



SPOTTING DOTTIE

GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ

THE TRUTH IS ABOUT TO SURFACE.

When Charlotte gets a drone for her fourteenth birthday, she's determined to get footage of Dottie, the elusive lake monster of Dorothy Lake. Her grandma, who has dedicated her life to searching for the monster, is the joke of the town. But when Charlotte manages to capture a video of the monster and posts it online, she's the target of a media storm. Now everyone is making fun of her too. Worse still, hordes of monster hunters flock to her town, crowding the lake. When their boat propellers threaten to hurt Dottie, Charlotte is faced with a difficult choice.

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ORCA CURRENTS • AGES 9–12 • RL 2.5

Publication: April 16, 2024

9781459834828 PB • \$10.95

9781459834835 PDF • 9781459834842 EPUB



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Spotting Dottie

Author: Gail Anderson-Dargatz

April 16, 2024

In this high-interest accessible novel for middle-grade readers, fourteen-year-old Charlotte wants to use her new drone to prove that Dottie, the elusive lake monster of Dorothy Lake, really exists.

FORMAT

5 x 7.5"

112 pages

Paperback

9781459834828

\$10.95

PDF

9781459834835

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KEY SELLING POINTS

- Fourteen-year-old Charlotte is determined to use her new drone to prove the existence of an elusive lake monster.
- This story explores family dynamics and intergenerational relationships, as well as themes of conservation, responsibility and doing the right thing.
- The appeal of mythical creatures like the Loch Ness Monster is universal, and drone pilots are increasingly using drones to search for lake monsters.
- This fictional town and community of Dorothy Lake was inspired by the Shuswap-Okanagan region of British Columbia, which is where the author grew up and is also the home of two lake monsters: the famous Ogopogo of Okanagan Lake and Shuswaggi of Shuswap Lake.
- Enhanced features (dyslexia-friendly font, cream paper, larger trim size) to increase reading accessibility for dyslexic and other striving readers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Credit: Vera Anderson-Dargatz

GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ is the award-winning author of over a dozen books, including *The Cure for Death by Lightning* and *A Recipe for Bees*, which were finalists for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. Many of her works are short novels for striving readers, including the Orca Currents titles *Bigfoot Crossing* and *Iggy's World*, both JLG Gold Standard Selections, and *The Ride Home*, which was shortlisted for a BC and Yukon Book Prize. Gail is also a writing mentor and editor, working from her home in the Shuswap region of British Columbia.

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Gail Anderson-Dargatz

orca currents

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Spotting Dottie / Gail Anderson-Dargatz.

Names: Anderson-Dargatz, Gail, 1963- author.

Series: Orca currents.

Description: Series statement: Orca currents

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20230465358 | Canadiana (ebook) 20230465366 |

ISBN 9781459834828 (softcover) | ISBN 9781459834835 (PDF) |

ISBN 9781459834842 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels. | LCGFT: High interest-low vocabulary books.

Classification: LCC PS8551.N3574 S66 2024 | DDC jC813/.54—dc23

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023939204

Summary: In this high-interest accessible novel for middle-grade readers, fourteen-year-old Charlotte wants to use her new drone to prove that Dottie, the elusive lake monster of Dorothy Lake, really exists.

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Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Design by Ella Collier

Edited by Doeun Rivendell

Cover illustration by Shutterstock.com/Kewalee Wanichakul

Author photo by Vita Anderson-Dargatz

Printed and bound in Canada.

For those who want to believe.

Chapter One

Scott and I are walking down the beach to see my grandmother, Donna. We're still wearing our wet bathing suits. My long wet curls snake down my shoulders. The smooth rocks feel warm under my bare feet.

"Let's get back in the lake right after lunch," I say. I want to swim as much as I can this weekend.

Monday is Labor Day and school starts on Tuesday. This is the end of my summer.

“Okay, but let’s swim out into the deeper water,” Scott says. “We spent the whole morning near the shore.”

I shiver at the thought. “No way. Dottie’s down there.”

Scott laughs a little. “Charlotte, you don’t actually believe the lake monster exists, do you?”

“Grandma does,” I say. But then, Scott already knows that. My grandmother is something of a legend around here. She’s spent most of her life searching for the lake monster named Dottie.

“But what about you?” Scott asks. “Do you believe it’s real?”

I adjust my backpack as I decide whether to admit it or not. “Yeah, I do,” I say.

He raises his eyebrows. “But you’ve never *seen* Dottie, right?” he asks.

I shake my head. “No, but Grandma has.” Several times.

My grandmother first saw the creature when she was about my age, fourteen. She was fishing on the lake with her dad when something big swam right under their boat. She says it looked like one of those extinct water dinosaurs, with a long neck and flippers. You know, like Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster. But it was Dottie—short for Dorothy—the monster that’s supposed to live here, in Dorothy Lake.

Ever since then Grandma has spent most of her free time either hunting the monster or interviewing others who claim they’ve seen it.

She also collects photos of it. In fact, her room is filled with Dottie stuff, like postcards and snow globes. For Christmas and her birthday, I give Grandma mugs, hats and socks with the monster on them. The stores in the town of Dorothy Lake

sell a lot of that kind of thing to tourists.

Grandma is so into Dottie that some of the locals call her Dottie Donna. And they aren't always nice about it. They think she's silly for believing in the creature. But I don't. I think she's cool. I mean, how many grandmas are monster hunters?

Scott inspects a rock to see if it's a good skipping stone, then drops it and picks up another. "You think Dottie is a water dinosaur, then?" he asks.

"Maybe. Grandma thinks so." She and other people think it might be a dinosaur that didn't go extinct. I find a flat stone and skip it across the water.

"But your grandma never got a good photo of it, did she?" Scott asks. "So who knows what it actually looks like?"

All of Grandma's photos of Dottie were taken from a distance. They're hazy images of something

dark poking up from the water. In fact, no one has ever gotten a clear picture of the monster.

Grandma is just down the beach from us now, sitting in a lawn chair beside her camper van. She's got one eye pressed to her spotting scope, which stands on a tripod. A spotting scope is a small telescope, more powerful than binoculars, used to look for things that are far away, like wildlife.

"Hey, Grandma!" I call, but she doesn't seem to hear me. As we get closer, I see she's wearing shorts and a T-shirt that reads *Beach Bum*. Which totally fits. My grandmother pretty much lives on this beach in the summer, sleeping in her camper van. Searching the water with her scope and hoping to spot Dottie.

When we reach her I tap her shoulder, and she startles.

Grandma laughs as she stands and hugs me. "Well, hello, Lottie."

My grandmother is the only one who calls me Lottie, which is short for Charlotte. It's an old-fashioned nickname. I don't really like it when anyone else calls me that.

She steps back to smile at my best friend. "Hello, Scott."

"Hi, Donna!"

"What brings you way down here?" Grandma asks me.

"It's my birthday, remember?" I remind her. "Mom asked me to come get you for lunch. We have hot dogs and birthday cake."

"Anna could have phoned," she says. Anna is my mom. "You didn't have to walk all that way."

"Your phone is dead," I say. "*Again.*"

"I didn't even notice," she says. "I guess I should spend a night at home and plug it in." Then she puts a hand to her cheek, as if she's just heard what I said. "Your birthday? But that isn't until Saturday."

“This *is* Saturday,” I say.

“Oh! I must have lost track of time.” As usual. Grandma is *always* forgetting about stuff. I think it’s because her mind is almost always on Dottie.

She hugs me again. “Well, happy birthday!”

But her voice is drowned out by a Jet Ski roaring our way. Our neighbor Carter is driving it, and his brother, Nash, is riding behind him. They live next door to us. Nash goes to my school and is in the same grade as me. Carter is a couple of years older. But Scott and I never hang out with them. They think they’re too cool for us. I just think they’re jerks.

Carter circles the Jet Ski around. Then, driving too close to shore, he splashes us on purpose. I quickly turn to protect what’s inside my backpack from the spray.

“Hey, *Dottie Donna!*” Nash calls out to my grandmother. “Seen any monsters today?”

They laugh at her. And I wish, as I have many times before, that I could prove the lake monster is real. So people won't think Grandma is weird for believing in it.

Chapter Two

Grandma glares at Nash and Carter as they speed away on their Jet Ski down the lake. Then she sighs and dries off her spotting scope with a beach towel.

“Don’t listen to Nash,” I tell her.

Grandma folds up her tripod, then slides it with her spotting scope into her van. “Maybe they’re right to make fun of me,” she says. “What am I doing? Spending all my time chasing monsters.”

