

DARK EYES



By J S Morey

**Prequel to the main story
in *Rose: The Missing
Years* and *Finding Rose***

DARK EYES

The unfinished short story, prequel to the gypsy romance series 'Love should never be this hard' by J S Morey

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Part of the series 'Love should never be this hard'

Books in the series 'Love should never be this hard'

Book 1: [The Sign of the Rose](#)

Book 2: [The Black Rose of Blaby](#)

Book 3: [Rose: The Missing Years](#)

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[Wild Hearts Roam Free](#) and [Wild Hearts Come Home](#)

(Modern westerns set in Wyoming)

[Unresolved?](#) - a short story linked to 'Wild Hearts Roam Free'

[Those Italian Girls](#) – set in the hills of Tuscany

[Read My Shorts](#) – stories and poems with a message

[Three Easy Pieces](#) - a haunting tale plus two feel-good romances

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Introduction to Dark Eyes

Prequel to *Finding Rose* and *Rose: The Missing Years*

For the full “what happens next”, please consider *Rose: The Missing Years* and *Finding Rose* – available in paperback on [Amazon](#) and in Kindle version as Books 3 and 4 in the series. Meanwhile, enjoy this run-up to the main story told in both books.

There is also the story of how the families come to England at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Sign of the Rose – 'Book 1' - begins in Southern Ireland before the action takes us to Devon and Cornwall and, ultimately Leicestershire. The drama concludes in Aylestone, Blaby and Wigston, after which the future of the family is set – gradually unfolding some sixty years later and recorded in *The Black Rose of Blaby – 'Book 2'*.

The four books from 'Love should never be this hard' make up a series to be enjoyed read in any order.

In terms of timescale, *The Sign of the Rose* is where it all begins, followed by *The Black Rose of Blaby* and then *Rose: The Missing Years* – which picks up the fortunes of the descendants of the family some sixty years later.

Finding Rose leads us into the seventies, where we discover how John's life unfolds (whereas *The Missing Years* covers the same story, but from Rose's perspective).

But first – to get into the mood – enjoy 'Dark Eyes'.

PROLOGUE

Any fiction author proclaiming they don't rely on real-life events and personal experiences when writing is – to put it bluntly – lying.

If that wasn't enough, all authors are liars. In building on these events and experiences they are not exactly truthful in how they are conveyed; or how things really turned out.

That doesn't mean that all authors are rogues and people from whom to steer clear. No. But it does explain why many an author – myself included – may often wish to avoid the 'most-asked' question, “Is the book an autobiography?”

So, before you ask, 'Yes. There is a lot of “me” in what follows – as well as in all my novels so far.' But, let's be clear, it's not the “me” here and now, but from influences and situations dating back decades. Hence more lies.

Each of them had to rely on memory (I have never kept a diary)(perhaps I should have), so there are plenty of shades of the truth.

That might explain why the tragedies and painful experiences are tinged with optimism, which I tend to call 'feel-good'. Hopefully it's one good reason to read and share my works with friends and family - after you have enjoyed them.

John Morey

P.S. Links to more writing are listed after DARK EYES.

DARK EYES

Prequel to FINDING ROSE and
ROSE: THE MISSING YEARS

John shielded his eyes, avoiding the sparks shooting out sideways from the camp fire. Melv had just dropped another dry log onto the searing red embers causing them to spit in protest. Both teenagers moved back from the rush of heat, but its warmth was welcome against the chill air now that the autumn evening closed in. At least it was dry but the dark clouds remained unseen in the dark sky of early evening. Tea-time approached.

They were on their half-term break, having started their fifth year at High School a few weeks earlier. They had spent all day outdoors in fields just a short walk from where each of them lived, raking about randomly and not even going home for lunch. It was now almost dark. In an hour John would be home, seated at the kitchen table alongside his brother and sister, waiting for their tea and the main meal of the day – the only time they all ate together.

It was a ritual 'not to be missed at all costs', said father.

He had to get back before his dad returned from his nine hour day in the Aylestone factory. (Ten hours, if you counted his drive there and back from Blaby.)

If he was late John would be in trouble.

Like the camp fire, but indoors, the kitchen-dining room would be nice and cozy, the coke boiler ticking away in the background behind the seat where he always sat, adding to the surge of heat from his mum cooking on the gas rings of

the stove.

It was the best of times - time to reflect on the day.

He and his best pal, Melv, had spent most of their time on the Tomato Farm since ten o'clock that morning. It was now four thirty and they had been building the grass huts for their camp. They were supposed to be Indian tepees – like they had seen in the western films – but grass instead of animal skin. The camp fire was the heart – the centre – the focus of their attention as the cool of the evening was felt now that they stopped whatever they'd been doing. It was Melv who had just returned with an arm-full of wood. Taz Taylor had gone with him this time to help him forage.

Taz was unique.

He always knew the best places to find everything that a fifteen year old could possibly need – dry wood for a fire, the best place to fish for perch (including the best bait) in the local brook, the best eating apples to 'scrump' and the best time to do so – the exact time he knew the gardener at the posh house would be having his dinner.

