

**Woodson Falls:  
16 Lakeview Terrace**

*A Gaby Quinn Mystery*

by

Andrea O'Connor

**SAMPLE CHAPTERS**



EMERALD LAKE  
BOOKS

Sherman, Connecticut

*Woodson Falls: 16 Lakeview Terrace*

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*For John:*

*This story is as much yours as it is mine.*

## Prologue

“IT’LL BE GOOD TO BE BACK IN MY OWN BED,” RALPH SAID TO his wife, Trudy, as they neared Woodson Falls, the last leg of the long drive back from Florida, where they spent the winter months.

“You sure you don’t want to sell this place? Live in the Florida condo full-time?” Trudy asked.

“No way! Too hot in the summer and way too many old people. Besides, I like having our own place here in the country. And the view of the waterfall never ceases to calm me down when I get riled up over something or other.”

“The falls and the lake are beautiful.”

“I wish you’d reconsider and let us buy that lot next to us. A house there would ruin our view.”

“Get over it, Ralph. That may be a lot on paper, but it’s not buildable. The health department would never approve it under the new rules.”

“If we changed the lot lines, maybe we could put in a swimming pool.”

“Not worth the money or the work. We have the lake. Plus, we can swim down in Florida.”

“Here we are, honey,” Ralph said, turning into Lakeview Terrace. “Home, sweet home.”

As they approached their house, Trudy gasped. “What in heavens is that?”

A three-story monstrosity had been planted on the adjacent property, jutting out at an angle that blocked the best part of their once-expansive view of Woodson Lake.

“Oh, Ralph. Now what?” Trudy was in tears as they turned at the end of the road to drive down their new neighbor’s driveway that once led solely to their home.

## Chapter 1

*(Two Years Later)*

“WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING?” RALPH LOOMIS shouted as he scuttled up his driveway toward his neighbor’s property, the last house on Lakeview Terrace. “Just what the hell do you think you’re doing?” he repeated, red-faced, leaning forward, fists on his hips as he neared the retaining wall his neighbor, Pieter Jorgenson, was erecting along the property line.

“Buildin’ a wall,” Jorgenson replied, remaining on his knees. Not looking up, he carefully spread mortar on top of the second row of cement blocks. A dozen or more blocks were stacked to his left, the mortar bucket kept close to the wall where he was working.

“But you’re blocking my driveway! I won’t be able to get out,” Loomis continued.

“Not my problem,” Jorgenson said as he laid three cement blocks onto the mortar, tapping them into alignment. He reached for the trowel, pulled up more mortar, and continued with the third layer of cement blocks. The wall extended the length of the property line.

“Don’tcha realize that every property owner this side of Lakeview Terrace gave his neighbor access to get onto the road? Idiot surveyor drew up the lots with no way of driving up to the damn road.

This... this wall'll make it impossible for me to get in and out of my own driveway!"

"Like I said," Jorgenson responded, standing to face his neighbor, "not my problem." A husky man, Jorgenson was all muscle, close to 250 pounds, and at least six-foot-six, dwarfing Loomis, who stepped back involuntarily.

"But... but," Loomis sputtered.

"See here. Your so-called driveway drains onto my property." He pointed with the trowel. "See that there gully along my foundation? Caused by all the water flowin' down the hill and across your driveway toward the lake. Don't need to be worryin' about no water underminin' my foundation. I'm buildin' this here wall to prevent that." He turned back to his work, slapping more mortar onto the cement blocks to finish the final course.

"You'll hear from my lawyer, damn you," Loomis bellowed, turning to hike back down his driveway to the house. "I'm not putting up with this nonsense. Not for one minute."

"So, sue me," called Jorgenson. "I got every right to protect my property. I checked in Town Hall. You can't be divertin' water onto someone else's land. I got rights here."

"We'll just see about that," Loomis yelled. He went into the house, slamming the door behind him.

"I got rights, you runty bastard," Jorgenson muttered, smashing the last of the cement blocks into place. "I got rights."

With the wall between the two properties finally finished, Jorgenson returned his tools and supplies to the garage across the breezeway and re-entered his house. He needed to cool off after that confrontation with Loomis.

Opening the refrigerator, he grabbed the first of the two beers he allowed himself each day and headed downstairs to the shaded deck that ran alongside the lower level of his house. Easing his weight into the lounge chair in the shady corner of the deck, he put up his legs

and popped the top of the can of Budweiser, taking a long draught of the cold brew.

He hated people like that. People who thought everything should go their way. People who took pleasure in pushing other people around.