I hug her. “Dottie is out there,” I say. “And you’ll be the first to prove it.”

But Scott snorts like he knows that’s never going to happen. Even my best friend thinks my grandmother’s hunt for the monster is a waste of time.

Grandma pats my back. “I’m not going to give this another thought,” she says. “I refuse to be upset on your birthday.” Then she smiles at me as if Nash didn’t say anything mean to her. “I did get you a present, by the way,” she says. “It’s at home, in my bedroom.”

“That reminds me.” I tug off my backpack and unzip it, pulling out my new drone. It’s black, and there’s a rotor that spins on each of its four legs. It kind of looks like a large insect. When it flies, it sounds like one too. “Look what Mom gave me for my birthday!” I hold out the drone to show Grandma. It’s small, about the size of my hand, but it’s got a camera on it.

“Want to see it fly?” I ask her.

“I sure do!” Scott says.

I set the drone down on a rock. Then I pull out my phone. “I downloaded an app so I can use my phone as a controller,” I tell Grandma. “I can see on my screen whatever the drone camera sees. From my phone I can snap photos or take videos with the drone camera while it flies.”

I switch on the drone to get the rotors whirring. Then I use the controls on my phone to lift it into the air.

Grandma ducks as the drone flies above us. But then she laughs as I hold out my phone so she can see the image the drone camera is sending back. It’s the three of us, standing on the beach by her camper van.

“I want one!” Scott says. “Hey, maybe you can use yours to take videos of me jumping on my mountain bike.”

"I want to use the drone to look for Dottie," I say. "It can skim over the water, maybe without spooking the monster the way a boat would."

"Maybe," Grandma says. She tosses her folding chair and bag in the van and closes the door. Then she turns to me, looking a bit more hopeful. "Let's give it a try."

As we stand by the camper van, I send the drone out over the water. On the phone screen we spot a few seagulls. A boat. Nash and Carter speeding away on the Jet Ski. A lake-monster pool float. Scott points at it. "There's Dottie!" he says, joking.

But there's not much else to see. After about half an hour of flying, a warning light flashes on my phone. "The drone's battery is running low," I say.

"Oh well," Grandma says, disappointed. "We'll try again some other time."

"I've got a spare battery," I say as I fly the drone back.

Her face brightens.

The drone came with two batteries and a charging dock so I can recharge them either at home or in a car. Mom also got me a pack of two more batteries so I can fly for well over two hours at a time if I want. But I left those at home.

As I'm swapping out the battery, Grandma points down the beach. "There have been a lot of sightings of the lake monster in that small bay," she says. "I've seen Dottie feeding close to the surface there this time of year myself."

"Okay, let's try there." I pull my sandals from my backpack and slip them on. Grandma locks up her van. Then we walk down the shore. Once we're near the small bay, I start up my drone and fly it over the water.

Grandma and Scott crowd in on either side of me to get a better look. As we watch the screen, we still don't see much at first. A rope floating on the surface. Someone's blue swimming noodle.

Then, as I'm looking up at the drone, Scott points at my phone. "Hey, what is *that*?" he asks.

All three of us squint at the screen, trying to make sense of what we're seeing. Something is moving through the water, making a V-shaped wake behind it like a boat would. But this is no boat.

"A fish?" I suggest.

Scott shrugs. "It's moving fast, and it's too big, even for a sturgeon." Sturgeon are really big fish. They can grow to be ten feet long. But Scott is right. This is no fish.

The hump of the creature's body rolls out of the water.

"That's Dottie!" Grandma cries out.

"Oh my god," Scott says. "You're right!" He looks at me. "You *are* recording this, right?"

"I never stopped," I say.

Then the creature's head pops up. It looks like a water dinosaur, just like Grandma said.

“Do you *see* this?” I say. The drone is pretty far away from the creature. We can’t make out much detail. But it’s clearly Dottie.

“This can’t be happening,” Scott says.

“Do you believe in Dottie *now*?” I ask him.

“Yes! I mean, look at that!”

“I told you so,” Grandma says, grinning.

A boat rushes toward Dottie, and the creature disappears under the water. We keep watching after the boat passes, hoping the monster will resurface.

Then the battery light on my screen comes on again. The drone is almost out of power. And I don’t have another battery on me. “I need to bring the drone back to shore,” I tell Grandma, “or I risk losing it.”

She sighs. “I understand.”

I return the drone and tuck it into my backpack. As I replay the video of Dottie, I realize I’ve finally

gotten my wish. I now have proof that the monster exists.

I quickly shoulder my backpack. Then I clutch my phone to my chest as I scramble back up the beach, toward home.

“Where are you going?” Scott calls after me.

“I need to show my mom the footage from the drone,” I call back. Because now I can finally prove to her that Grandma was right about Dottie all along.

Chapter Three

As I race home, Scott runs after me. I look back once to see Grandma unlocking her camper van. She waves me on, so Scott and I rush up the gravel road toward our yard.

Grandma owns this land above the beach and the small white house we live in. Mom and I came to stay with her after Dad died. I was pretty young then. Until I started school, Grandma took care of

me while Mom worked. I guess that's why Grandma and I are so close.

Scott and I rush up the stairs, and I push open the screen door into the kitchen. "Mom! Mom!" I cry. "I took a video of Dottie!"

Mom carries a plate of hot dogs to the table. She's wearing her work clothes—a dress shirt and slacks. She's a bank teller, but she took the afternoon off to celebrate my birthday with me. "What took you so long?" she asks. "The hot dogs are cold. And where's your grandmother?"

"She's driving her van here now," I say. "But did you hear me? I can prove Dottie is real. People won't make fun of Grandma anymore." *You won't make fun of her.*

Mom turns her back on me to grab ketchup and mustard from the fridge. She plunks them on the table, maybe a little too hard. "There is no such thing as Dottie," she says.

“Yes, there is!” I hold out my phone again. “Look.”

“Seriously,” Scott says. “You’ve got to see this!”

But Mom turns her back to us again as she pulls down a stack of plates. She sets them firmly on the table. “Please don’t be like your grandmother,” she says. “She’s spent every waking moment looking for a creature that doesn’t exist. What kind of life is that?”

I don’t try to argue with Mom. Instead I play the video and hold it right in front of her. When she sees the head of the creature pop up from the water, she looks surprised. But then she shakes her head. “It’s a log.”

“That’s no log, Mom. That’s Dottie!”

Mom puts on her glasses and watches it again.

“Isn’t it great?” I say, trying to pull her into my excitement. “I love this drone! I never would have got this footage without it. Best birthday gift ever. Thanks, Mom.”

She wraps an arm around me. “You are so welcome.” But then she turns back to the kitchen counter as if she hasn’t just seen a video of the lake monster.

I feel disappointment settle into my stomach. “You don’t think it’s Dottie, do you?” I ask.

“No.”

Just then Grandma walks in. “Anna, you saw Lottie’s video?” she asks Mom. She lifts her chin, looking proud of herself. “I told you Dottie was out there.”

“It’s a log,” Mom says.

I play the clip again, pointing at it. “But you can clearly see the head.”

Mom shrugs. “I just don’t see it.”

“I sure do,” Scott says. He turns to me. “You’ve got to post this. Like, right away.”

“It’s up to you,” Mom says. I think mostly because she figures I won’t get many views. “But you’re only going to make yourself look silly if you do,” she adds.

Like Grandma, she means. Grandma has spent her life trying to prove Dottie exists. Mom, on the other hand, has spent *her* life *denying* it.

“Why don’t we eat lunch before you decide?” Mom offers me a plate. “Have a hot dog, and then you can cut the cake.”

We all sit at the kitchen table. I grab a hot dog and think things over as I chew. I’ve got footage of the monster poking its head out of the water. I pretty much *have* to post it. But I do worry that if I do, people will make fun of me like they make fun of Grandma.

After we eat our hot dogs, Mom brings out the cake. Grandma, Mom and Scott sing “Happy Birthday” and I blow out the candles—all fourteen of them.

Then Grandma slips into her room and comes out carrying a present. “Happy birthday!” she says, handing it to me.

I quickly unwrap it and open the box. “A pair of binoculars!”

“So you can search for Dottie with me,” she says.

Mom sighs heavily at that. But I hug my grandmother. “Thanks, Grandma.”

Scott nods at my phone. “Well?” he says. “Are you going to post that video or not?”

“Yeah, I’m on it,” I say. I upload the clip and add the words Dottie is real!

