

In this epic struggle set before the American Civil War, an individual must choose to do good even if it means breaking with his family.

SYNOPSIS

RETRIBUTION is the story of the conflict between two settler families in 1855 in Wyoming Territory. It is the story of the death of an innocent at the hands of a rash and brutal patriarch and the birth of a freedom bought at the cost of a primal struggle between father and son. The wider struggle for freedom is brought into the story in the shape of a runaway slave: this is a society deeply at odds with itself and only a handful of years away from a bloody civil war.

When Mikael Bergman- the scion of a Swedish-American family -is hanged for a crime he didn't commit, the wheels are set in motion for a struggle between the Bergmans and Mikael's killers, the Irish-American McArdles. Matt McArdle is a rancher who is bent on getting hold of the rustlers who have been stealing his cattle. Matt becomes judge and executioner when he finds Mikael Bergman on his land.

Matt McArdle might think that his problems are over, but they are only beginning. The divisions within his own family, manifested in arguments with two of his three sons, take centre stage when Gunnar Bergman pays the McArdles a visit in the aftermath of his son's murder. Gunnar is a very different type of man to Matt McArdle and though he wants revenge, he cannot countenance taking a life. Instead, Gunnar takes captive Matt's middle son- Sean -as a kind of payment for the loss of Mikael.

Thus an unhappy situation continues unhappily. Sean goes back to the Bergman farm as little more than an indentured slave, and the Bergmans are unaware that he had remonstrated with his father not to hang Mikael. As things go on, Sean is resented and mistreated by Gunnar Bergman and more so when Gunnar learns that his daughter, Lisabeth, has taken a shine to the young man. One night, Sean escapes from the Bergmans and rides back to the McArdle ranch. But here he learns that his father has not let matters rest: Matt McArdle has hired a bounty hunter to kill Gunnar Bergman.

This news forces Sean to act against his own family. He knows that he must return to the Bergmans and warn them of their impending danger. And so he rides back to the Bergman farm and in the nick of time saves Gunnar Bergman from certain death by killing the bounty hunter. This marks a transition for both Sean and the Bergmans. He stays on with the Bergmans, turning his back on his former life and embracing his new life and drawing ever closer to Lisabeth Bergman.

When a near destitute runaway slave- Nathan -turns up at the Bergman farm, he is given the support that only comes from people of a generous and open nature. This draws Sean ever closer to the family and particularly to Lisabeth. Nathan is frightened and bewildered and tells his story of the brutal world he has escaped from. It is no accident that he has journeyed far from the plantation where he was enslaved. The Bergmans learn of a secret road that brought Nathan to Boston and safety. But Nathan had to set out to seek his wife who had come to Wyoming and whom he knows is in the nearest town.

Events come to a head when the Bergmans, Sean and Nathan set out for the town. The purpose of the journey is twofold: to buy wedding garments for Sean and Lisabeth, and to find and reunite Nathan with his wife. They are not long in the town when there are intimations of trouble: Sean's brother Seamus is seen in the main street. Has Seamus seen Sean? And two slave hunters are combing the streets, keeping a watchful eye out for runaways. There is a new presence in town, a new Marshall. But will he have the authority to settle disputes in this hitherto lawless town?