

The Travellers
Four people: one story

TESS

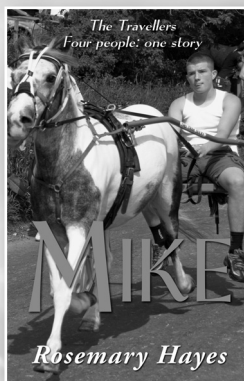


Rosemary Hayes

The Travellers



The first book:
Tess's story



The second book:
Mike's story



The third book:
Lizzie's story



The fourth book:
Ben's story

The Travellers: Tess
by Rosemary Hayes

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Tess

The first book in the series

Rosemary Hayes



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Rene

Jessie

Abraham

Abi

and Rita.

The English gypsies I spoke to referred to themselves as either gypsies or travellers, and these terms appear to be interchangeable. Many have Romany roots and still practise some of the old traditions and use words from the Romany language.

Traveller Organisations

The Community Law Partnership (CLP) incorporates the Travellers' Advice Team, a nationwide 24-hour advice service for gypsies and travellers.

The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups

The Gypsy Council

Friends, Families and Travellers

National Association of Gypsy and Traveller Officers

Travellers' Times

One

It was raining hard. Tess's mum, Kate, got out of the car and put up her umbrella. Tess ducked underneath it and they ran up the path to the village hall.

Even before they reached the door they could hear angry, shouting voices.

The hall was packed and Kate and Tess squeezed through the door and stood at the back, jammed against a load of other people. It was hot and stuffy and Tess banged her elbows into

someone as she shrugged off her school blazer and slung it over her arm.

A woman was standing at the front of the hall, behind a table. 'Can we have quiet, *please,*' she said.

But the noise just got louder.

Someone shouted. 'You never asked us about this. You've gone behind our backs.'

There was a roar from the crowd, then a man in front of Tess, with a shaved head and a thick neck, cupped his hands over his mouth and yelled: 'Yeah, right! No one asked us. We don't want no filthy gypsies round here! End of.'

Tess looked round the room. She recognised a few people. There were some of the staff from the technical college where Mum worked as a receptionist, and she saw Mr Hardy, the headteacher from her school, pushing his way through the crowd to the front.

'This is chaotic,' muttered Kate. 'The council have got a real fight on their hands.'

Mr Hardy was at the front, now. He stood up on a chair and clapped his hands.

Everyone knew him. He'd been teaching at the primary school for years. Gradually, the noise in the room died down.

Mr Hardy pointed to the people sitting at the table beside him. 'Let's hear what the councillors have to say,' he said. 'There'll be plenty of time for questions later.'

'Too right there'll be questions!'

'We don't want gypsies in this village.'

Mr Hardy clapped his hands together again. Tess had seen him at school assemblies, getting the kids' attention, quietening them down. He was doing the same thing here, as if all these grown-ups were primary-school children.

'Right,' said Mr Hardy, as the people settled down. 'Please listen to the councillors.' He held up his hand again, as there was more muttering. 'You'll have your say later.'

Mr Hardy stepped down and a man in a suit stood up behind the table. He fiddled with the papers in his hands, adjusted his specs on his nose and smoothed the few remaining hairs over his shiny bald head.

Tess yawned and zoned out as he spoke about the wasteland where the council had created a site for travellers under the motorway bridge, and how it was important to welcome them into the village community ... etc. etc.

Boring, boring, boring. Tess looked at her watch.

How long was this going to drag on? She took out her phone and checked her messages. One from Sophie and another from Tara, both with silly selfies. She giggled out loud and her mum nudged her and frowned.

Tess texted back. At v hall. Boring or what?

At last the councillor stopped speaking and at once the noise started up again. Once more, Mr Hardy climbed on the chair.

‘We’ll have one question at a time.’

A whole lot of people raised their hands. Mr Hardy pointed at a woman who worked with Tess’s mum.

‘The site may be some way from the village,’ she said, ‘but it’s very close to the technical college.’

‘What’s your point?’ asked Mr Hardy. Tess recognised the anger in his voice. She’d heard him speak like that to some of the cheeky little sods in the playground.

The woman cleared her throat. ‘Well, I’m just saying that the site may not affect the main village so much, but it could have an impact on the college.’

‘In what way, exactly?’

The woman was floundering. ‘Well ...’

‘She’s talking about thieving,’ shouted someone.

‘Thieving and litter and mess. These people live like animals.’

Kate gasped. ‘That’s a dreadful thing to say,’ she whispered to Tess, and for a moment the remark seemed to stun everyone in the hall, but then someone else shouted out: ‘Yeah, and they’ll have a whole lot of dogs with them. What about if the dogs get loose and bite people?’

More voices were raised. ‘And cock fighting. I’ve heard they do that, too. That’s really cruel.’

‘And horses,’ shouted someone else. ‘They’re bound to have horses. And you’ll bet they won’t look after them properly, poor things.’

Tess raised her head and snapped her phone shut. Horses? These people had horses? She stopped listening and started to daydream about owning a pony and becoming a top show jumper.