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Mom asks.

“Yes, Mom,” I say, rolling my eyes.

But her concern makes me doubt myself, and I hesitate. If I go public with this video, *am* I going to make myself look stupid?

Then Scott elbows me, and I post it.

“Done,” I say. I’m committed now.

Chapter Four

As soon as I wake up the next morning, I grab my phone and check to see the number of views on my Dottie video. But only a handful of my friends liked it. And only one left a comment: Cool.

I fall back onto my pillow, frustrated. Hardly anyone is going to see the video this way. Especially not the people who usually make fun of Grandma. Like Nash and Carter.

I play the clip again. There's the creature's head poking out of the water. You can't miss it. Anyone seeing that would *have* to believe in Dottie.

And yet Mom doesn't. Maybe if enough others did, she would come around. But that means people actually have to see the video first. How do I get the word out?

I remember that Grandma has been on *Dorothy Lake News* a few times over the years. She's the local expert on Dottie, so they interview her when someone takes a rare photo of the monster. They'd *have* to be interested in this footage.

On my phone, I find the news website. Then I click on "Contact Us" and quickly write an email explaining where Scott, Grandma and I saw the creature. I attach the video. But then I pause. Mom's going to be so mad at me for doing this. But how else are people going to see the video? I hit Send.



I spend most of the morning lounging in bed, scrolling and checking my post to see if it's gotten more views. Finally I shuffle into the kitchen to grab something to eat. Mom and Grandma are already sitting at the table, digging into a salad.

I yawn and scratch my messy hair. "Morning," I say.

Grandma smiles up at me. "Good morning, Lottie."

"It's afternoon," Mom says. "Twelve thirty."

"It's Sunday," I say. "I get to sleep in." Even though I wasn't really sleeping.

I eye the salad, then grab a bagel instead. I pop it in the toaster.

"What are you doing with your afternoon?" Grandma asks me.

I find the margarine tub in the fridge. "Scott should be here any minute," I say. "We're going swimming." Enjoying our last weekend of freedom.

“Give it a couple of hours,” Mom says. “Digest your lunch first. If you don’t, you’ll get cramps.” She gives me a serious look. “If you get cramps, you could *drown*.”

“That’s a myth,” I tell her as I butter my bagel. “You can’t drown from swimming after eating.” Mom believes in all kinds of odd things. Just not Dottie.

“There’s Scott now,” Grandma says.

I turn to see him jogging up the stairs to the front deck. He doesn’t bother to knock. He just opens the screen door and pokes his head in. “Ready to go?” he asks.

I take a bite of my bagel. “Just give me a minute,” I say with my mouth full.

But then my phone pings as I get an email. It’s from *Dorothy Lake News*!

I join Scott out on the deck. As I close the door behind me, I put a finger to my lips, telling him to be quiet. I don’t want Mom to hear.

“What is it?” he asks.

I hold up my phone. “I got an email from a reporter at *Dorothy Lake News*.”

“Seriously?”

“I sent her the Dottie video this morning.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Scott asks.

“I wasn’t sure they would do anything with it.”

“Are you kidding?” He grins. “It’s a video of a *lake monster*!”

I quickly dial the number in the email, putting my phone on speaker so Scott can hear. A woman answers. “Hello? Tracy Robins here,” she says.

“I’m Charlotte Evans,” I say. “You asked me to call, in your email.”

“Oh, Charlotte! That was fast. Yes, I was delighted to get your message. And, of course, your amazing video.”

I lock gazes with Scott. “Are you going to use it on the news?” I ask Tracy.

“Well, yes. But I’m also hoping to talk with you and your friend Scott about it.”

"You want to interview us?" I ask.

Scott nods, his eyes wide.

"Yes, and I'd like to talk to your grandmother as well," Tracy says. "My coworkers tell me she is something of an expert on Dottie. I understand she's even earned the nickname Dottie Donna?"

I look through the kitchen window at Grandma. I'm not sure my grandmother would want to know the news reporters call her that.

"When do you want to do the interview?" I ask Tracy.

"We can meet you at the beach where you saw Dottie in an hour."

"An *hour*?"

"I want to air the piece this evening," Tracy says.

I turn back to Scott. He does a fist pump. *Yes!* he mouths.

But I try to keep my voice calm. "Yeah, okay," I say.

"Perfect," Tracy says.

As soon as I end the call, Scott and I jump up and down. “We’re going to be on the news!” he says.

But then Mom opens the door. “Who was that?” she asks me. “Who were you talking to?” She scans our faces. “What’s going on?”

Scott and I exchange a glance. I’m not sure what to say. Should I lie? Because Mom is the one person who could stop me from doing that interview.

Chapter Five

I *have* to tell Mom about the interview. She'll find out anyway. So as she eyes Scott and me from the doorway, I throw on a smile. "The call was from a reporter at *Dorothy Lake News*," I say. "She wants to talk to us about our Dottie sighting. She's going to use the video. Isn't that great?"

Mom tilts her head. "How does she know about the video?"

I tuck my chin to my chest as I squint up at her. “I might have emailed it to the news office.”

“You did *what?*”

I try to keep a smile on my face as I look past her at my grandmother. “And Grandma, she wants to interview you too.”

Mom waves both hands. “No, no. Not again.”

Grandma joins us at the door. “But Anna, this time we have the video to back up our story,” she says.

Mom ignores her. “Charlotte, I don’t want you talking to a reporter about this,” she says. “You know what happens after your grandma is on the news. The jokes. People pointing and laughing at us when we’re in town. They call your grandmother Dottie Donna!”

“But I *want* to do this,” I say.

“Me too,” Scott says. “I’ve never been on the news before.”

“And I’ve already agreed to do it,” I add.

Mom crosses her arms. Standing at the door like that, she kind of looks like a bouncer. Like she's not going to let me in. "Call and cancel," she says.

"Anna, what are you afraid of?" Grandma asks her.

Mom looks back and forth between Grandma and me. "I don't..." she stammers. "I don't want..."

Grandma finishes for her. "You don't want me to embarrass you again."

"Or me," I add.

Mom, caught, doesn't answer.

I take her hand. "Don't you see?" I say. "I've got to do this interview. To prove to Nash and everyone else who makes fun of Grandma that Dottie exists." I squeeze her fingers before letting go. "Maybe if other people start to believe, you'll see Grandma like I do. And be proud of her."

Mom looks shocked. She blinks a few times, like she's stopping tears. But she doesn't say anything more.

Before we head down to the beach for the interview, I try my best to tame my hair. But I finally give up. I inherited my curls from Grandma, and after yesterday's swim, my long hair is even wilder than usual.

When I come out of my room, I find Grandma has changed into a T-shirt that reads *I want to believe*. Below that text is a cartoon Dottie. When Mom sees it, she makes a face and shakes her head. But I'm not going to let her bring me down.

"Ready for this?" I ask Scott.

"I expect you to do most of the talking." He grins. "As usual."

I snort. "Thanks a lot."

As Grandma, Scott and I walk down the beach, Mom follows—to keep an eye on us, I imagine. When we reach the bay where I took the video, Tracy and a camera guy are already waiting for us.

"Showtime," Scott says.

I take a deep breath. Suddenly my heart is hammering in my chest.

Tracy greets us and shakes our hands. “Thanks so much for agreeing to talk to me,” she says. Then she asks Scott, Grandma and me to stand in a line so the lake is behind us in the interview. I see Mom hovering off to the side, squeezing her hands like she’s worried.

“All set?” Tracy asks the camera guy.

“Good to go,” he says.

The reporter holds up her mic. She nods to let us know she’s beginning the interview.

“Charlotte,” she says, “you took a video yesterday capturing what you believe is our very own lake monster, Dottie. Can you tell us where you saw the monster, and what happened?”

I gulp as I look into the lens of the camera. “Um, I—” And I completely blank out. I don’t know what to say.

Scott steps in. “Charlotte was flying her new

drone over this bay behind us..." he starts, hoping I'll continue. When I don't, he adds, "She got the drone for her birthday, just yesterday."

"It was your birthday?" Tracy asks. She laughs a little. "You got some birthday present there, seeing Dottie." She shoves the mic back in my face.

"I...I guess."

She waits a moment longer, hoping I'll say something more. When I don't, she says, "So you were flying your new drone, and then you saw..." The reporter rolls her hand, encouraging me to tell her all about it.

"I saw—" I stop and look at Scott. What *did* I see?

"We saw something moving in the water," Scott says. He turns to Grandma. "We all saw it."

