. She's confused. Her father left her a note, but on top of the book. He wouldn't leave another one, would he? She looks around, to see if anyone is looking. Not that they are, and not that this is super secret, but she's curious. She takes the folded note out of the book and opens it. To which it reads:

*"If you are reading this Della, you must have taken the book I gave you. Now this is important. Remember the business trip I was going on? Well, Della, it was to go inside of the book Endless Spectacular. The book you hold in your hands, I lay within the pages..."*

Della is instantly confused. She takes the book and holds it up, shaking the pages waiting for something, or someone, to fall out. Instead it's just a book, just like any regular book. With no father laying between the pages. She then goes back to the note, reading what else her father has to tell her.

*"Della, this is very important. I need you to come into the book with me. You see, Mary is not acting according to what the book is written, and the story is changing. I need you to join me so that together we can change the story back to how it's intended. All I need you to do is say one phrase..."*

Della stares hard at the words on the page. Her heart beats fast and a smile creeps on her face. Della is about to venture out into the spectacular. And without a moment's hesitation she lays the book down on the bench, along with the note, and takes one last look at the girls. A girl with blonde hair looks up, confused. Della puffs out her chest, puts her hands on her hips and yells,

*"A book I write, a book I enter. To the great beyond, to the great spectacular. Endless, countless, I now descend to my great adventure"*

Just like that, the blonde girl's eyes widened, for a Della who stood there, was no longer there. But all that was left was a brown book on a bench with a folded note laying on the grass.

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Della transcends colors and sounds like none she has ever experienced before, and when she opens her eyes, a sky as blue as blue can be lays looming over her. Beneath her is grass, soft and tender, still holding morning dew. She then hears a voice call out to her. A voice she knows.

"Della, darling! You made it!" her father yells.

Della sits up and turns around to see her father running towards her. He wears brown slacks and a white button down shirt with a darker brown vest. He looks like the outfits in fantasies she's heard about.

Della stands with a great smile and greets her father with a large hug. He lifts her in the air laughing as she sprawls her arms out to feel like she's flying. Her father lets her down with a big grunt and lays his hands on his hips.

"I'm so happy you're here! How does it feel to be inside of a book?" Her father chuckles.

"Quite spectacular," Della replies.

"That's my girl." Her father laughs as he pats the top of her head.

"Do you always enter your books for business trips?" Della inquires.

"Haha, I knew it wasn't long until I got that question. I'll tell you everything, but only after you meet Mary herself. Deal?"

"Deal!" Della yells excitedly.

Her father takes her hand in his and leads her down a dirt pathway that leads to a cottage resembling a plump red mushroom. As they venture down this path, Della sees an array of flowers with small flying bugs surrounding them. Some are ones she's seen, like bees, but some are more brighter and whimsical than she's seen before. She looks up to her father, who no longer holds a smile, but one of determination. She recalls what her father told her about how Mary's actions are changing the story. It must be serious that Mary is not going along with the story. She sees now that it must be stressful for her father, and why he is determined to fix it.

As they walk, she wonders why her father brought her here, not that she's upset, but she doesn't see how she fits into a world that's spectacular. What can she do? She has no magic, fight, or warrior living inside of her. She's just a girl who loves stories and who never fits in. What does she have to offer?

Her father must have noticed her concern, perhaps it was written on her face. Or that he just knows his daughter well. He stops and looks down to her with a compassionate face.

"Della, you belong here. I asked you here because I need your help. I wasn't the only one who wrote this, so I can't be the only one to fix this. Understand?"

Della looks up, and smiles a soft smile. She understands what he is saying, but yet still doesn't believe. But instead of saying anything, she smiles wider.

"Yes, I understand. Thanks father." Della says.

Her father leads her closer to the cottage where she gets a quick glance at a girl in a window. She sees only a lock of golden hair swooshing away. They walk up to the front door and her father knocks three times.

"Go away!" A girl yells.

"Now is that anyway to talk to your author, Mary?" her father responds.

Something hits the door, causing a thud, to which Della jumps back in fear.

"Don't worry Della." her father leans to her. He faces the door again and knocks yet again. "Mary, this is important. I need you to open the door."

As he speaks, Della sees a vine grow from the ground, covering the door. Della's eyes widen. Magic! Mary used magic!

"Wow!" Della squeals. "That's so cool!"

She turns to her father who has a rather different reaction to the vines. It's then when he waves his hands away, causing the vines to disappear and the door to open wide. To this Della is even more surprised.

"You have magic Father?!"

"That I do. In this world.," he responds.

Her father walks through the door to which Della follows. There sits an angry Mary on the floor wearing a long blue gown with white sleeves that are puffed up: much like a princess. Her golden locks are held up in a half up bun with hairs falling in front of her face. She stands and then turns her back from the two of them.

“I don’t care how many times you tell me, I refuse to go along with your plans.” Mary pouts.

