

LITTLE WONDER

A one-hour historical drama series

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BASED ON:

"Little Wonder, The Fabulous Story of Lottie Dod, The World's First Female Sports Superstar," by Sasha Abramsky

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SERIES LOGLINE

Little Wonder tells the true story of Charlotte "Lottie" Dod, the first female sports superstar (1880s-1908) who defied gender discrimination to become one of the greatest athletes of all time. In 1960, on the night Lottie passes away, her nurse, Celine Armstrong, a single mother and Trinidadian immigrant, cares for Lottie. Both women share tales of parental rejection, loss of their true loves, and triumph over a system skewed against them. Lottie's story inspires Celine's athletic daughter to never give up hope.

PILOT SUMMARY: **Blaze A Trail!**

It is 1896, Switzerland. Two world famous female lovers are breaking world records in ice climbing in the alps of San Moritz. They are at the top of their game, one a world class photographer, and the other, Lottie Dod, our heroine, the world's most famous sports superstar. In the alps of San Moritz they can be free from the restraints of English society.

It is 1960, England. After picking up her talented tennis-playing, 11-year-old daughter, Celine, a 29-year-old black nurse, meets her new patient, an elderly Lottie Dod, on what turns out to be the eve of Lottie's death. Through Lottie's scrapbook of memories over the course of the series, Celine is able to piece together the story of Lottie's incredible life and accomplishments. Lottie's story of overcoming obstacles inspires Celine and her daughter who face discrimination.

It is 1883, England. DOD is 11 and training for tennis at the family mansion. Margaret, Lottie's mother, has deep hatred towards her. She blames her for the disfiguring and brutal childbirth and the loss of her next child in infancy. Since her husband Joseph's death, Margaret keeps all her children cloistered in the family mansion.

Lottie has a close relationships with the house maid, Mary, a surrogate mother to her, and to her three siblings, especially Annie, who is also her coach.

In the next few scenes Lottie is 3 with her loving, affectionate, feminist father who inspires her. He is a contrast to her mother who rejects and despises her. Lottie is 7-8 and her resolve and determination with sports and training become evident. Her father's unwavering support is strong, right before his untimely death when she is 8.

The rest of the pilot Lottie is 13. She hates school work. She is an accomplished artist, singer, and advanced piano player. We learn about the importance of one piece in particular, Beethoven/Liszt's "Eroica," which becomes her anthem, the driving force in all her athletics. The music takes the role of a character in her sports. Lottie becomes a media darling and is constantly in the newspapers.

She and Annie plot against their mother and start making Lottie's name on the tennis public stage, the Northern Championships, the gateway to Wimbledon, which has just allowed women to participate.

In the semi-finals, Lottie wins everything: singles, doubles, mixed. Journalists describe just how pioneering her technique is. They also criticize her traditionally male style of play as well as her physique. She is becoming so famous she has a big fan base. Even Queen Victoria hears of her. A young, modern-thinking journalist, Peter, will develop a crush on her. Annie's secret love affair with Ernest Worssam becomes clearer. William suffers as a closeted gay. Anthony is sickly but a master chess champion and a flirt with the ladies.

At the Northern finals, Lottie wins the doubles with her sister, Annie, but then experiences her first losses. One in mixed doubles with a world-class tennis player. The other, the most demoralizing, is against the reigning champion, the dazzling Maud Watson. The loss is profoundly impacting. Lottie is devastated. But through the help of her siblings and her own will and confidence, Lottie gets a resolve and determination to get to Wimbledon.

Celine stays late at work to take care of Lottie and hear the rest of her incredible tale.

EPISODE 2 SUMMARY: Windrush

May 17, 1948, 17-year-old Celine is on a small fishing boat on the rough seas traveling on the five night journey from her home in Trinidad to Jamaica. She has given the last of her wages from her job in garment factory to the surly, kind-hearted Captain. She has been thrown out of her strict Roman-Catholic home because she is unmarried and pregnant.

