

CHAPTER SAMPLER



THE TRUTH IS
ABOUT TO SURFACE.

SPOTTING DOTTIE

GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ

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ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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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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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.