## Chapter 2

GABRIELLA QUINN GAZED OUT THE PICTURE WINDOW AT THE pond below. Most of its snow cover had melted days ago, but a heavy rain followed by a sudden dip in the temperature had left its surface smooth as glass, reflecting the bare trees that lined the shore. She could glimpse Woodson Lake in the distance and imagined the falls beyond, the tumbling waters suddenly frozen into a sculpture worthy of display in a museum.

Pennsylvania's groundhog had predicted six more weeks of winter. *If you believed such things.* Only two weeks to go until Beaver Pond should begin to melt into itself once again, turning a subtle taupe that surely would signal the start of spring. She had chosen this room for her law office because of the view. The ever-changing pond and active wildlife, even in winter, were a source of delight whenever she glanced up from her desk.

She returned to drafting a particularly tricky clause in the contract she was preparing for the Hansen's, who were selling their house. If acceptable to the buyer, this clause would permit Ann and Paul to stay in the house until June, allowing their young daughter Cyndi to finish out the school year before the family moved to Texas. Real estate law wasn't her favorite, but most small law practices like her own survived on the fees real estate transactions generated for the attorney

handling the transfer for either buyer or seller. In a larger practice, a paralegal would handle most of the details surrounding such sales, but Gaby wasn't yet in a position to hire a paralegal, even part-time. The telephone rang, interrupting Gabriella's train of thought.

"Law offices. Gabriella Quinn speaking," she said, smiling to herself at the formality of her announcement given the location of her "offices" in this room in the cottage she'd inherited from her grandfather.

"Gaby, good to hear your voice. Bud Taylor calling. I've got an estate I'm hoping you'll take on."

Hiram Samuel "Bud" Taylor had retired from a large estate planning practice some fifteen years ago, winning the seat as Judge for the Foothills Probate District every four years since with little opposition. A tall, stocky man with steely gray hair, he preferred to be called "Bud" rather than "Judge Taylor," but she still had difficulty with that informality.

"Good afternoon, Your Honor. I think I may be able to squeeze it in," she said with a chuckle. She had opened her law practice in Woodson Falls just over two years ago. Fresh out of law school, she had resigned her tenured position as a professor of philosophy at Columbia University after she passed the bar in both New York and Connecticut. "What have you got?"

"Interesting case. Started with a land dispute up in Woodson Lake Estates. Lakeview Terrace, number sixteen. The defendant, by the name of Pieter Jorgenson, failed to appear when the case came up for hearing. The plaintiff, Ralph Loomis, was awarded a judgment by default against Jorgenson on an adverse possession claim when the defendant didn't show up at the trial. Turned out Jorgenson had died suddenly in New York, an apparent stroke or brain aneurysm according to the death certificate. Just in his fifties too. Loomis can't collect on the judgment or remove the wall blocking his access to his property until there's an estate to file a claim against. Bill Harrison, Loomis' attorney, asked me to appoint someone as administrator.

There are no next of kin according to Bill, at least not in Connecticut, and it's likely Jorgenson didn't leave a will. You're the only attorney in Woodson Falls, and I figured you might be interested."

Gaby appreciated the Judge's occasional referrals. She had introduced herself to the Court once she had set up her office, and Judge Taylor and his clerks had welcomed her warmly. Building a law practice from scratch would have been difficult without such referrals.

"Certainly am interested, Judge, and thank you for thinking of me. Let me see... Today's Wednesday. I can stop by to pick up the death certificate tomorrow. I should be able to file the necessary applications early next week."

"Good, good. Knew I could count on you, Gaby. Well, see you tomorrow—or one of my clerks will. Have a good afternoon."

"Thanks, Judge. You too. Bye now."

Hanging up the phone, Gaby scribbled a few notes on the new case, then leaned back in her chair, gazing once again at the pond. She hated the thought of going up to the Estates. The narrow, winding roads in the massive subdivision were tricky to navigate, and it was easy to get caught in a dead-end, where turning around could quickly turn dangerous on the steep hills. The accumulated snow and likely icing of the roads would just make a difficult situation even more hazardous.

"Come on, Katrina," she called to her German Sheprador, a beautiful Shepherd-Labrador mix she had gotten shortly after she moved to Woodson Falls. "Time for a run."

Gaby did her best thinking while she was outside running or, in the summer months, swimming with Kat out to one of the islands in the middle of Woodson Lake. She and the black and tan dog both loved the outdoors, and the trails around Gaby's cottage in the woods of southern Woodson Falls allowed Katrina to run free of a leash. They headed toward a tree-lined trail that ran just across the road and up a steep hill.