Her belly just barely protrudes. She is flooded with memories of her family, her siblings and the school friend who raped her. The Captain opens her eyes to a new way of thinking about God and religion and teaches her his philosophy that love conquers all.

Once in the port of Kingston, and without a ticket to board the Windrush, Celine quickly devises a plan to stowaway. She sees three Chinese immigrants, steals the uniform of the ship's first class server while the women bathe in the public showers. Hiding in the toilet stall, she overhears the workers talking about the British Nationality Act, where the U.K. provides citizenship to immigrants from Jamaica and Trinidad in exchange for helping to rebuild the country after WWII.

In the nursing home in 1960, Lottie listens to Celine's story. She remembers the famous Windrush Generation and the ship that carried immigrants. Celine confides in Lottie about her rejection by her family and the brutal rape.

Back in 1948, Celine stows away on board the Windrush. Her new mantra is "love conquers all." She uses her amazing memory and uncanny ability to memorize diagrams and maps to navigate the ship. She shows an ability to think on her feet.

Celine meets Bernadete, the ship's cook, a warm-hearted mother figure and Aldwin Roberts AKA Lord Kitchener,* the ship's musician and entertainer, and a future UK recording artist. Aldwin and Bernadete both separately pine for their unrequited loves. Celine meets Ena Sullivan,* (who eventually becomes head of the National Health Service) a Trinidadian nurse who inspires Celine to study medicine. She meets Bert and Doreen Zane* a wealthy mixed-race couple with children who open her eyes to the dangers of judgement and societal expectations.

Later, Celine meets her love interest, Oscar Schwarz, 19, a Holocaust survivor who had been living in Trinidad, and who had also stowed away on the Windrush. It's love at first sight for both of them.

Celine helps Oscar get a new position on board as bus boy.

Celine sees two of the Chinese immigrants on board and hides.

Celine creates her own prayer before bed, taking a lead from the fishing boat Captain.

Back in 1960, Celine shares her story of how she fell in love with Oscar who would have been forbidden by her family. Lottie admits she too was in love in a forbidden relationship. Celine vows to always accept her own daughter and anyone she loves.

Back on board in 1948, Oscar discovers that Celine is pregnant. He doesn't care, given the atrocities he has suffered and the lesson of how short life is.

Doreen Zayne tells Celine how hard it is being a mixed race couple, how the stress caused them to lose a child.

Celine meets Mona Baptiste* a master musician, songwriter and performer, (and a future UK recording star) a truly liberated woman.

Celine gets discovered by one of the Chinese women but gets away just in time.

Celine and Oscar stroll after work on the deck discussing their future. The Chinese women surprise attack them and Oscar, defending Celine, is killed accidentally in a fight.

The ship arrives in England. Celine is in shock.

***Real life passengers of the epic Windrush journey**

EPISODE 3, BATTLE OF THE SEXES

1887-1888, LOTTIE DOD AGE 15-16.

1951, CELINE AGE 20, CATHERINE AGE 3

1887. All of Britain is alive with the celebration of the Queen's Jubilee. Dod is flush with winning three of the best tournaments the Irish Championships, Bath and the Northerns. She is now the undisputed best female tennis player in the world as she heads to Wimbledon. The fans are wild and she wins Wimbledon on her first attempt.

1951. London. Celine is 20. Her daughter, Catherine, is now 3 years old and very physically active. Celine earned her state-sponsored nursing degree in two years and has been working at the Royal London Hospital for one. She moves out of a group home for immigrant women into her first shared apartment with another single mother who cares for Catherine and other children. Catherine's energy level bothers others. Celine worries about how to contain her.

1888. The headlines are dominated by the terrifying acts of Jack the Ripper, who is on a killing spree in London's East End. With that dramatic backdrop, Dod wins her second Wimbledon championships.

