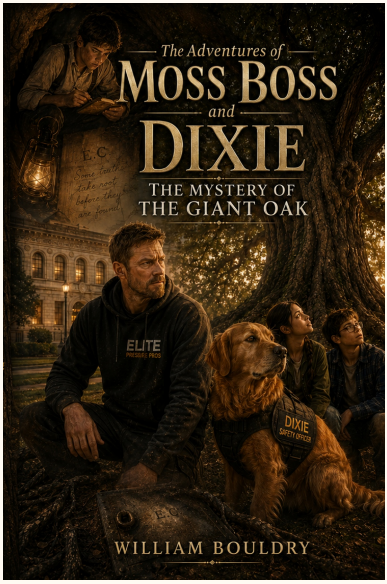
THE ADVENTURES OF MOSS BOSS & DIXIE

THE MYSTERY OF THE GIANT OAK

READ CHAPTER ONE FREE

A full-color illustrated mystery adventure where the dog notices the danger first.

For readers ages 8–12 — and families who love dogs, adventure, and California Gold Country.



Inside this preview

- The complete opening chapter
- Dixie, Moss Boss, Tyler, Sofia, and Eli
- A mystery rooted in a real sense of place
- No purchase required

Written by William Bouldry

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CHAPTER 1

The Bark That Didn't Sound Right



The problem with living in a town like Placerville, California, was that everybody knew everything.

Or at least they thought they did.

By eight-thirty that morning, three different people on Main Street had already explained that the giant oak outside the courthouse was:

- haunted,
- hollow,
- cursed,
- unstable,
- or secretly connected to hidden Gold Rush tunnels.

One old man near the coffee shop swore he had heard voices coming from it the night before.

Moss Boss suspected the voices were probably tourists.

“You hear that?” he asked as the black Elite Pressure Pros truck rolled past the Bell Tower.

Dixie sat upright in the passenger seat wearing her black-and-yellow Safety & Quality Control vest, ears twitching toward the open window.

She gave him a look.

Moss Boss nodded slowly.

“Yeah. That’s what I thought too.”

Dixie huffed and rested one paw on the center console. The truck moved through historic Main Street while morning sunlight flashed across old brick storefronts and weathered Gold Rush signs. Tourists wandered the sidewalks carrying candy bags nearly as large as their heads.

One little kid pointed through the truck window.

“LOOK! A police dog!”

Dixie immediately sat taller.

Moss Boss lowered his sunglasses slightly.

“She’s gonna let that go straight to her head.”

Dixie wagged her tail once.

Too late.

Then the courthouse came into view.

And so did the oak.

The giant tree towered over the courthouse lawn.



Its branches spread above the old courthouse as if the oak had been guarding Placerville for centuries. The trunk was wider than Moss Boss's truck, its bark folded and weathered with age.
Thick roots pushed through the soil around it like frozen waves.
A small crowd had already gathered around it.
Which in Placerville basically meant:
- seven locals,
- three tourists,
- one guy holding coffee,
- and at least two people giving opinions nobody asked for.
"This tree's over two hundred years old," one older man announced dramatically.
Another crossed his arms.
"I heard it survived three lightning strikes."
A woman nearby added quietly:
"My cousin says there's tunnels under there."
Moss Boss parked the truck.
"Ah," he said. "Placerville rumor season started early this year."
Dixie jumped out beside him.
Then she froze.
Her nose twitched.
Her ears lifted.
Her body went perfectly still.
Moss Boss noticed instantly.

Most people thought Dixie was just a smart dog.
Moss Boss knew better.
Dixie noticed things people missed.
Loose boards.
Bad wiring.
Wet concrete.
People pretending “just looking” meant “not touching.”
Especially danger.
And judging by the way she stared at the courthouse lawn...
the problem was not just the giant oak.
It was whatever waited under it.
“Morning, Moss Boss!” called Linda, a courthouse worker carrying a clipboard thick enough to stop a bear attack.
“Morning, Linda.”
She sighed dramatically.
“I’ve already answered the same question nineteen times.”
“Only nineteen?”
“It’s still early.”
Dixie sniffed toward the oak.
Then she walked to the far side of the tree.