“But Mary, you do understand what’s at stake, don’t you?” her father pleads.

“Your story? I never signed up to be part of your story!”

“It’s not just my story Mary, it’s yours. Do you understand how important your role is in this fight? You have something others don’t.”

“Well you have magic too. Why don’t you fight?”

“Authors don’t often get involved in their stories.” he slightly laughs.

“Then what do you call this?” Mary spits back.

Della’s father scratches his head while Mary goes to sit at her kitchen table. He then sits at the seat across from her, to which Della, who wants to be included, takes a seat at the table as well.

“Mary, as an author, I have a duty to my characters. To bring them on a journey, to have them grow and live a story that needs to be told. All of that is for the sake of my readers,” he says. He looks at Mary, who still seems to not be listening, but pushes anyway. “It’s imperative that you understand you are meant to save your village. That is your role.”

“Yes, I know. The role you set for me. A warrior, but I never agreed to it.” Mary yells.

“I understand, but that shouldn’t stop you from stepping up.”

“Then, give me a reason. One besides the excuse that this is how your story is supposed to go. Give me something other than the bigger picture. Something more than it being all about what you want.” Mary is breathing heavily now and a single tear falls down her face. “What about what I want?” She pauses, holding the sides of her arms, looking straight at the table.

“I’m scared. What you have set out for me is scary, and You won’t even tell me everything. So how am I supposed to go along with all of this when I still feel like I’m in the dark about everything?” she pleads.

“That’s because if you knew everything that would happen, it would ruin what is set out for you. Can’t you trust that I’m a good author?” Della’s father reasons.

“I can’t! I don’t know you! You just came here one day, said you were the author of this story and told me to stop acting foolish.” Mary yells.

“You’re putting words in my mouth.” He rebuttals.

“I don’t care. It’s too much. I wish you would have just left me alone.” Mary sighs.

Della’s father looks deep into Mary’s eyes, patience in his glance. An understanding that surpassed anything Della could know.

“I couldn’t Mary. I wrote you, I know you. If I didn’t intervene and come here, what is destined to happen would never happen.”

Mary crosses her arms and lowers her head, trying to hide the tears in her eyes. Della’s father smiles softly, and then turns to Della. Her eyes widen as to her new role of distant listener to someone who is included.

“Della, will you speak to her? I’ll step outside.” he asks.

“Yes, father, I’ll try.” Della responds.

“That’s my girl.” he smiles.

Della’s father slowly stands up, looking at Mary one last time before walking out and closing the front door. Della watches as he leaves, and once she’s gone, she slowly shifts her focus to Mary, who is still sitting cross-armed with tears in her eyes. Della shifts her chair, causing a screech on the ground to flood the silence. Della flinches, and then looks to Mary.

“Hi, I’m Della.” she says.

Della hears a small chuckle from Mary, causing Della to get embarrassed.

“I helped my father write the story, and I was most excited for your adventure.” Della continues.

Mary looks up to Della, curious. “How so?”

“Oh,” Della looks up confused as to how that possibly worked. “I loved the idea of someone seemingly forgotten and small is the one to save the day. All because she had something... spectacular.”

“But saving the day is out of my abilities. I can only grow plants, that isn’t much to fight a war against my village.” Mary pleads.

“But your magic. It’s so strong.”

“My magic is not my own. You should know that. It was given to me by my grandmother before she passed. Don’t you remember?”

“Sorry, there was a lot my father wrote without me. I just helped with his writer’s block.” Della admits.

“Well, your father, the author of this story, decided to kill my grandmother off and have her give me her magic. Now, because this power has been something to protect the villages for years, all of this pressure is on me. I didn’t ask for this. I love it, and it’s amazing. I love growing flowers and building trees from the ground up, but the responsibility for using it for what I’m supposed to. It’s terrifying.”

Della looks at Mary as she speaks. Her words, her face, it’s all so somber. This character who Della thought was spectacular, has stepped into the ordinary. It makes Della frustrated. She doesn’t have anything to make her spectacular, yet Mary has everything she could ever want, yet she’s running away? Della wants to yell at Mary, tell her she’s ungrateful and foolish for acting like this. But through her frustration, through her confusion, she sees a girl, her age, who is scared of doing something she doesn’t think she’s able to.

Della understands this feeling.

Oftentimes father encourages Della to hang out with the other girls, to get to know them and their stories. To even introduce them to the ones she loves. Though Della feels as though she would be unwanted or even mocked for being different. That she is not made to be around girls so different. That’s she’s less than somehow.

That’s why she wants to be spectacular. So she can belong anywhere and everyone would see how amazing she is. Though, if she isn’t spectacular, what’s there to see? And so Della understands Mary, on some level. Yet, as she thinks, she starts to see more why she fell inlove with Mary’s character in the first place. She had magic and she was spectacular because of it, but there was something else. Something apart from the magic. Something Della admired.



