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Picture Books

Rough, Tough Charley
Verla Kay Adam Gustavson
Tricycle Press
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Disguises and derring-do are perennial children's favorites, and this new verse biography of Charley Darkey Parkhurst does not disappoint. A runaway orphan whose life spanned the American continent and most of the nineteenth century, Charley's story contains a surprise ending that will be as astounding to today's readers as it was to Charley's contemporaries—after "his" death, Charley turned out to be woman who took advantage of her male disguise to vote, exercising that most American privilege more than fifty years before the federal government granted women that right.

Discovered sleeping among the horses in a barn as a child, Charley begs for room and board in exchange for doctoring the owner's horses. "He" soon excels at horse care and learns to drive a stagecoach: "Charley driving! / Gaining fame. / Folks requesting / Him by name."

Moving west by steamship, Charley remains a popular stagecoach driver, even though "Ladies gossip," remarking that Charley is "vulgar. / Chews and spits. / Gambles, swears, and even hits." Nevertheless, his coaches always arrive on time. After killing a notorious bandit and losing an eye while replacing an edgy horse's shoe, Charley continued driving for three more years before raising cattle with a partner. Eventually, he opened a stagecoach stop, and joined the International Order of Odd Fellows, an exclusive gentleman's club. After his death in 1879, Charley's sex was discovered, shocking everyone: "Women were not / 'Rough and tough.' / They weren't 'smart / Or strong enough.'" Remarkably, "she was buried with full lodge honors because her lodge brothers respected her so much as a 'man.'"

Author Verla Kay's unique "cryptic rhyme" is terse, vivid, and remarkably evocative. Her brevity is especially apt in the mouth of a person whose few words were probably as much part of her disguise as the signature blue gloves that covered hands too small and smooth to pass for a man's. Kay has several award winning books to her credit, including *Gold Fever*, *Iron Horses*, and *Tattered Sails.* This is illustrator Adam Gustavson's second book for Tricycle Press;

other titles include *Snow Day* and *Good Luck Mrs. K.*

Elizabeth Breau