1951 The year of the Festival of Britain and a general election returning Winston Churchill to power. The Festival of Britain is described as "one united act of national reassessment...and reaffirmation of faith in the nation's future."

The arts were displayed in a series of country-wide musical and dramatic performances. Achievements in architecture science, technology and industrial design. But people like Celine are not represented. Woman's netball and women's hockey teams are all white. And the Festival of Britain's Miss World Bikini Contest features white women in a world catering to men.

1888. Boldly, at only 16 years old, Lottie has the audacity to challenge three of the best male players of the day - the domineering Renshaw twins, and Scottish champion Harry Grove - to a series of Battles of the Sexes. To the amazement of audiences and journalists, she beats two out of three of them. She thrashes Wimbledon champion William Renshaw in straight sets and also beats Grove. Renshaw gets on his knees and bows to her on the court. Dod solidifies her status as a sporting goddess and is, by now, one of the most famous women in the United Kingdom.

EPISODE 4, ESCAPE FROM EDGEWORTH
1889-1893, LOTTIE DOD AGE 17-21

Dod completes her "hat trick" of Wimbledon in 1889. She's on top of the sporting world, yet deeply unhappy: her home life in Edgeworth is more and more claustrophobic, and after her sister Annie elopes, she is trapped by her mother, who, fearing that she will also flee the family hearth, bars her from traveling to tennis tournaments for the next two years.

1955 Celine is 25. Catherine is 8. Celine is working the exhausting grind of the 88-hour-per-fortnight schedule. Celine still has nightmares about Oscar and sometimes thinks she sees him or the Chinese workers. They still share the dingy apartment with the single mother who babysits other children.

Catherine has taken to tennis training in the local park. She walks by the whites only tennis club and watches top ranked players. She studies the boys' style of play.

1890. Suitors come a-calling, including Peter, the journalist, but Lottie is disinterested. Her cousins are picking up work in the new professions -- as chemists, lawyers, real estate agents and so on - but Lottie and her brothers stay at home, unable to break Margaret's spell.

1955 Celine gets approached by many suitors. But one day, she sees a doctor at the hospital. He is white.

Catherine is getting very good at tennis and a boys' coach invites her to train with them.

1893 Lottie, 21, comes into her inheritance left her in her father's will.

In a fiery scene, she rejects Margaret's entreaties to remain in Edgeworth. Liberated, she heads south to Wimbledon again. The fans pick up where they left off, chanting her name, writing poems and songs in her praise, buying tennis rackets named after her. She wins Wimbledon in 1892 and again 1893, though this last time just by the skin of her teeth.

1955 Celine finds a poster of Lord Kitchener and Mona Baptiste show in London.

Episode 5, **DAREDEVILS IN LOVE**

LATE 1893-1897, LOTTIE DOD AGE 22-25.

1955

Dod has made an abrupt move to retire from tennis while still on top. She reemerges a few months later in the ultra-fashionable Swiss mountain resort town of Saint Moritz, hobnobbing with a galaxy of rich, famous, fashionable, eccentric adventurers from across Europe and the Americas. Her social circle includes counts, dukes, business titans, flamboyant artists, sportsmen and women, and fabled beauties.

1955 Celine reconnects with Alvin and Mona who are now in love and recording artists. Sugar Bum Bum is a hit but with the name changed. Alvin mentions he still sees the Zayne family.

Dod quickly befriends a woman 10 years her senior, Elizabeth Main, also known as Lizzie Le Blanc, who is the world's best known female photographer and mountaineer. Over three winter seasons, Dod learns mountaineering, and, as she and Main become ever-closer, the older woman and her, sometimes alone, sometimes with Anthony and guides in tow, winter-summit several of the Alp's toughest peaks. When climbing alone, Main and Dod leave town in women's clothing, but once out of site put on more functional men's attire to do their ascents.

CELINE goes to a Zayne party. The world they run in feels alien and scary. They are now the social edgy artsy circle in London. There, Celine runs into the handsome white doctor. He recognizes her from the hospital.