"And what did you see exactly?" Tracy asks, then sticks the mic in front of me again.

"It...it was..." But I freeze. Behind Tracy and the camera guy, I see Mom cover her eyes in embarrassment.

“We saw the head stick out of the water,” Scott says. “Right, Charlotte?”

“Yes, the head.” But then I can’t think of anything more to say. I can’t *think*. I’m totally screwing this up.

The reporter tries again. “Do you really think it was Dottie?” she asks. “The image was taken from some distance away. Could it have been a log?”

Suddenly I know she’s right. I know what *I* saw. But the video isn’t as clear as I would have liked. I mean, the ripple in the water, the “head” popping out, *could* be anything. “I...I don’t know,” I say.

“Then you agree that the thing in your video could be a log.”

“I guess.”

“But it didn’t move in the water like a log,” Grandma says. And I can see she’s trying to save me, to save this interview. “It moved like an animal swimming through the water.”

“But you’re not 100 percent sure what it was,” Tracy says.

Scott nudges me so I’ll speak up.

I clear my throat. “It was Dottie.”

The reporter again waits for me to say more. When I don’t, she drops the mic. “Okay, I think we have enough,” she says. She starts winding up the mic cord. “Thank you all. That was great.”

No, it wasn’t. “I messed up,” I say. “Can we try again? People have to see this video. They have to understand that Dottie is real.”

“You did fine.” But Tracy doesn’t look me in the eye.

Just then a Jet Ski zooms our way. Nash and Carter. Of course they would turn up when the reporter is here. I bet they saw the news van from their house. Carter cuts the engine, and they coast into shore.

“Hey, Charlotte is getting interviewed!” Nash calls out. “What did you do? Catch yourself a lake monster?”

“As a matter of fact, I did!” I yell back. “I took a video of Dottie with my drone. You can see it on the news tonight.” But then I want to take my words back. Nash won’t just see my video on the news. He’ll also see the embarrassing interview I just did.

“So now you’re a monster hunter just like your granny?” Nash calls out.

Grandma must see my embarrassment, because she says, “Never mind him, Lottie.”

But Nash picks up on that. “Your granny calls you Lottie? Hah! First Dottie Donna, now *Dottie Lottie*.” Both he and Carter laugh at us before zooming off again.

Dottie Lottie! Ugh. Why did he have to call me *that* with the reporter standing right here? He clearly thinks we’re weird. Now I worry Tracy will too. I feel my face heat up. I’m almost in tears. “*We did see Dottie*,” I tell her. “We really did.”

She peers at me. “Like I said, it’s a great story. And a fun video.”

“When will the interview air?” Mom asks.

“Likely tonight,” Tracy says. “On the evening news.” She smiles at me. “If you want people to see this video, I think you’ll get your wish.”

I hear Mom mumble under her breath, “Careful what you wish for.”

Chapter Six

I never watch the news, not on TV. I mean, who watches TV anymore? I only see the news online. But tonight, after Scott leaves, I join Mom and Grandma on the couch to watch the evening news. The reporter said that's when our interview would likely air. It seems to go on forever, and we wait and wait.

Finally, right at the end of the news hour, my video pops up on the screen. The newscaster says,

“Is this video proof Dottie exists? Or is it just a log? You decide. Here’s Tracy Robins with that story.”

I duck down in the couch and watch the TV through my fingers as the reporter who interviewed us appears on the screen. Tracy stands alone on the beach. She must have filmed this section after we headed back home.

“Donna Weber, affectionately known to locals as Dottie Donna, has been one of the area’s leading researchers on Dottie,” Tracy says. “Now her granddaughter, Charlotte Evans, has joined forces with her grandmother to hunt down the elusive lake monster. In doing so, she’s earned her own handle, Dottie Lottie.”

I groan. “Dottie Lottie? She had to call me that?”

“Shh,” Grandma says. “Listen.”

“Using her drone, Charlotte captured footage of what may be Dottie,” Tracy says.

And there we are on TV, me, Scott and Grandma in her *I want to believe* T-shirt.

“Does my hair really look like that?” I ask.

Grandma runs a hand over my head. “You have beautiful hair.”

But I pull away. My hair looks pretty much like hers does. Long, curly and wild. Like a bad case of bedhead. Only Grandma dyes her hair red now to cover the gray.

We were both clearly nervous in front of the camera. In fact, I look scared to death.

I wince as I listen to myself stumble through the interview all over again.

Then my video is back up on the screen, along with Tracy’s voice as she wraps up the piece. “And there you have it,” she says. “Is this a video of a dinosaur that didn’t go extinct? Or just another video of a floating log? You decide. But for those who are determined to believe, this fuzzy image *is* Dottie.”

I slide farther down the couch.

“You did fine,” Grandma reassures me.

But Mom isn't so kind. "I told you," she says. "You shouldn't have done this interview. Or posted the video, for that matter."

"But I have a video of *Dottie*," I say. And then I repeat what Scott said. "I *had* to post it."

After the news, Grandma goes into her room to research—you guessed it—Dottie. I sit with Mom to watch a movie. But I'm not really watching it. I keep checking for views on my video. The number of likes is starting to tick up.

Then I get a text from Scott.

Have you seen the comments on the news story?

School is going to be hell.

I pull up the *Dorothy Lake News* site on my phone. Our interview is up. I scroll down to the comments section. Half of the comments about our interview and video are kind.

That's wild. I'm going to get out on the lake and check it out.

My dad and I saw Dottie when we were in the boat.

Where was this video taken? I want to see the monster!

The other half of the comments aren't so nice.

What crappy footage. Who was flying that drone?

Bigfoot?

Oh, look! Another blurry video of a log in the water.

And then there's this one:

Dottie Donna and Dottie Lottie! I love it! But what about the other kid? What do we call him? Dottie Scotty, of course!

Dottie Scotty. Now Scott has a crappy nickname too.

"Great," I say under my breath. "Just great."

"What's up?" Mom asks.

I hold out my phone. She leans in to read the comments. But when I see the look on her face, I immediately regret showing her.

"Charlotte, that's it," she says. "No more interviews. Don't post anything more about this. I told you what would happen if you did. People ridicule you."

“I just wanted you to believe Grandma,” I say. “To respect her.”

Mom opens her mouth like she’s going to say something. But then she stops herself and hugs me. “No more interviews, okay?” She pats my arm. “If you don’t give them anything more, this will become yesterday’s news soon enough.”

But not quick enough. School starts on Tuesday. By then everyone in school will have seen that awful interview. I wanted to prove Grandma was right about Dottie. But I’ve only managed to make myself look stupid. Even my own mom is embarrassed of me. And the footage just isn’t good enough. I need a better, clearer image of Dottie or people aren’t going to believe it’s real. I have *got* to get another video of the monster, and I’ve got to do it *now*.

Chapter Seven

The next morning I wake early to knock on Grandma's door. "Can I come in?"

"Of course."

I enter the room to find her sitting at her desk in front of the window. There's a website dedicated to Dottie open on the screen of her laptop. I've been on that site in the past. It lists almost every sighting of the monster ever recorded.

“My video was picked up by some news site in England,” I tell Grandma. “I got a massive number of views online.”

My grandmother smiles a little sadly at me. “You’re famous!”

“I don’t want to be famous,” I say. “Not like this. People are leaving all kinds of nasty comments.” Both on my video and on the interview, no matter where it’s posted. Most of the comments are kind of grumpy, saying the image in the clip is only a log. Others are just plain mean, like saying my hair is weird. Or that Grandma is weird. Or that we’re weird for believing in the lake monster.

“I saw that too,” she says.

I hold up my phone to show Grandma a comment on the *Dorothy Lake News* story. “But did you see this?”

Dottie Lottie and Dottie Scotty! What a cute couple.

I’m sure the person who wrote it, probably a boomer like Grandma, was just trying to be kind. But

I feel sick reading it, because I know Scott will have read it too. Scott and I aren't a couple. Seeing him again after this will be totally awkward. And the first day at school tomorrow *is* going to be hell, for both of us. Nash *will* make sure we start the school year off as Dottie Lottie and Dottie Scotty. If he sees it, he'll use that "cute couple" comment against us. And he *will* see it.

"After all this," I say, "Scott won't want to have anything to do with me."

"I'm so sorry," Grandma says. She gets up from her desk and sits on her bed, patting the space beside her. As I sit she says, "I'm sure that once things die down, Scott will forget all about this. You two have been friends since kindergarten. This video isn't going to end your friendship."