“Mary,” Della starts. “I don’t think your magic is the only thing that makes you spectacular.”

“How is that possible when my identity lies in my magic,” Mary replies.

“What was your identity before your grandmother gave you her magic?” Della retorts.

Mary’s eyes widen as she lets the words Della spoke settle in. Mary adjusts in her seat, putting her hands on the table, and looks down to her lap.

“Then, what makes me spectacular? If not for my magic, if not me fighting for the village, what am I?” Mary asks.

“A girl who loves.” Della responds. “Huh?” Mary asks.

“A girl who loves. You love your grandmother. You love your village. You love your magic and the flowers you create. You are spectacular because you love.”

Mary looks up to Della, with tears streaming down her face. A smile creeps up and she throws her arms up to wrap them around Della.

“I am spectacular, aren’t I!” Mary sobs.

Della smiles and she hugs Mary back. She’s happy that her words left an impact on Mary. As they hug, Della’s father returns and smiles at the two girls.

“Ah, so we’re friends now are we?” He asks.

“I think so!” Della responds.

“Does that mean you’ve changed your mind Mary?” he asks, hoping the answer is yes. Mary’s arms fall off from her embrace with Della. She wipes her tears and lays her hands in her lap. She then looks up to Della’s father and speaks sweetly.

“I have,” Mary starts. “Not because I have to live up to this big role. Not because this is my destiny or anything. But because I do love my family and my village, and this power is to be used to protect what I love. Even if it’s scary. So, because of that, I will follow the story you have laid out for me.”

“That’s more like the Mary I know,” he responds.

Della, her father, and Mary stay in this moment smiling at what they've overcome before Della's father declares that it's time for him and Della to leave. Mary gives Della a hug before they walk out of the cottage. As the two of them walk the same dirt path as before, Della looks back to see Mary waving! Mary moves her hands causing flowers to grow all along the dirt path her father and Della walk through. One is taller than the rest, so she picks it and puts it in her pocket. Perhaps to give to mother, she thinks.

Della and her father continue to walk, taking in nature for all that it's worth before Della asks a very pressing question.

"So, about your normal business trips..." Della starts.

"I knew it wouldn't be long before I heard that question again. You're a curious one," Della's father starts. "You did meet Mary, so I suppose it's time for me to explain.

Della's father stops and crouches down to Della's height. He holds her shoulders and drops them down to her mid arm, staring into Della's eyes with a soft smile.

"All of my business trips have been to travel inside of the books I write. You see, as the author, I not only want to write stories that encourage my readers, but also my characters. I want to inspire people with my words and stories. And this is how I do it," he says.

Della smiles, as if that is the coolest thing she's ever heard. How she loves her father and the worlds and characters he builds. It's then, when the words she said to Mary hit her.

*"You are spectacular because you love."*

"Father, do you think I'm spectacular?" Della asks.

"The most spectacular of all." He responds.

"How so?"

Della's father smiles sweetly, brings her closer to him and kisses her on the forehead. He brings her into a hug to which she wraps her arms around him tightly.

"Because your heart is so full." He says.

At this moment, Della begins to cry. It's as if it all makes sense. She looks at all the parts of her life that once felt bleak, and how love made them spectacular. Her spazzy mother, how

she loves Della so well by cooking for her and singing her lullabies before bed. How her father reads her stories and plays make believe. How in a world of bleakness, the one thing that makes everything spectacular is love.

Della has love. Della is spectacular.

Della's father holds her as Della's cries turn into soft sniffles. He pulls back to look at her face and wipes a tear from her cheek.

"What a spectacular girl you are my dear Della. Let's head home."

With that, Della's father stands holding Della's hand. They stand side by side and Della's father recites a phrase. Colors and sounds erupt in front of them, and the world of *Endless Spectacular* disappears from view.

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There, Della sits, back on the bench, across from the girls who are reading their picture books. A girl stares at her, confused. Looks back and forth, up and down, but decides she must have seen something and goes back to her story of romance. Della, stares at the book her father gave her, with the small blink of a story that was not written in words, but in her mind. A daydream she assumes. Father will be back from his business trip soon, she didn't visit him in this book. That's impossible.

Della closes the book, and stands to leave. She holds the book in one hand and places her other in her dress pocket. Though, her hand brushes against something unfamiliar. She takes it out of her pocket to see a flower from her day dream laying in her hand. It's then when it all floods back. She smiles brightly. She turns abruptly, dropping the flower as she does and walks to the girls with their romance picture books. She holds her book in front of her and looks down while standing in front of the young girls. All of their eyes are on her. She looks up, smiles a sweet smile, and says,

"May I join you?"

The girls smile and invite her in. Together they share stories and laugh. Della begins to make friends. In the end, our dear Della, is spectacular. Not because of anything she does, has, or a position she holds, but because of the love that surrounds her life.