In the summers, Dod and Main returns to England. Dod trains even harder at golf and at archery. They take a romantic bicycle trip through Switzerland, Germany, Italy, France and England, with Anthony, and their friend Harold Topham. It's an endurance test. Dod and Main are in love.

Back in San Moritz, Dod begins to delve in to intense ice-skating and tobogganing training. Elizabeth feels ignored, jealous and also afraid for Dod's safety. Dod ignores her warnings.

Celine and the doctor are now dating seriously. He convinces her to move in with him. She hesitates due to her daughter but hates her roommate now.

Dod challenges norms by entering in to the intensely difficult male ice-skating tests, and passing them, and then conquering the notoriously difficult Cresta toboggan, a magnet for many of the world's most daring male athletes of the time. Elizabeth warns her that her petticoats could get caught in the toboggan. Dod narrowly escapes a close call and successfully navigates the run, hurtling along the ice at a faster speed than any other woman on earth has experienced.

Doc boyfriend now live in. He's father figure to Catherine. The Zaynes invite them on a cruise. Right before the cruise, Ena Sullivan comes by hospital to inspect and is delighted to see Celine but then says a weird comment about Celine's boyfriend that suggests he's a womanizer.

For Dod and Main, the route is intensely dramatic, and the photographs taken by Main and by Anthony show the drama of the Grand Tour. The relationship of Dod and Main is on thin ice.

DOC SHOWING SIGNS OF ENDING THE ROMANCE.

EPISODE 6, **MUD SLINGING**

SUMMER 1897-1899, LOTTIE DOD AGE 25-27.

1956

Lottie and her brother Anthony, along with Elizabeth Main and their mountain guide guru Joseph Imboden travel from Switzerland to England, and from England on a steamer ship to Bergen in Norway. Their plans are to spend several months mountaineering in the epic landscape of central Norway. In Bergen, Dod, a keen musician, seeks out the composer Edvard Grieg, whose cabin outside of town has become something of a mecca for music-loving tourists.

On the mountains, they again break records, summiting peaks no women have conquered previously. Several times, they have narrow brushes with death.

On the cruise Doreen drunkenly spurts out a warning about how hard the mixed race relationship is in front of Celine and the doctor.

Celine accidentally stumbles on Bert kissing a man.

Elizabeth and Lottie start squabbling, and in the notes that she is writing up for a long article on the Norway expedition, Elizabeth pens subtle digs at her friend. Lottie sees them and takes umbrage. They fight explosively, and Lottie and Anthony depart early from the expedition.

The two women never see each other again. Main excises all references to Dod in her writings.

Celine returns to work. The doctor breaks her heart. Celine buries herself in parenting and work.

Dod returns to Edgeworth with a broken heart, where she begins obsessively training in golf and archery. For physical relief, she starts playing lawn hockey, a rough and tumble sport that allows late Victorian women a rare opportunity to be anything but genteel.

Catherine is displaying her extreme talent yet lack of place to play.

For the finals of England versus Ireland, the Britain's National Hockey Team plays in Dublin. The weather is torrential. The already rough contact sport is made even more dramatic with female athletes wrestling and fighting in mud. In a final dramatic scene, after a series of England versus Ireland matches that are tie games, Lottie Dod scores the winning goals for the English ladies.

EPISODE 7, **AMERICAN SOIL**

EARLY 1901-1904, LOTTIE DOD AGE 29-33.
1958

In January 1901, Queen Victoria dies, and the country goes into a paroxysm of ritualized mourning. As a high society lady, Dod would is expected to partake, and dress in heavy black crepe mourning clothes, Edgeworth's curtains are shuttered. Inside Edgeworth, a more personal drama unfolds, as Margaret fades into her own final days. A year after the queen dies, the Dod mater familias also passes on. For William, Anthony and Lottie, grieve but also feel liberated. Annie and her husband come to grieve as well. The siblings sell the old estate.