"But what other people say about us might." I look down at my phone. "I should have never posted it. Or pushed you into doing that interview."

“I knew what I was getting into,” Grandma says.

But I’m the one who has to do something about it. I lower my voice so Mom won’t hear me from the kitchen. “Listen, can you take me out on the boat today? You know the best places to spot Dottie. I need to get a much better video of it.”

Grandma shakes her head. “You heard what your mother said. She doesn’t want you posting anything more about this.”

“I know. But I have to do this, Grandma. For you. For Scott. For me.”

“Your mother will never allow it.”

“So we don’t tell her,” I say. “Or tell her we’re going fishing. She’s going grocery shopping this morning, anyway.”

“Lottie—”

“Please, Grandma. I don’t want to start the school year as Dottie Lottie. If I get a really good video, one that clearly shows the lake monster, then maybe I

won't have to. People will be forced to believe us. Besides," I add, "this will be a chance to try out the binoculars you bought me."

She thinks about that for a moment. "Okay," she finally says. "I'll take you to Dungeon Island, where most of my sightings have been. There's an underwater cave there. That's how the island got its name. People thought of the cave as a dungeon. I think Dottie lives in there."

I stand up. "Perfect. I'll pack us a lunch and get my drone."

But before I leave the room, I hear a knock on the front door. "Charlotte," Mom calls from the kitchen, "there's someone here to see you."

Grandma pulls back the curtain to look out her bedroom window. "Who *is* that?" she asks.

I join her to see a guy standing on our porch. He's got a beard and a nose ring. His T-shirt reads *Mr. Monster* and, under that, *CryptidLand*.

"I think he's a reporter," I say.

Grandma raises one eyebrow. "He's a reporter?"

"*CryptidLand* is a YouTube channel. A show. I think he's the host." I've heard of it, though I haven't seen it. It's all about Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster and other cryptids—animals scientists don't believe exist.

"Remember what your mother said," Grandma warns me. "No more interviews."

"I know."

When I meet the guy at the front door, Mom stands right behind me.

"Charlotte?" the guy says.

"Yes?"

"I hope you don't mind me popping in like this," he says. "But as soon as I saw your video online yesterday, I jumped in my van and drove all night." He looks back at his van, which has the *CryptidLand* logo painted across its side. "I was hoping to get

out on the water right away," he says, "while Dottie is still active." He holds up his camera. "It would be amazing to shoot some footage of it myself."

"How did you find us?" Mom asks him.

"I saw this beach on that interview you did with Tracy Robins of *Dorothy Lake News*." He waves at two figures on the beach. Nash and Carter wave back. "Your neighbors were good enough to point out your house."

"They shouldn't have done that," Mom says.

The guy holds his hand out to me. "I'm glad to meet the famous Dottie Lottie."

Dottie Lottie. I cross my arms, refusing to shake his hand.

"I'm sorry," Mom says. "Who are you?"

The man withdraws his hand. "I'm Ozzy Longbottom," he says, so quietly he almost whispers.

"What was that?" I ask, not quite believing what I heard.

He clears his throat and says it again, louder. "Ozzy Longbottom." He points at his T-shirt. "Otherwise known as Mr. Monster."

"*Mr. Monster?*" Mom asks.

If my name were Ozzy Longbottom, I think I'd switch it to Mr. Monster too.

"It's my handle on my YouTube channel. Anyway, I see you have a boat." He points at the beach, at Grandma's powerboat, which is big enough for four people to ride in. "I was hoping I could go out on the water with you," Ozzy says to me. "I want to film and interview you as you hunt for Dottie. You and your grandmother. Dottie Donna, is it?" He cranes his neck to look into the house at Grandma as she drinks a cup of coffee behind Mom.

"No," Mom says firmly. "Charlotte doesn't want any part of your show."

"The last interview didn't go so well," I say, trying to explain.

“But we could take all the time you need,” Ozzy says. “I would get your approval before airing the interview.”

Mom steps up beside me. “You’ve got your answer. So if you’ll excuse us...” She tries to steer me back inside the house.

But Ozzy holds the door open to talk to me rather than Mom. “Please. If you’d just give me an hour or two out on the water—”

“Maybe we should do it,” I say to Mom. “If Ozzy films Dottie, and he airs the footage on his show, then people will believe us.”

“I said no,” Mom says. Then, to Ozzy, she adds, “You need to go now. Or should I call the police?”

Ozzy holds up his hands and takes a step back. “Okay, okay. No need to go there.”

Then he fishes a business card out of his pocket and hands it to me. “If you change your mind,” he says, “give me a call.”

“She won’t,” Mom says. She grabs the card from me and, after closing the door, throws it in the garbage.

A few minutes later, when she’s not looking, I pull Ozzy’s business card out of the garbage and slip it into my hoodie pocket. You never know when a monster hunter’s phone number will come in handy.

Chapter Eight

As soon as Mom drives away to go grocery shopping, I leave a note on the kitchen table to say we're out on the lake. Then Grandma and I throw our gear into the boat and push off. Our plan is to head to Dungeon Island. But even though it's still early in the day, we're not the only ones out on the water. In fact, there are way more boats than usual, especially for this time of day.

“What’s going on?” I ask Grandma. “Is there some kind of fishing derby?”

Grandma slows, then turns off the engine as we take a closer look. Many of the boats are just sitting in the water. But the people in them aren’t fishing. They’re scanning the water through binoculars and taking images with their cell phones. And most of the boats are gathered in the bay right where I took the video.

“They’re looking for Dottie,” I say. Like we are. “Are all these people here because I posted the video?”

“I’m afraid so,” Grandma says. “But I doubt the creature is in that bay now. This many boats would have scared her away.”

One of the women in a nearby boat points at us. “Is that Dottie Donna?”

“And Dottie Lottie!” the man with her cries. “Where’s your boyfriend, Dottie Scotty?”

Other boaters hear and turn to look. I pull my hood over my head.

“Hey,” one of them calls out. “Where’s the best place to see Dottie? Should we just hang out here in this bay?”

“Let’s get out of here,” I say to Grandma.

She fires up the engine.

But when we speed away, a few of the others start their boats and follow. “Why are they chasing us?” I ask, raising my voice over the noise of the engine.

“I imagine they think we’ll lead them to Dottie.”

“We’ve got to lose them,” I say.

“Hold on!”

I grab the side of the boat as she races down the shoreline. The other boats are as fast, but the drivers don’t know the lake like Grandma does. She’s lived here her whole life. Once we’re just past a rocky outcropping, she pulls a sharp turn back to the shoreline. Then she tucks the boat behind some large rocks, hiding us. The other boaters zip right past.

“We’ll lie low for a few minutes,” Grandma says. “When we’re sure no one is following, we’ll head back out to the island.”

“I don’t think we’re going to find the monster,” I say. “With all those boats on the water...”

“The noise may well scare off Dottie,” Grandma says. “It must be terrifying for the creature. All those propellers.”

“I never thought of that before,” I say. “How Dottie would be scared of humans.” I only thought about how scared I would be if the creature swam in the water below me.

“Human activity is very dangerous for any animal living in the water,” Grandma says. “I’ve often thought I should have kept quiet about my sightings of Dottie. After seeing all these boaters out here looking for her, I’m sure of it. We need to protect her from the propellers, the noise, the people. I won’t do another interview.”

“But Grandma, we need to do at least one more. People have to see that we’re not—” I stop there as I think of all the mean things people have posted about Grandma and me. And about Scott.

“I know what I saw, Lottie. You know what you saw. Don’t let anyone tell you different. Not even your mother.”

“But I’m not even sure what I saw anymore.”

She scans my face. “So that’s what this trip to the island is about. You’re hoping to prove you saw Dottie, to yourself as much as to others.”

“I guess.”

“I understand,” she says. “When people doubt me, I start to doubt myself too.” She grips the wheel of the boat with both hands. “Well, I guess we better get out there and find the monster.”

Grandma steers the boat out of our hiding place. Once she sees that the coast is clear, she revs up the engine, and we’re off.

I always love being out on the water. The smell of the lake. The feel of the wind on my face, through my hair. The clear sky above and deep blue water below. I feel free here.

When we finally reach Dungeon Island, Grandma steers the boat into the inlet near the underwater entrance to the cave and turns off the engine.

I pull my drone from my backpack and start it. It lifts above our heads, and I fly it out over the water. On my phone we see what the drone sees—me and Grandma sitting in the boat. Then the dark mouth of the underwater cave that locals call the dungeon.

