

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®



**by Marshal Younger**

from *Adventures in Odyssey*®



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*The Creek War*

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*For Paityn,  
my second-born,  
who smiles for no reason,  
except to make my day.*





## POETIC JUSTICE

I SAT AND WATCHED Max squirm in his chair. For him, every second was more painful than the one before. I wished I could videotape the moment and watch it over and over at home, and maybe invite people over to have a “watch Max squirm” party. But I was told I couldn’t bring a camera into the courtroom.

“Guilty!” Pete, the prosecuting attorney, shouted, banging his hand on the table. He winced a little bit. Clearly he had hurt himself, but knowing the jury was watching, he clenched his teeth and went on. “That is the perfect word to describe Max Darby—not just today but throughout his entire life. He has been guilty of so many crimes within the walls of this town that it would be impossible to count them. But in this court case, right here, today, we’re going to attempt to do just that—count how many people have been ripped off by Max Darby.”

The jury was visibly nodding, as well as everyone else in the jam-packed meeting hall pavilion, which doubled as our courtroom. Max sat at the defendant’s table, nervously tapping

his pencil on his knuckles. He had on his best suit and his favorite cowboy boots. I think he felt the boots made him look more rural and, therefore, more friendly. But today they made him seem like a dishonest used-car salesman who wanted you to *believe* he was friendly.

It was obvious he knew the end was near. Twenty-nine people had shown up to watch Max get trounced—the entire population of Kidsboro. As for me, Ryan Cummings, mayor of Kidsboro, I couldn't have been happier.

I reclined in my chair and prepared for an entertaining show. This was something I'd anticipated for a long time. Max Darby had burned so many people with so many tricks that I doubted he had a friend left in all of Kidsboro. For nine months I had tried to get him thrown out of town, but he always had some legal loophole that made him technically innocent of his scams. Plus, the city council—made up of the five original members of Kidsboro, myself included—had always been afraid to throw him out because his father owned a construction company, and Max had access to large amounts of wood—the wood with which we built our clubhouses. But now our hesitation to throw him out was over. A boy named Mark had become a citizen during the summer, and he'd shown us all how to make clubhouses out of tarp—so we didn't need Max's wood anymore.

After that, I had led an effort to throw Max out. I contacted all of the people who had ever been cheated by Max and asked them to testify at a trial. Legally, I figured Max had a technicality to stand on for every scheme he pulled, but put them all together and a jury might decide to throw the book

at him. After I had a list of people who would testify, I just waited for Max to strike again—and he did.

This is what the trial was about: Max had bought a plot of land on the shore of the creek and had built very nice, two-story clubhouses on it. Each was furnished with a bed, chairs, and even a recliner that Nelson, our town inventor, had made for him. The nicest feature, though, was siding. None of the other clubhouses in Kidsboro had siding, and I had to admit, it looked really sharp. Most of our walls were slabs of uneven wood boards. But the siding in Max's clubhouses made the new models look almost like real houses. Max sold two of these houses to citizens of Kidsboro. Little did they know that the siding was made out of painted cardboard. The first time it rained the roofs sagged in and large pieces of siding drooped and fell off the houses. It was a classic Max scheme. So the owners of the houses were now suing, with Pete as their lawyer.

"The defendant, Mr. Max Darby," Pete said, "is going to come up here and tell you that the people he sold houses to bought them *knowing* that their siding was made out of cardboard. After all, it's in the contract, and since these people signed the contract stating that they had read through the entire thing, they must have known. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, he is telling the truth. Technically, Max is right in saying that the fact that the siding was made out of cardboard is, indeed, in the contract. But let's have a look at this contract."

Pete walked quickly to his table and grabbed a thick stack of papers. He held it up for the jury to see and slammed it back down on the table. The legs wobbled and the people in the front row jumped back. "This is the contract: 38 single-spaced

pages of impossible reading material. Legal jargon, 14-letter words, and enough Latin to choke a Trojan horse. Allow me to read an excerpt from page 16: *'Pluribus equus caput capitis es horridus plebeius.'* Translated from Latin this very loosely means: 'Many horse heads are scary and uneducated.' The point I'm trying to make here is that none of this contract makes sense. It's just thousands and thousands of words thrown together for the purpose of boring the reader out of his mind. There are very few people in the world who would be willing to read through the entire thing."

The jury was smiling at the Latin translation. Pete went on. "And why, you ask, does Max not want you to read the entire thing? Let me read an excerpt from this contract, buried on page 27, in the middle of a 573-word paragraph. It reads, and I quote: 'Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the party of the second part, hereafter referred to as The Seller, will indemnify the non-expected payments. The siding is made out of cardboard. Whenever any claim or demand is instituted in order to defray expenses . . .'" Pete's voice trailed off. He'd made his point.

"So, yes, the siding material is in the contract. But you and I both know that Max had no intention of anyone actually reading through this entire contract to get to that one fact. It's a scheme—a scheme that we all know too well. For this case, I will parade witness after witness before you to show you a pattern of this type of behavior. You will be amazed at how many people in this community have been ripped off by Max Darby."

One by one, Pete called witnesses up to the stand to testify how Max had tricked them out of their money or prop-

erty. And every time someone stepped down, Max sank a little bit lower in his seat.

Then, as if wanting to go out on his own terms, he suddenly flew up in the middle of someone's testimony and yelled, "Forget it! No more of this! This is ridiculous, and I don't even care! I don't need this town! You guys are a bunch of whining little twirps, and I'm sick of being a citizen here." I guess he had given up on trying to appear friendly. "Don't bother kicking me out. I quit!" He stormed out.

Nobody was quite sure what to do at this point. Pete had six more witnesses that he was ready to call to the stand, plus he had a closing argument I'm sure he was dying to wow the jury with. He turned to Judge Amy, who probably thought she ought to rule something. But did she need to rule anything? Pete and I exchanged looks, and then Amy shrugged her shoulders and lifted her gavel.

"Court's adjourned," she said, pounding the gavel on the table. Everyone sat silently for a moment, and then I heard someone snickering. It was Scott Sanchez, my best friend and one of the many who'd been tricked by Max before. Suddenly, he let out a burst of joyful laughter, followed by the laughter of others. People around him started clapping, including me, and soon everyone in the assembly hall was smiling and giggling and high-fiving each other. The place was oozing with joy. We had rid the evil king! We had bested the giant troll! Ding dong, the witch was dead! Kidsboro was free at last!

It was a revival of sorts, but as it turned out, it was a short-lived one. For at that moment, no one could have dreamed of what Max would do for revenge.