

Excerpts from **RIDING FREEDOM**

by Pam Muñoz Ryan

“Thanks, Vern. I wish I could stay with you and work with the horses, but . . . I’d be in the kitchen and I’d be missin’ Justice and frettin’ ’cause I wouldn’t get to see Charity’s foal . . . or help you name it.”

“I know. I know, Miss Charlotte,” said Vern. “You gotta do what your heart tells you.”

“I won’t ever forget you,” said Charlotte.

“I guess I’m not likely to forget you, Miss Charlotte.”

“Here were six strong horses waiting for her commands, her tugs on the reins, to tell them which way to go. She yelled, “Haw” and “Gee” to get them to bear left and right, like she did when she was riding one horse or driving two.

She wished Hayward could see her. And Vern. Vern would have never let her get out of that wagon until she figured out the turns. Just like when he taught her to ride, he kept putting her back on Freedom [her horse] after each fall, saying, “Every time you fall, you learn somethin’ new ’bout your horse. You learn what not to do next time.”

“What are you blabberin’ about? The mail’s gotta go through, same as them passengers.”

Ebenezer put his hand on Charlotte’s shoulder. “Now listen, don’t you pay them passengers no mind. You are what you are. And what you are, is a fine horseman. And the best coachman I ever saw. You remember that. Under the circumstances, there ain’t nothing left for you to do but your job. So get to it.”

Charlotte looked square at Ebenezer.

Ebenezer looked square back at Charlotte and said, “You’re the coachman. You’re in charge, so load ’em up.”