We wait. After about half an hour, my battery light comes on, signaling the drone is low on power. I brought my three extra batteries and the charging dock with me, which can plug into Grandma's boat. As long as I always keep one of the batteries charging, I can fly all day if I want to. I bring the drone back to

the boat, change the battery and lift it back into the air.

As the morning passes and the sun rises higher in the sky, I swap out the battery again and again. The days are still hot, even now, on Labor Day. But it won't be long before the days get cooler and fall is here.

And because this is the last day before school starts, it seems like summer is already over. I dread the thought of returning to classes tomorrow. I know everyone is going to call me Dottie Lottie and make fun of Scott and Grandma—unless I can get a way better image of the monster, one that will make everyone believe in Dottie.

“What's that?” Grandma asks as I put a fresh battery into my drone. At first I only see the hazy entrance to the underwater cave. But then something moves in the water.

Something big.

Chapter Nine

I scramble to get my drone back up in the air and fly it over the cave entrance to get a better look. Then, with a splash, the creature surfaces. Dottie! There's that strange dinosaur head, the long neck, round body and flippers. It turns to peer at us in our boat, and there's curiosity in its eyes. This animal is smart. It would have to be, to have avoided humans for so many years.

“Oh my gosh!” Grandma whispers, delighted.
“She’s beautiful!”

And she *is* beautiful, in a spooky sort of way. Mom and I went on a whale-watching tour last year. The feeling I had then, seeing a whale breach, is the same feeling I have now. Wonder. Fear.

I check to make sure I’ve been recording all this.

“She has scars on her side,” Grandma says.

“Where?” I ask.

She points. “There, where her neck meets her body.”

As the creature moves up and down in the water, I see several cuts along her body. Most are healed, but there is a fresh wound there too. “She must’ve been hit by boat propellers,” I say.

“Yes,” Grandma says. “Several times.”

Boaters, speeding along, may have thought they had hit a branch or log in the water. When they’d actually hit Dottie.

“That cut looks like it could be from today,” I say. “Is that our fault? We’re the reason all those boaters are out here to hunt for Dottie. One of them must have hit her.”

“I’m afraid so,” says Grandma.

And then I see a second shape in the water. But much smaller. “Grandma, look! Look!”

She cups her face with both hands in surprise. “Dottie has a young one! Maybe that explains why we’ve been seeing so much of the creature. She’s taking chances she wouldn’t take otherwise, to feed her baby.”

We both watch, stunned, as the little creature swims up to its mother. It bunts her with its head like a kitten looking for milk. But, of course, this animal can’t be a mammal. It wouldn’t feed her baby milk.

“They care for their young!” Grandma says. “I thought that if she *was* a dinosaur, she would lay eggs and leave them.”

I look past the animals into the distance, to the many boats out on the lake.

“But all those propellers on the boats,” I say. “If that baby gets too close, like its mom has—”

“It could very easily be injured,” Grandma says. “Or killed.”

“And it *would* be my fault,” I say. I feel racked with guilt. “That video I posted brought all those people out to look for Dottie.”

Then I see one of those boats heading directly toward us. I put down my phone to pick up my binoculars, leaving the drone to hover on its own in the air above us. I groan as I bring the binoculars into focus and see who is in the boat. It’s Ozzy—Mr. Monster—in Nash and Carter’s boat. Carter is old enough to operate the vessel. Ozzy must have paid our neighbors to take him out.

“What is it?” Grandma asks.

I point. “See for yourself.”

She pulls out her spotting scope.

“We’ve got to keep them away from Dottie and the baby,” she says. “If that man sees them or gets a good video, even more people will come out here in boats.”

“Maybe we can scare the animals back into the cave before Ozzy gets here.” I clap my hands. “Go, Dottie! Get out of here!”

But while the creatures duck back under the water, they continue to hang out near the entrance to the cave.

“We’ll have to use the boat to herd them into the cave,” I say.

Grandma starts the engine and quickly turns toward the mouth of the cave. I fly the drone above us so I can see where the creatures are and keep us a safe distance from them.

As Grandma circles the cave area, the two lake monsters separate as the mother ducks into the

cave below the island. I imagine she hopes the baby will follow. But the baby seems to lose sight of its mother. Confused, it starts to follow us.

“Cut the engine!” I shout. “Quick.” Grandma immediately turns it off so the propellers won’t hurt the animal. “Look.” I point at the dark shape of the little lake monster following closely behind us. “It doesn’t know it shouldn’t follow us,” I say.

“If it follows the other boats, it could be killed,” Grandma says.

“And there is a swarm of boaters out there that would want to get *very* close.” All those monster hunters.

We both look back at Ozzy in Nash and Carter’s boat. They are almost on us.

“You’ve got to keep them away from this cave,” Grandma says. “And quickly. Do you still have that YouTuber’s number?” So she saw me take Mr. Monster’s business card out of the garbage after Mom threw it away.

I bring the drone down and pull Ozzy's business card from my pocket. As I punch in the numbers on my phone, I ask Grandma, "But how do I convince him to leave? How am I going to stop everyone from hunting Dottie?"

She holds my gaze. "I think you already know," she says.

I do. There's only one way to stop all of this. But I don't like it.

Chapter Ten

I put my phone on speaker so Grandma can hear. Then I watch through my binoculars as Ozzy, aka Mr. Monster, takes my call in Nash and Carter's boat.

"Hello?" he says.

"It's Charlotte." I wave at him. Nash and Carter's boat isn't far away from us now. In fact, Carter is slowing it as they approach the island. I look back

to see the baby is still hanging around. I've got to make this quick. "Look, Ozzy. I have a confession to make."

"Oh?"

"The reason my mom didn't want me to be on your show—" I clear my throat. "The video is a fake."

I hear a long sigh on the other end. "Not *again*," he says.

"It was a joke." I glance at Grandma. "Scott and I saw a bumpy log in the water and took a video of it. I posted it, saying it was Dottie, as a prank. Then things just kind of got out of hand."

I cringe at the lie. Scott will be mad. I'm making him look like a liar too.

"Then why are you out here filming with that drone?" Ozzy asks me.

Grandma mimes catching a fish with a rod. "We're looking for fish," I say. "That's what I was doing when I filmed that log in the first place."

"Fishing."

“Yes.”

“Where are your poles?” Ozzy asks.

Grandma opens the boat’s equipment box. She pulls out a fishing rod and holds it up. Grandma always has her fishing rod handy.

As Carter cuts the engine to drift toward the inlet, I can see Ozzy’s face is red. “How could you *do that?*” he says. “I had a whole show built around your Dottie video. And now you tell me it was just a hoax?”

I hear Nash call out, “I told you it had to be a fake.”

“I’m sorry,” I say to Ozzy. “But like I said, it was only meant as a joke.”

He holds up a hand in frustration. “I’ll be letting everyone know your video is a fake, even that reporter from *Dorothy Lake News*. You can count on it.”

I *am* counting on it, but I don’t tell him that. “I’m sorry,” I say again. And I am. When I posted that video, I had no idea things would spiral out of control like this.

Grandma circles her hand to get me to speed things up as Nash and Carter's boat enters the inlet. They are so close I don't need my phone to talk to Ozzy anymore. I can't let them get any closer or they'll see the baby lake monster.

"There's no point in following us," I call out to them. "Grandma and I are just out for a day of fishing before school starts. You need to leave us alone."

"Fine," Ozzy says. "Clearly there's nothing to see here." He waves a hand to get Carter to take him back, and Carter turns the boat around.

"See you in school tomorrow, *Dottie Lottie*," Nash calls. The way he says it, snickering, makes it sound like a threat. I'm so *not* looking forward to school.

Grandma and I watch them speed off. "Oh, thank goodness," she says. "I was sure they were going to see the creature."

"Now we've got to get this baby back to its mother," I say.

Once we're certain it's far enough away from the boat, Grandma starts the engine. Alarmed by the noise, the little creature swims quickly away from us. But in the wrong direction. I start my drone and fly it over the water so I can see where it is. I point away from the island. "Go that way," I say to Grandma.

Following my directions, she steers the boat. On my phone I can see the baby moving away from us, back toward the cave.

"Good," I tell Grandma. "Now the other way."

She brings the boat around and crisscrosses back and forth in front of the island. Finally the little lake monster flicks its tail and disappears into the cave entrance.

"Phew," I say, sitting back in the boat seat. "Hopefully, they'll both stay in the cave until it's dark and everyone has gone home."

