

**Woodson Falls:
9 Donovan's Way**
A Gaby Quinn Mystery

by
Andrea O'Connor



EMERALD LAKE
BOOKS

Sherman, Connecticut

SAMPLE CHAPTER

Woodson Falls: 9 Donovan's Way

Copyright © 2021 Andrea O'Connor

Cover design and illustration © 2021 by Mark Gerber

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Books published by Emerald Lake Books may be ordered through your favorite booksellers or by visiting emeraldlakebooks.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: O'Connor, Andrea B., author.

Title: Woodson Falls : 9 Donovan's Way / Andrea O'Connor.

Description: Sherman, Connecticut : Emerald Lake Books, [2021] | Series: A Gaby Quinn mystery ; 2 | Summary: "Attorney Gaby Quinn has settled into her law practice in the small Connecticut town of Woodson Falls. She's quietly rebuilding her life after the tragic murder of her husband in New York City. When famous author Phillip Mitchell suddenly dies of an apparent heart attack, his ex-wife asks Gaby to handle the estate. Everything seems above board until some things turn up missing, including Mitchell's girlfriend"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021004826 (print) | LCCN 2021004827 (ebook) | ISBN 9781945847417 (paperback) | ISBN 9781945847424 (epub)

Subjects: GSAFD: Mystery fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3615.C5843 W63 2021 (print) | LCC PS3615.C5843 (ebook) | DDC 813/.6--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021004826>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021004827>

SAMPLE CHAPTER

Prologue

THE TELEPHONE IN THE DOWNSTAIRS BEDROOM rang insistently. Phillip Mitchell was tempted to ignore it. He would usually just let calls go to voicemail, the messages to be picked up later when he could respond—or not.

He stood in the bedroom doorway, staring at the lake, visible through the kitchen window opposite him. The view from his office was so much better. He picked up the phone, interrupting its ring.

“Yes?” he said gruffly to his caller.

“Oh dear, love,” said the woman at the other end of the line, her voice tinged with a faint French accent. “I’ve disturbed your work.”

“No, no, Danielle. Never. Are you okay? The baby?”

“Everything’s fine, my dear one. No problems. It’s just that I’m mapping out a new tour my agency may offer in the coming season. The tour would be in and around Saratoga Springs. I thought I’d drive down from Quebec on Friday, check out the sights, restaurants, hotels. It’s just a short drive from there to Woodson Falls, and I wondered if you’d have time for a quick visit over the weekend? I’d have to leave on Monday, but it would be so very good to see you.”

“Oh, sweetheart! That would be wonderful! Beyond wonderful! The only wrinkle is that Alan has me scheduled to speak about my new novel at some college in Pennsylvania—in Scranton, I think—Friday

evening. It's too late to cancel. I'll have to stay for dinner and was planning to spend the night there and drive back to Woodson Falls Saturday morning. That would shorten our time together, but I so want to see you. Even for a short time."

"Great. I can book into one of the hotels I'm considering for the tour, stay there Friday night, and head down to Connecticut on Saturday to meet you at the cottage."

"Why spend money on a hotel? Drive down when you're done with your exploration of Saratoga Springs and stay at my place Friday night. You know where the key is."

"I don't want to intrude..."

"Don't be foolish. Any time you want to spend here is just fine with me. Better than fine... I love you."

"I love you, too. Well then, that's settled."

"And Danielle. Don't worry about our baby. I've told Alan about the pregnancy. I wanted to warn him I would be taking a break from writing when this next book is done—probably a long break."

"Really? I'm thrilled you're thinking that way. But how did Alan take the news?"

"Badly, I fear. But he'll get over it. It really doesn't matter what Alan thinks. I want to be fully present for you and our baby."

"You seemed so upset when I told you I was pregnant. Really. I can manage raising this child myself."

"I know I wasn't exactly thrilled at first when you told me the news just before Christmas, but now... I've embraced the idea of fatherhood and want to enjoy it with you. I missed a lot of that with Tim. Eleanora insisted on a full-time nanny until he was in nursery school so she could focus on her business. Then she pushed hard for him to be sent to boarding school. It's only recently that I've had the chance to get close to him. I don't want to throw away this second chance. And besides... Oh, Danielle, do you know how very much I love you?"

Chapter 1

GABY WAS SIPPING HER COFFEE and leafing through the local paper when Emma Larson came over from the deli with Gaby's buttered roll.

"Have you heard the latest?" asked the bubbly blonde, wife of the owner of Mike's Place, the only grocery store in Woodson Falls.

Gaby smiled at her friend. "Probably not. What's up?"

Emma sat down beside Gaby. Mike's Place offered a gathering space next to the deli where customers could linger with coffee or a sandwich.

"You know Phillip Mitchell? Lives in one of those old cottages on Woodson Lake?"

"I've met him a few times at the Sail Club. What about him?"

"Well, he's just about the most famous person in Woodson Falls. Or was... He's dead!"

"What?"

"Yes! Totally unexpected! Mike was one of the EMTs on the call. I liked the man. I mean, he was always friendly—well, sometimes a bit too friendly. He was an unabashed flirt and a bit eccentric but always pleasant."

Mitchell had called 911 claiming he was having severe chest pain and thought he might be having another heart attack. He'd had two in the past and knew the symptoms. When the ambulance arrived a

mere fifteen minutes later, the EMTs found the sixty-two-year-old Mitchell unresponsive, with no pulse or discernible respirations. They began CPR and continued their resuscitation efforts on the way to Prescott Memorial Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

"Maybe you'll get the case," Emma continued. "After all, you must be Woodson Falls' most famous lawyer after that case up on Lakeview Terrace, and it *is* the kind of work you do."

