



Retribution Rails

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A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR READERS

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Reece Murphy is forcibly dragged into the Rose Riders gang because of a mysterious gold coin in his possession, he vows to find the man who gave him the piece and turn him over to the gang in exchange for freedom. Never does he expect a lead to come from an aspiring female journalist. But when Reece's path crosses with Charlotte Vaughn after a botched train robbery and she mentions a promising rumor about a gunslinger from Prescott, it becomes apparent that she will be his ticket to freedom—or a noose. As the two manipulate each other for their own ends, past secrets are unearthed, reviving a decade-old quest for revenge that may be impossible to settle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 While Reece wants to be free of the Rose Riders gang, he doesn't seem to think he's worthy of redemption. Why do you think this is? Is Reece as bad a person as he believes himself to be?
- 2 Charlotte meets a lot of pushback in her goal of becoming a journalist. What does this tell you about life in 1887 Arizona? Have things improved for women pursuing careers in the 21st century? Why or why not?
- 3 Consider Charlotte's perception of Reece early in the novel. Why does she so strongly believe he is guilty of all his reported crimes and therefore unredeemable?
- 4 Kate tells Charlotte that she "has made her own help, always (p148)," and suggests that Charlotte do the same. In your opinion, was this a cruel comment or helpful advice? Does Charlotte "make her own help" by the end of the novel?
- 5 Why do you think the author chose to narrate the story in first person, from both Reece's and Charlotte's point-of-view? How are the narrations different, and what does this tell you about each character? How would the story have changed if one of these POVs was removed?
- 6 Reece says "Secrets are like bullets...Folks say they'll take 'em off your hands, share the burden, but really they just load 'em into their own weapons so they can use 'em against you later (p183)." Do you agree? By the end of the novel, do you think Reece still feels this way about secrets?
- 7 Rose tells Reece that "love makes us do odd things (p262)." Do you agree? In what ways, if any, are Rose's goals different than Uncle Gerald's?
- 8 Reece and Charlotte come from very different walks of life. In what ways do they reach to a shared understanding, and why do you think they are able to eventually respect each other despite their differences?
- 9 Consider the passage on p291-292 where Reece imagines his regrets as a cape. How has his guilt held him back before this moment? How does his mindset change moving forward? Do you agree that "the ghosts of our misdeeds can haunt us?"
- 10 Charlotte says "words have great power; unbelievable impact. I cannot abuse that (p355)." How has her view on reporting changed since the beginning of the novel? What about her thoughts on what constitutes the truth? Can you see any parallels to the 21st century? Consider our justice system and reporting media.
- 11 The railroad serves as backdrop for many scenes in the story. What advantages do these new rail lines bring citizens of Arizona? What detriments? (Look to the Author's Note on p368.)
- 12 What do you think happens after Reece and Charlotte connect at the end of the novel? How have their opinions of each other changed? How have *they* changed?