The angry shouting got louder, but Tess didn’t hear; she was too busy thinking about ponies.

Then suddenly the room went silent and Tess felt Kate clutch her arm.

‘Oh no,’ said Kate. ‘That’s awful!’

‘What?’

‘Weren’t you listening? They’re here.’

‘Who?’

‘One of the families who are going to live at the

site. The councillor's just introduced them. They've been here all along, listening to all this stuff people have been saying about them.'

'Where are they?'

'There. Right there out at the front.'

They'd been sitting unnoticed amongst the crowd of people and now they'd been asked to come and stand at the front. It was as if the whole room was shrinking from them. People pushed their chairs back, so that the space at the front was larger, leaving them standing there exposed, facing the village.

A mother and father, an older boy of around 15 or so, several smaller children and a girl who looked about 10 – Tess's age. They stood there, the adults looking at their feet, the smaller children clinging onto their mother's skirt.

Tess stared at them. She'd never thought about how a gypsy family would look. Until today she'd hardly heard of gypsies – *travellers* – but they didn't look that different from the other people in the hall. They certainly weren't dirty or anything. The woman wore lots of bracelets, gold hooped earrings and a dress, unlike most of the other women in the hall who were wearing jeans, and the man had a sort of medallion round his neck and

some gold rings. But other than that, they looked – well, *normal*.

Mr Hardy went up to them, shaking hands with the adults and older children and squatting down to talk to the little children. Then he stood up and faced the crowded room.

‘These people will be our neighbours,’ he said. ‘I hope you will make them welcome.’

There was an embarrassed silence. Then the father of the family nodded to Mr Hardy and started walking towards the door. The rest of his family followed him.

Tess was close to the door of the hall as the traveller family filed out. As she was staring at them, the older girl suddenly raised her head and looked straight at Tess; for a moment their eyes met.

She’s really pretty, thought Tess, taking in the girl’s curly dark hair and big eyes. Perhaps she’ll be at our school next term.

Once the family had left, the talking began again, not quite so loud, but no less hostile.

Tess tugged on Kate’s sleeve. ‘Can we go now, Mum?’

‘Well, I thought I’d speak to ...’

‘Mum, it’s late and I’ve got homework!’

That got Kate's attention.

'Oh ... oh, all right. I think I've heard enough.'

It had stopped raining when they left the hall. On the way back to the car Tess said, 'Why was everyone so horrible about that family?'

Kate shrugged. 'Well, travellers don't have a great reputation,' she said.

'Is it true, then, what those people were saying – about stealing and treating animals badly and being dirty?'

'I don't know, love, but ...'

'But what?'

Kate sighed. 'I'm not sure I'd trust them.'

Tess remembered a book she'd had when she was little, with pictures of painted wooden caravans drawn by skewbald and piebald horses.

'Do they live in wagons?'

'I doubt it. Not now. I think they live in either caravans or houses.'

'But they still have the horses? Someone there said they had horses.'

Kate had reached the car. She climbed into the driver's seat and put on her seat belt, as Tess scrambled into the passenger seat.

'Do they, Mum? Do they have horses?'

'Oh for heaven's sake, Tess, how should I know?'

'Perhaps I could ... ?'

Kate turned quickly. 'I know what you are thinking, Tess, and the answer is no. Don't you *dare* even think of it! You keep well away from the gypsies, do you hear?'

She put the keys into the ignition and started the car.

'What *is* it with you and horses?' she muttered, as she reversed the car, did a U-turn and headed for home.

They didn't speak on the way back. When they reached their house, the lights were blazing.

'Oh good, Ben's home,' said Kate.

Tess came back down to earth. She'd been imagining living in a big house with its own paddocks and stables, and winning trophies and masses of rosettes with her very own beautiful pony.

She sighed as she gathered up her school bag and followed Kate inside their front door. In the real world, things were very different. Tess lived in a council house on the outskirts of a boring village. Her Dad didn't live with them and Ben was a pain.

Ben was in the lounge, sprawling on the settee watching some noisy DVD.

'Turn it down, Ben,' Kate yelled.

'Hello to you, too, Mum,' said Ben.

Kate took off her jacket. She went over to Ben and ruffled his hair. How was the footie practice?

Ben squirmed away from her. 'Orright,' he muttered.

'Sorry we're late,' said Kate. 'We've been at the meeting about the travellers' site down by the college.'

Ben abandoned his game for a second. 'Scum,' he said.

'Ben!'

'Well, they'll only be trouble, won't they? They're just a bunch of thieves.'

But they'll have horses, thought Tess. Lucky things.



Rosemary Hayes lives in Cambridgeshire with her husband and an assortment of animals. She worked for Cambridge University Press and then for some years she ran her own publishing company, Anglia Young Books. Rosemary has written over forty books for children in a variety of genres and for a variety of age groups, many of which have been shortlisted for awards.

Rosemary is also a reader for a well known authors' advisory service and she runs creative writing workshops for both children and adults.

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