Focused.
Moss Boss followed.
At first everything looked normal.
Parents took pictures.
Kids pointed at the tree.
A tourist loudly asked where the Gold Rush started.
Three locals answered at once.
Incorrectly.
Normal Placerville behavior.
Then Dixie growled softly.
Not angry.
Concerned.
Moss Boss looked down immediately.
“What is it?”
Dixie moved carefully across the dirt.
Tap.
Tap.
Tap.
Then she stopped beside the base of the massive trunk.
Her ears flattened slightly.
She stared straight at the ground.
“Dude, there’s no way tunnels are actually under there.”
Moss Boss glanced toward the courthouse steps.

Three kids stood nearby.

About eleven or twelve years old.

The loud one wore a red hoodie and the kind of confidence usually connected to very bad ideas.
Tyler.

Placerville always had at least six kids exactly like Tyler running around at any given time.
Usually unsupervised.

Beside him stood Sofia, sharp-eyed and clearly smarter than everybody else there.

The third kid, Eli, looked much less convinced.

He stared nervously at the caution chain around the oak.
“We probably shouldn’t be over here.”
Tyler grinned.
“That’s quitter talk.”
“It’s literally a courthouse.”
“Exactly. Historic adventure.”
“That’s not how history works.”
Tyler ignored him.

Meanwhile, Dixie stayed locked on the dirt beneath the oak.
That worried Moss Boss more.

Tyler ducked under the caution chain.

Eli immediately looked stressed enough to develop back pain.

“Tyler—”

“What?” Tyler shrugged. “I’m just looking.”

Sofia crossed her arms.

“That sentence is usually said right before something dumb happens.”

“Relax.”

Tyler stepped closer.

The ground beneath him made a sound.

Crrk.

Tiny.

But real.

Dixie barked sharply.

Tyler jumped backward.

“Whoa!”

The crowd turned.

Moss Boss moved fast.

“Everybody back from the oak.”

Some people listened immediately.

Others did what humans unfortunately do best:

They moved closer to see what was happening.

Linda sighed.

“Every time.”

Moss Boss crouched beside the dirt where Tyler had been standing.

Dixie pressed close beside him.

He brushed away loose dust with one gloved hand. Then stopped.

A crack.

Thin.

Fresh.

Widening beneath the oak.

Not an old dry split in the dirt.

A new one.

The kind that meant something underneath had shifted recently.

“Well,” Moss Boss muttered.

“That seems less than ideal.”

Tyler peered over his shoulder.

“Is that bad?”

Moss Boss looked at him.

“You ever ask a question you already know the answer to?”

“…Yeah.”

“This is one of those times.”

Even Tyler laughed.

But Dixie didn’t.

She kept staring at the crack.

Then she stepped backward fast.

Moss Boss saw it instantly.

“Move back,” he said calmly.

Something in his voice changed.

This time everyone listened.

Even the tourists.

The dirt beneath the oak shifted.

A low grinding sound echoed under the courthouse lawn.

The giant oak creaked.

The crowd gasped.

And somewhere beneath the tree...

something hollow answered back.

Silence.

Nobody moved.

Then Tyler whispered:

“...Okay, that was actually awesome.”

Sofia smacked his arm.

“That was NOT awesome.”

“A little awesome.”

“A medium amount of awesome,” Moss Boss admitted.

Linda stared at him.

“You are not helping.”

“I’m helping emotionally.”

Dixie walked back toward the crack.

Careful.

Focused.

Then she stopped.

Her ears perked.

She looked straight at Moss Boss and barked once.

Short.

Certain.

The kind of bark that meant:

You need to see this.

Moss Boss stood slowly.

The crowd waited.

Even Tyler stopped talking.

Which honestly felt historically significant.

Moss Boss stared at the widening crack beneath the giant oak.

Then at the darkness hidden underneath.

Then at the people standing too close to both.

This was not just an old tree drawing a crowd anymore.

This was a safety problem with an audience.

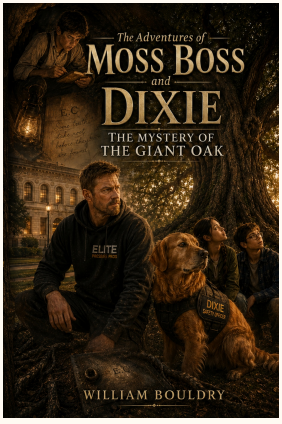
And in Placerville, that was usually when things got complicated.

“All right,” he said quietly.
“Now things are getting interesting.”

THE FIRST CLUE WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

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