"We should back off," Grandma says. "We don't want that young animal getting used to humans and their dangerous boats."

Both of us watch the water to make sure the mother and her baby aren't anywhere near the boat as Grandma eases us away from the cave. Then she cuts the engine, and I bring my drone back down to the boat. We float quietly near the mouth of the inlet, watching in case the creatures resurface.

I open our lunch bag and hand Grandma a sandwich. As I unwrap my own, I say, "Let's stay for as long as we can. To head off any other boaters."

"Someone *will* get a clear video of Dottie sooner or later," Grandma says.

"I know. But maybe we can help to make it later. I don't want that baby to get hurt. Or worse."

We eat our sandwiches in silence for a time.

"What are you going to tell Scott?" Grandma asks.

"I guess I'll have to explain what happened. That I told Ozzy the video was a hoax. That I was trying to protect the animals."

"You think that's a good idea?" she asks. "You're taking a big risk if you tell him Dottie and her baby

are here. He may well tell everyone about it. Or try to get a video to share himself. I think the fewer people we tell, the better.”

I think about that. It doesn't feel right to keep this from my best friend, but Grandma has a point.

I play the new clip of the mother swimming with her baby in the water. The image is so clear. I'm almost tempted to post it again. But I won't. If I do, I risk the animals' lives.

But if *I'm* thinking about posting the video, wouldn't Scott think about it too? If he did, everything would start all over again. All the boats in the water. The mean comments. The annoying nicknames.

“Do you think you'll ever get used to being called Dottie Donna?” I ask.

“Oh, at first I hated it,” she says.

“Just like I hate Dottie Lottie.”

“Yes, but I'm learning to embrace it. Maybe I'll get *Dottie Donna* printed on a T-shirt in big bold letters.

Sort of like that YouTuber's T-shirt that says *Mr. Monster.*"

"Oh, Grandma, please don't."

She grins. "But why not?" she asks. "I'm a member of a select club, one of the very few who have seen Dottie. I think I should wear that proudly. Don't you?"

Chapter Eleven

After Grandma and I secure the boat, we find Mom waiting for us at the door. It's well after supper hour. We spent more time out on the lake than I thought.

"Where were you?" Mom asks from the doorway.
"I was worried."

"I answered your texts. I let you know we were on our way home."

"Two hours ago," Mom says.

“Sorry,” I say. “I guess we lost track of time.” I hold up my phone. “But Mom, you’ve got to see—”

She turns to my grandmother. “Mama, I asked you not to take Charlotte out on your silly monster hunts.”

Grandma smiles. “Before you give me heck for that, you may want to look at Lottie’s latest video.”

I play my new footage of the mother and baby lake monsters for Mom to see.

But she doesn’t even look. She just waves it away. “I’m not going to waste my time looking at yet another video of a log. Honestly, Charlotte.” She turns back to Grandma. “And haven’t the last couple of days taught you anything?”

“But you don’t understand,” I say, holding up my phone again.

“I do understand,” Mom says. “Your grandmother has pulled you into her obsession with this monster. I should have put an end to it a long time ago. Well, I’m putting an end to it now.”

“But Mom, if you just look at the video, you’ll see—”

Mom steps to the side, inviting me into the house. “Come inside and wash up. Supper is waiting for you.”

“But Mom! Just look!”

“I said, come inside.”

I slip past her and into the bathroom. As I wash my hands, I can hear Mom and Grandma arguing in the kitchen. They are trying to keep their voices low, and I can’t hear what they’re saying. But I can tell Mom is mad.

When I come out, they both suddenly stop talking. Grandma and I sit at the table as Mom serves up spaghetti and sauce. We eat in silence. Or *almost* silence. I can’t help slurping when I eat spaghetti.

After I finish eating, I try to show Mom my new video again. But she still refuses to look at it.

“Mom, *please* just look.”

“I said no!”

Grandma, angry, pushes her chair back. “For heaven’s sake, Anna. Just take a look at what your daughter is trying to show you! You should be proud of her for what she did. It’s something no one else has done.”

“I’m supposed to be proud of her taking a video of a floating log? Or was it a wave this time?” Mom snorts. “I’ve heard all this before.” She points at Grandma. “From you.”

Grandma lets out a long sigh. “Honestly, Anna. You can be so stubborn.”

“You’re one to talk!”

Grandma points at my phone. “If you’d only look at the darn video.”

Mom waves a hand to dismiss her. “And if you would only stop trying to drag my daughter into your ridiculous monster hunt.”

“Stop it!” I say. “Both of you, stop it!”

Mom and Grandma both cross their arms and look in opposite directions. Finally Grandma says,

“I need some air.” She gets up and goes outside through the screen door.

Mom rubs her brow as if she has a headache. “I’m sorry, Charlotte,” she says. “I shouldn’t have let my temper get the better of me.”

I shake my head. “I don’t understand why you’re so mad at Grandma and me. Why does Grandma’s search for Dottie bother you so much? Are you really *that* embarrassed of her?” *Of me?*

“It’s not like that,” she says.

“Then what is it?”

Mom looks over at a photo hanging on the wall, of her and Grandma when Mom was ten. They are in Grandma’s boat, both of them smiling. “Did you know I used to go out monster hunting with your grandma?” she says.

“You *did?*”

She stands to take the photo off the wall, looking down at it as she speaks. “I shared Mama’s fascination

with Dottie for a long time. I even wore a lake-monster costume for Halloween.”

I laugh as I imagine my mother dressed like that.

“But then I grew older,” Mom says. “And the other kids made fun of me for it. I started to see how others saw your grandma. Her interest in Dottie made her seem...strange.”

“You *are* ashamed of her.” I slump in my chair. “Does that mean I embarrass you too now?”

“No, honey. I’m always proud of you.” She looks back down at the photo of her and Grandma. “I just don’t want to lose you.”

“Why do you think you’d lose me?”

Mom puts the photo face down on the table and sits across from me. “Because I lost my mom, your grandma.”

“No you didn’t. She’s right here.”

“Is she?” Mom glances at the screen door. It’s getting dark outside. “Honey, for as long as I can

remember, your grandma has spent every spare moment on the beach or on the water with that darn scope, looking for Dottie. That didn't change when I refused to go out with her. I felt—" She pauses. "I felt abandoned, like she didn't want me."

"I didn't know," Grandma says.

We both turn to see my grandmother at the screen door. She's heard every word my mother said.

"Anna, really, I had no idea you felt that way," she says, opening the door.

"I just wanted to spend time with you," Mom says. "I was your child. And you were more interested in hunting for monsters than being with me."

"Oh, Anna, that's not true," Grandma says. "Not at all. I'm so sorry if you felt that way. When I'm out there looking for Dottie, I sometimes get forgetful."

"You get *focused*," Mom says. "All you think about is that creature. And it doesn't even exist."

“But she *does* exist,” I say. “I can prove it to you.” I whip out my phone. “Just look, Mom. You can see for yourself.”

Mom tears up. “No. I won’t lose you like this. I want you to stop hunting monsters right now.” Then she rushes to her room.

I turn to my grandmother, confused. “I don’t get it,” I say. “Why won’t she look at the video? Why is she mad at me?”

Grandma wraps an arm around my shoulder. “She’s not angry with you,” she says. “She’s mad at *me*.”

“But she wouldn’t be, would she? If she saw this video?”

“We’ll try to show her again later,” Grandma says. “In the meantime, let’s wash these dishes.”

As she starts to collect our supper plates, I take a last look at the clip I shot this morning. There’s the lake monster mother and baby, clear as day. And if

I zoom in, I can see the scars on the mother's body from old wounds.

It seems like my mom has a few old wounds of her own.

Chapter Twelve

Tuesday morning, I stand in front of the school entrance, trying to gather the courage to go inside. I'm dressed in jeans, a striped T-shirt and an oversized hoodie. So I can hide. Because I have a pretty good idea of what's coming.

Finally I put up my hood and enter the school, head down. I keep my eyes to the floor as I walk the crowded hallway. But Nash still sees me. I'm sure

he's been watching and waiting so he can take a few shots at me.

"Hey, Dottie Lottie!" he calls out. "Catch any lake monsters on your fishing trip?" A couple of kids hanging out with him laugh.

For a brief second I think of pulling out my phone. I could show Nash the second video of the lake monster and her baby. Just to wipe that smug look off his face.

But if I do, word will definitely get out. Even more people will be out on the lake, looking for the creatures. There will be more boats. More propellers that could hurt the animals. And, of course, more people talking trash about Scott, Grandma and me online.