The three siblings buy a house in the suburban town of Newbury just outside of London. They invite a series of friends to come live with them, and hire some housekeepers and cooks to keep the place functioning. Then they take to sports: William has become a big game hunter, and heads overseas regularly - on one of his trips, he meets the famed imperial poet, Rudyard Kipling. The two become inseparable. Kipling, who comes from a little town in southern England called Westward Ho! convinces William to join him and buy a house there.

CELINE ASKS FOR A RAISE AND GETS TURNED DOWN.

CELINE HAS A FEW DATES. HORRIBLE.

CATHERINE CAN'T PLAY AT IMPORTANT TENNIS CLUBS. SHE'S BEATING EVERY BOY. RACIAL SLUR

FAMOUS FEMALE TENNIS STARS ON TV. ALL WHITE

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT STURRINGS.

Anthony is spending more time on chess, and is actively looking for a wife. He finds a beautiful bride and the siblings host a wedding. Lottie starts winning golf tournaments while also joining William at a nearby aristocratic estate, dating back to Henry VIII's times, to train in archery. In 1904, she achieves an even higher level of fame by becoming the British ladies' golf champion, at a tournament in Scotland. Newspapers around the world write about her. In America, promoters seek her out. She agrees to travel to the US in the fall of 1904 to play a series of tournaments - but she runs out of energy, starts losing to players she had been expected to handily beat, and runs afoul of a US tabloid press that takes cruel pleasure in taking the English lady down a notch or two. It is a humbling moment for Little Wonder, and in distress, she books passage back to England early.

EPISODE 8, **FOR SPORT AND WAR**
1908-1918, LOTTIE DOD AGE 36-47.
1958

The episode opens in White City, the astoundingly beautiful world fair complex in west London that was expanded to include the Olympic stadium, swimming pool and other sites in 1908. There are tens of thousands of spectators, who have braved some of the worst summer weather in living memory. The games are opened by the King, and presided over by a notoriously sexist Pierre Coubertin, head of the International Olympic Committee.

There are several thousand male athletes, but fewer than 50 women. Amongst these few is Lottie Dod, now in her mid-thirties and suffering debilitating sciatica attacks. Watched over proudly by their old maid from Edgeworth, Mary, Dod wins the silver medal in archery, while William wins gold. They are the first brother-sister combo to win Olympic medals. It is Dod's last sporting hurrah; after a quarter century in the spotlight, she's in pain and ready to retire. At the ceremony, greeting the King, she sees a maimed veteran from the Boer Wars, who calls out to her. He was the fan boy who tried to snatch her cap after she lost in Liverpool as a 13 year old. Lottie. has an epiphany: she wants to train to be a nurse.

Notting Hill Riots

<https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/notting-hill-riots-1958/#:~:text=Amidst%20racial%20intolerance%20and%20competiti on,the%20confrontation%20lasted%20a%20week.>

Dod joins the Volunteer Auxiliary Detachment and, as the world war with Germany nears, she acquires the certification to work in a war hospital. When war breaks out, William, now 50, joins the Sportsman Battalion, a privately funded group that drew in many of the most famous athletes from around the Empire. Over the coming years, Dod will work in an extraordinarily beautiful townhouse-cum-officers' hospital around the corner from Buckingham Palace.

William's battalion will be shipped off to the continent. Many of its members are slaughtered in the Battle of the Somme. By 1917, William has been discharged, with symptoms resembling shell shock. That same year, Lottie gives up nursing to live with her increasingly isolated older brother. The war ends in 1918, women's suffrage bill passes immediately afterwards. Lottie registers to vote.