"More like Woodson Falls' only lawyer," Gaby replied with a smile, "though I do a good deal of probate work. It's more likely the family will contact whoever drafted Mitchell's will if he had one."

"Still, it would be fascinating to deal with the estate of such a famous author," Emma declared before getting up to serve a customer.



Phillip Mitchell was the successful author of several novels set in the French and Indian Wars of the mid-1700s. Fashioned as biographies, Mitchell's engaging writing style had enabled the novels to capture a fairly large share of the historical fiction niche. His own experiences in the Vietnam War, where he lost the lower half of his left leg as well as his right eye, provided realistic color to his writing.

The man posed a dashing figure. A flashy dresser, even in rural Woodson Falls, Mitchell was often seen sporting a scarf at the neck of his safari jacket and wearing his trademark fedora whenever he was out and about. He kept his salt-and-pepper beard neatly trimmed, while his waxed handlebar mustache reflected his quick and easy smile. The simple black patch worn over his right eye lent an air of mystery to the well-built man.

Mitchell's ex-wife Eleanora was an equally successful design consultant with a large New York City-based business she managed from their well-appointed apartment on Central Park West. Tall, elegant and startlingly attractive as a young woman, the years hadn't been kind to Eleanora, who had packed on pounds despite her daily workouts with a personal trainer. Her scalp was visible through a

dwindling head of frequently dyed hair that had turned an unattractive pink.

Once they each had achieved a measure of financial success, Phillip and Eleanora had purchased and renovated one of the old cottages comprising Donovan's Camp, a cluster of fishing shacks arrayed along the southern shore of Woodson Lake. Over the years, New Yorkers seeking refuge from hectic city life had bought up most of the shacks. They poured money into the structures, transforming them into small but charming year-round dwellings suitable for a weekend escape.

Although they'd enjoyed a happy marriage in their early years together, the couple began to bicker once their only child Timothy was sent off to boarding school. Their weekend tirades, in which Eleanora accused Phillip of various infidelities, echoed across Woodson Lake, punctuating the usual quiet of the sleepy country town. When the couple finally called it quits, Eleanora kept the New York apartment. Phillip stayed on at the Woodson Falls cottage, turning their large bedroom with its fabulous view of the lake and the falls beyond into a writer's retreat.



Arriving home to her cottage on Beaver Trail, Gaby unloaded the supplies and equipment she had picked up at Frank's Supply Depot. Spring had finally asserted itself in the past few days, and she wanted to get a head start on restoring the rambling garden her grandparents had maintained so many years ago. She had renovated the cottage she inherited from her grandfather before moving to Woodson Falls from New York following her young husband's violent death. But she had found little time or energy to engage in the significant work involved in bringing the sprawling garden back to life. She had resolved to tackle the work this year as an antidote to the grief that sometimes overwhelmed her still.

Putting everything into the garage, she entered the house and was immediately greeted by Katrina, her German Sheprador

companion. Acquired as an emotional support dog that had gotten Gaby through some difficult episodes of PTSD, Kat had become a fixture in Gaby's life.

Letting the dog out the door, Gaby picked up the ringing phone. "Law offices, Gabriella Quinn speaking," she announced.

"Eleanora Mitchell calling. My ex-husband, Phillip Mitchell, died last Thursday. I called the probate court in Prescott this morning, and Judge Taylor suggested you as an attorney who might handle the estate since Mitch was a resident of Woodson Falls. I'm much too busy with my design business here in New York City to become involved with this. Our son, Timothy, is a sophomore at Harvard up in Cambridge and in no position to take this on. I'm sure Mitch would have wanted Timothy to be the executor as well as the beneficiary of his estate."

Gaby had the urge to say "Whoa! You don't get to decide" but heard her caller out instead. Ten minutes later, Eleanora had run out of steam.

"I just heard about Mr. Mitchell's death. I'm so sorry for your loss. Do you know if your ex-husband had a will?" she asked. "That would name his preference for the executor of his estate as well as his beneficiaries."

Her question only wound Eleanora up again.

"Well, *of course*, Mitch would have named Timothy as executor. Who else would he name? But as I've said, neither Timothy nor I have the time to manage Mitch's affairs. Would you take this on? I'd like this matter settled as quickly as possible. Mitch was supporting our son's education, and Timothy needs any inheritance he might receive to pay for his studies at Harvard. Not at all inexpensive, you know."

"I'd be happy to help, as long as the individual named to administer the estate decides to retain my services. The first step would be to determine whether Mr. Mitchell left a will."

"I was at the cottage right after Mitch died. I had to come up to Connecticut to identify the body and make the necessary arrangements. Mitch named his brother Bill as his primary emergency contact

the last time he was in the hospital, but he left my name as his secondary contact and never changed it. Bill was out of town when Mitch died, so the hospital called me. I didn't look into his files while I was at the cottage. Just made sure that the place was secure after the ambulance had left. I could meet you there this weekend, and we could look for the will together if that works for you."

"You have access to the cottage?"

"Mitch was a creature of habit. I knew where he hid the spare key, and I felt it was important to protect our son's interests, which is why I went there."

"I could meet you this weekend. When are you thinking of coming up?"

"How about Saturday, say around 11:00? It's number 9 Donovan's Way. Do you know where that is?"

"Yes, I do. I'll see you then." *Well, this ought to be interesting.*

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

The Gaby Quinn Mystery Series

WOODSON FALLS: 16 LAKEVIEW TERRACE

WOODSON FALLS: 9 DONOVAN'S WAY

WOODSON FALLS: 2 SUNRISE TRAIL (*coming soon*)

To read more, please visit
emeraldlakebooks.com/elbdonovansway
or order from your favorite retail or online bookseller.



EMERALD LAKE
BOOKS

Sherman, Connecticut

SAMPLE CHAPTER