I keep walking.

"Your video was all a hoax, huh?" Nash yells after me. "Like we didn't already know." Then he starts to chant, "Dottie Lottie, Dottie Lottie, Dottie Lottie..."

Others pick it up, until the annoying nickname echoes down the hall.

I flee to my locker and stuff my backpack inside. Then I stand there behind the open locker door with my head pressed against the shelf. Maybe I should just go home.

But then I hear Nash start up a new chant. “Dottie Scotty, Dottie Scotty, Dottie Scotty...”

I peer around my locker door and see Scott, walking tall like he’s ignoring the kids chanting at him. But his face is grim. He hates it as much as I do.

I wave him over. “Hey,” I say. “Just ignore them.”

“Kind of hard to do that,” he says.

The “Dottie Scotty” calls continue for another few seconds, then trail off. Down the hall, Nash smirks at us. He makes some joke at our expense that the kids around him laugh at. Then he calls out, “Hey, Dottie Lottie and Dottie Scotty. You make a cute couple!”

Crap. I knew that comment would come back to haunt us.

“I’m sorry about that—” I start.

Scott cuts me off. “It’s not your fault,” he says.

But so much of all this *was* my fault. I close my locker and pull back my hood. “You saw Ozzy’s episode about my video on *CryptidLand*?” I ask him, and he nods. I had sent Scott the link earlier. Ozzy had called us out, saying the video was a prank. There was even a notice to that effect on the *Dorothy Lake News* site. So Ozzy must have already contacted Tracy too.

“I was the one who told Ozzy it was a hoax,” I say. “I figured saying the video was fake would be the quickest way to make people lose interest. I hope you’re not mad.”

Scott looks down at his shoe scuffing the floor. “I get it. I just wanted it to be over too.” He looks back at Nash. “I thought being in the news would be fun, you know? Instead it just made us fair

game for idiots like Nash.” Scott shrugs. “Anyway, who knows? Maybe what we saw that day *was* only a log.”

I look around to make sure no one is listening and lower my voice. “It wasn’t a log,” I say.

“How can you be sure?” he asks.

I pull out my phone and, turning my back to the kids nearby, I play the second video of the lake monsters. Scott’s eyes widen as he watches the baby splashing beside its mother in the water.

“You can’t tell anyone about this,” I say.

“Are you kidding? We’ve got to tell *everyone!*”

I shush him and lower my voice to a near whisper. “After our interview there were boats all over the water, people looking for Dottie. The boat propellers are dangerous. The mother already has scars from being hit. If too many people go out to look for Dottie, both animals could be killed.”

“I don’t know, Charlotte. With something big like this, we’ve got to tell people—”

“Seriously, Scott. They must already be nearly extinct or we’d see more of them, and more often. We’re talking about the end of a whole species. Promise me you won’t tell anyone about it. Or post anything online. Those animals’ lives are at stake.”

He runs his hand over his mouth as he thinks about that. “Yeah, okay. I’ll keep it to myself. I’m so done with the whole Dottie Scotty thing anyway. But you’ve got to take me out on the boat. I want to see the baby lake monster for myself. Deal?”

“Deal.”

Scott looks up the hall at Nash. “It’s tempting, though, isn’t it?” he asks. “To show Nash this video. Just to shut him up.”

“I’m not sure I care anymore,” I say. “We’ve seen Dottie. We know she’s real.” So maybe it doesn’t matter what other people—or at least strangers—think.

And yet it does matter to me what Mom thinks. Of Grandma. Of me.

Chapter Thirteen

The following Saturday, Scott, Grandma, Mom and I are in the boat on the water. The lake is calm, and there are far fewer boats out this weekend.

Mom still refuses to watch the new video of Dottie and her baby, and it's killing me. But Grandma and I have come up with a plan. We're taking Mom to Dungeon Island, hoping she'll see the animals for herself. If they don't make an appearance, I'll trick

Mom into viewing the clip. I'll say the drone got a great shot of us having a picnic.

And that's all Mom thinks this is—a picnic, at Grandma's invitation. So we can all spend time together. Scott knows what we're up to, but I've asked him not to say anything. He's just hoping to catch a glimpse of Dottie and the baby.

As we reach the island, Grandma cuts the engine and we coast to shore. But not too close to the underwater cave entrance. As she said, we don't want the animals getting used to humans. And we certainly don't want to accidentally hurt them with our boat's propeller.

Once onshore, we all climb out of the boat. I grab my backpack, and Scott carries our picnic basket.

After a short climb we sit on the rocks above the cave entrance. As Grandma pours coffee for her and Mom, I pull out my drone. I set it on a rock

and then lift it into the sky, to hover over the cave entrance. The lake is calm, so I can see several feet down into the water.

“See anything?” Grandma asks. Both she and Scott are hanging over my shoulders, looking down at the screen of my phone.

“What do you expect to see?” Mom asks.

“They may already be out on the water,” Grandma says. “Now that there aren’t so many boats.”

“Who?” Mom asks. Then she makes a sour face. “You came out here to look for Dottie again, didn’t you? After everything we talked about last weekend, you still want to hunt for that monster instead of spending time with me.”

“No, Anna, it’s not like that,” Grandma says. “We just wanted you to share the experience. To see—”

“Look!” Scott cries.

I turn back to the lake and see two shadows under the water. Then there’s a splash.

“Mom!” I say, pointing. “Mom, look!” There in the water below us is Dottie, her head surfacing. And then the baby pops up. They both turn to us.

“Oh my god,” Mom says. “Is that—?”

“Dottie,” Grandma says, nodding, “has a young one.”

“This can’t be happening,” Mom says. It was what Scott said when he first saw the creature. And I know what they mean. Seeing these animals is magical, as strange as seeing a dinosaur walking down the street. I can’t quite believe my eyes. Yet there they are.

“Do you believe us now?” I ask Mom.

She is too stunned to answer. She just stares at the two animals with her hand over her mouth. Then she turns to me. “Are you recording this?”

“Of course.”

“You have *got* to post this video,” Mom says. “You *have* to!”

Scott, Grandma and I all laugh.

Mom grins. “Okay, okay,” she says. “I admit it. I was wrong about Dottie. But you have got to show this to the world!”

I shake my head. “No way, Mom. We can’t post this video.”

“And we can’t tell anyone else,” Grandma adds.

“Why not?” Mom asks.

“If we did, boaters would be all over this cave,” I say. “And their propellers—”

“Would endanger the young one.” Mom nods slowly as she watches the creatures. “I understand.” Then she turns to my grandmother. “But this is incredible.” She takes Grandma’s hand. “I get it now. Why you spend so much time looking for them. They’re amazing. Maybe I’ll come out with you more often, to see them again.”

Grandma wipes a tear away, and Mom hugs her. Then Mom wraps an arm around me. Together we

turn back to the water and watch as the mother and baby swim out into the lake, their bodies speeding through the water.

“Look at them go!” I cry.

Author's Note

The lake monster and location in this story are made up. But, of course, there have been real-world sightings of many lake monsters in Canada, the United States and around the world. There's Bessie in Lake Erie, Ogopogo in Okanagan Lake, Shuswaggi in Shuswap Lake, Manipogo in Lake Manitoba, Champ in Lake Champlain and Tahoe Tessie in Lake Tahoe, just to name a few. And then, of course, there's the most famous of all, Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster in the Scottish Highlands.

Some claim these creatures are living fossils—prehistoric water dinosaurs or whales that somehow survived extinction. That may sound unlikely, but animals we've thought to be extinct are sometimes found alive. One example is the coelacanth, a fish that was supposed to have died out with the dinosaurs but was found alive in 1938.

Others think that when people report seeing a lake monster, they are actually seeing other large aquatic animals or fish, like sturgeon. Or maybe something entirely different. A row of ducks. A rogue wave. A bumpy log in the water.

And yet many people around the world *have* claimed they've seen a lake monster. Are they *all* wrong? Or is there some unknown creature lurking in the deep? Scientists continue to find new aquatic animals on our planet, though usually in the deep ocean. So who knows—maybe there's a monster diving under your feet as you swim in a lake near you.

Will anyone ever come up with real proof that lake monsters exist? I hope so. In the meantime, I'll keep my phone handy when I'm enjoying a day on the water, in case one pays me a visit.

Acknowledgments

I offer my thanks to my son Graham Anderson-Dargatz for his help in sculpting this story, and to my editor, Doeun Rivendell, for refining and polishing it.



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