*I'll finish up that contract when I get back.* Then she would map out a plan for gathering the information she'd need to file the necessary paperwork with the probate court, formally opening the Jorgenson estate.

An hour later Gaby was back in her office, warming her hands around a mug of cocoa. She laid aside the completed draft of the Hansen contract to be reviewed tomorrow, then reached into a drawer, pulling out her map of Woodson Falls. She located Woodson Lake Estates, which ran along the lake's northwestern shoreline. It was impossible to determine topography on this map, but when she found the squiggly line representing Lakeview Terrace, she suspected it would run along a high ridge. The line drifted off into empty space, one of the many dead-end roads located in most Woodson Falls subdivisions. Hopefully, the house would be one of the first on the road and not the last.

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## Praise for

### *Woodson Falls: 16 Lakeview Terrace*

Against the routine backdrop of a small New England town, Andrea O'Connor successfully weaves a gripping page-turner, ending with a bang. The fictional town, Woodson Falls, is itself an expertly drawn character and O'Connor's knowledge of her terrain is masterful right down to the most obscure zoning ordinance. *Woodson Falls: 16 Lakeview Terrace* is perfect for mystery lovers, and her spirited protagonist, Attorney Gaby Quinn, resonates so strongly that one wonders what other mysteries she might unravel in future novels.

—**Don Lowe, First Selectman, Sherman, CT**

O'Connor gets the pace and detail of small town, rural Connecticut, the land of steady habits, just right, in her first mystery. Her background as a nurse, an attorney, and a hands-on elected official really shines through in her descriptions of local land use policy and probate courts, which she makes easily understandable, all the while cleverly hiding clues among these mundane topics. Yes, small towns almost always have big secrets, and you'll enjoy hunting for them in O'Connor's delightful tale of intrigue in *Woodson Falls: 16 Lakeview Terrace*.

—**Cheryl D. Reedy, former First Selectman, New Fairfield, CT**

There is something warm and cozy about Andrea O'Connor's first Attorney Gaby Quinn mystery, *Woodson Falls: 16 Lakeview Terrace*. A small-town atmosphere is brilliantly created in this intriguing conundrum that has a strong finish that will shock and surprise you. A fine writing style moves the puzzle along in an effortless pace and Ms. O'Connor's lead character, Gaby Quinn, is a pleasure to follow around. *Woodson Falls: 16 Lakeview Terrace* is a good read for anyone who likes a clever mystery.

—Peter Green, author of the Jimmy Dugan mystery series

No one knows what to make of Pieter Jorgenson in the small Connecticut town of Woodson Falls. A school crossing guard who's always nice to children, he has few admirers among the town's adults. Sullen and reclusive, he has no friends, and he never allows others into his isolated lakeside home. When he dies suddenly on a trip to New York City, he leaves no will to settle his unexpectedly large estate. A local judge assigns a young attorney, Gabriella Quinn, to handle his affairs. As she delves into the case, she finds herself drawn into the dark landscape of his life; the tension builds as she discovers the shocking truth about him. Andrea O'Connor's novel, *Woodson Falls: 16 Lakeview Terrace*, is a story of mounting intrigue and menace.

—R.C. Goodwin, author of *Model Child* and *The Stephen Hawking Death Row Fan Club*

Everyone wants a small New England town to be peaceful and predictable with the safety and security not found in the drama of the Big Apple. Attorney Gaby Quinn moved to Woodson Falls for that very reason. Unfortunately for Gaby, evil knows no bounds. Author Andrea O'Connor brings you to the lovely New England town of Woodson Falls and takes you down a road no one wants to go.

—Marc Youngquist, author of the *Maidstone* mysteries

In this twisted mystery, Andrea O'Connor takes the reader on a journey through real estate law (and makes it interesting) to a very bizarre ending. And, we're not talking run-of-the mill bizarre, but really, really you-don't-see-it-coming bizarre. Excellent read.

—Robin Taney, Studio 4 PR

Woodson Falls is a charming town, where folks know one another and willingly help each other. As a retired probate judge, I was delighted to read the factual, clear detailing of estate administration, which had young lawyer Gaby Quinn unearthing information about family trees, lawsuits, town regulations, the decedent's property, and questionable happenings. As Gaby administers the estate of a Woodson Falls resident few people knew, Andrea O'Connor sets up a surprising conclusion subtly hinted at throughout the story. I would have welcomed Gaby Quinn in my court!

— **Judge Barbara J. Ackerman, retired**