EPISODE 9, **SONG BIRD**

1918-1930, LOTTIE DOD AGE 47 TO 60.
1959

After decades of fame, Dod reinvents herself. The war has quieted her. She's older, less obsessed with conquest. She's not as wealthy as she was before, since many of her investments, especially in France, had gone south during the war. She minds her money and rents out rooms in her house, to maintain a respectably middle-class existence. Dod takes up her childhood passion of singing again, joining the renowned composer and conductor CK Scott's legendary Oriana Madrigal Society. In music, at the urging of the somewhat tyrannical Scott, who reminds her of mother, she trains as assiduously as in sports, and throughout the 1920s, she tours the country, performing at many of the top concert halls and even records in a studio. The world has changed. It is the jazz age. Flappers and the modern woman captivates Lottie's imagination.

In 1926 -- The King and Queen hold a ceremony at Centre Court to give all surviving Wimbledon champions medals. Dod, and some of her fellow singers, are commanded to give a private performance inside the palace for the monarchs. Other than the music, however, Dod is sinking into the life of a recluse. Apart from William, she sees few people socially. The media has almost forgotten her.

For two weeks each summer, she takes her nieces and nephews to Wimbledon to see the new generations of stars. But outside of that, her life in London revolves mainly around music, and her time spent with William in Westward Ho!

playing club golf. In the late 1920s, her dear sister Annie dies of cancer. This is a crushing blow to Lottie. Dod, now the sole surviving woman of her immediate family, has to confront her own mortality.

EPISODE 10, DAD'S ARMY

EARLY 1930s-1945, LOTTIE DOD AGE 60 TO 73.

Facing increasing ill health, Dod is forced to quit the Madrigal Society. At a loss as to how to spend her time, she begins doing volunteer work in the slums of London's East End, teaching poor children how to sing and play the piano. She moves slowly now, more or less hobbled by sciatica. Her heyday is far in the past, the sporting media's attention now focused on women such as the American sporting polymath Babe Didickson Zaharias.

By the late 1930s, another world war is looming, she rents out her Earl's Court home and moves in full time with William in Westward Ho! When the war breaks out, the golf course is converted into a sand-bagged army training site, and William, now in his late 70s, joins the Home Reserves, colloquially known as Dad's Army, and starts parading in uniform up and down the hilly streets of the resort town. All around them are bivouacked British fighter pilots, who in the summer of 1940 will fight the Battle of Britain in the skies directly overhead. When the Americans enter the war, in late 1941, the region becomes a massive encampment for US soldiers. As D-Day nears in June 1944, Westward Ho! and the surrounding land in the county of Devon become epicenters for the invasion preparation. The Dods hunker down, reading newspapers, following stories of experimental weapons being tested on the nearby beaches, helping to care for children evacuated from London during the Blitz for the duration of the fighting.

When the war finally ends, in 1945, the Dod siblings are still together, geriatric and frail; the little town they love has changed. It is gaudy, packed with jazz and beer halls. The elderly Dods are fish out of water in their own home.

EPISODE 11, THE LEGACY OF A LEGEND

1954-1960, LOTTIE DOD AGE 82-88.

1960

Lottie decides she needs the stimulation of London again. She packs her bags and moves back to Earl's Court, now a center of Polish and other migration. William, unable to live alone, follows her. They return to the capital, start attending concerts, visiting museums, and go to Wimbledon to see tennis. In 1954, Lottie returns home one day to find William dead. She is devastated.

She stays in London a short time longer, hand writes her will, then moves to a retirement home in the little southern English town of Sway to be near Anthony, her sole surviving sibling. Then in the late 1950s, Anthony dies. Now utterly alone, visited by virtually no-one, forgotten by the world, Little Wonder slides into confusion and ill health.

On June 27, 1960, the day she dies, Lottie tells her story in fragments to her nurse, Celine, sits by her bed, stroking her hand. Celine understands the gravity of who Little Wonder was and can relate to the obstacles she faced and how she overcame them. At Lottie's grave, Celine and her daughter, who face their own personal hurdles, are profoundly inspired by Lottie's story. Paying homage, they dress in tennis attire and bring roses to leave next to an otherwise anonymous final resting place for the world's greatest female sports athlete.