“Save some fire for us,” complained Melv, getting John to budge over. The seat was a branch on two logs.

He was always complaining whenever he was asked to carry out a chore he didn't like, but this time there was plenty of room round the fire. OK, so it might be on the side where the light wind was blowing the live embers, threatening to leave burn holes on their coats, but there was no smoke.

Just heat.

It had been dry weather – too dry, in fact.

Come summer, the tall grass on the Tomato Farm was always at risk from fire. Usually it was Martin 'T' who started it. He lived on Grove Road and timed his incendiary spectacular events to the point of dryness where a single match would be enough to ignite the whole twenty acres of tall grass. He timed it to a 'T', which is where he earned his nick-name I suppose.

Melv lived on Auburn Road and had a shorter walk home. The Tomato Farm commanded an uninterrupted stretch of farmland between Grove Road to Auburn Road, with another field and houses to the north making a third natural border. Taz lived just up the road from John in council houses on Lutterworth Road, opposite Orr's garage. They usually walked home together. Taz's mum worked at the same shoe factory as his own mother, off The Green near The Bakers' Arms - one of the oldest pubs in England.

Melv's mum *didn't* work – to begin with she had just given Melv a little baby brother, and a couple of years before that his sister had been born. Her full-time occupation was 'mother'. But mainly it was because she didn't *have* to work – his dad had been officer grade in the army after the war and now had an office job with the Gas Board. One wage was enough to raise a family in their case.

What John didn't realise was that Melv's mum had a heroic past – in fact, few people outside of immediate family knew about it. Furthermore, she never spoke about it. For one thing, she had signed The Official Secrets Act during her role in the RAF, monitoring strategic information on German air man oeuvres. She had even lied about her age to volunteer early, she was so committed to

playing her part in defeating the Nazis.

She had earned the right to enjoy motherhood.

All that had been a complete and utter other world from what engrossed the boys now. The end of any day sat round an open fire in the outdoors was a good time for reflection.

So that's what they did.

Would Leicester City football club win the league this year? Would Maurice Hallam get his first cap for the England cricket team next season? Would the boys get new bikes this Christmas?

The first two events had the best chance of happening.

Those events in the sports calendar were a few months away right now, so they turned to more pressing matters to discuss. In John's case it was always the same of late.

'Have you seen the new girl in the village?'

~ *** ~

“Thinking about Dark Eyes again?” It was Melv who read John's faraway thoughts as he dumped more logs on the campfire. It broke his spell, making John jump and shield his eyes again from the sparks. Melve reacted. “Serves you right.”

“Why d'you say that?” John was irritated when Melv *always* knew what he was thinking before *he* did

“You were well away. You didn't even hear us coming, did you? We could have been the Whetstone kids out to wreck our camp again. *Then* what would you have done?”

The raids between Blaby and Whetstone were part of an ongoing tradition that went back centuries. The Blaby and Whetstone villages were separated by one 'neutral' field

between their two boundaries. On the Whetstone side there was a ten acre meadow carrying a footpath from St Peter's Church to the *fringe* of Blaby village. From The Avenue in Blaby there was a jitty running beside the allotments just as far as a gate – beyond which there was 'No Man's Land'. Not Whetstone; not Blaby.

It really was tradition. The Blaby kids lined up by the gate leading to No Man's Land; The Whetstone kids did similar, from *their* side of the imaginary boundary.

Then they fought.

They fought for 'occupation' of No Man's Land. They fought with brick ends and rocks and stones. Bits of wood. Anything. Neither side ever won. Nobody was ever hurt. (Amazingly that was an incredible fact.) On John's skirmishes as part of the Blaby gang - so far - he was astounded at how rocks would be raining down from the Whetstone kids like a shower. But they always, always fell just *short* of the gate at either end.

Why *was* that?

Looking deeply into the fire – and delving into the solution - John figured out the answer. Already he had developed the knack for working things out; to find answers in a *mathematical* way. In this case it was all down to the size of the person *throwing* the missile compared with the size of the item being thrown.

He worked out that the 'big kids', as they were called, tended to pick up the biggest rocks; on the other hand the smaller, younger kids chose smaller stones. Either way, each boy managed to reach just short of the intended target – i.e. just short of the gate of their enemy in each case. 'It's

just physics,' he mused, 'equal and opposites that cancel each other out and all that.'

He knew what he meant.

Taz rarely joined in on these discussions. (You could hardly call them arguments.) He was quiet, preferring to express himself in action. They say 'actions speak louder than words'. Whoever dreamed that up had defined Taz Taylor. There was not a tree he couldn't climb, nor a parallel iron bar he couldn't jump up to and swing on, nor a telegraph pole into which he couldn't sink his knife thrown from fifteen feet.

(Regulation issue scouts jack knife, of course.)

He was also an expert with a catapult – not just aiming and hitting the target, but making one - selecting the best forked branch from a willow or hazel tree and fitting it with the right grade elastic and leather sling. Best of all, he could build a grass hut *taller and quicker* than anyone.

Taz was useful to have around.

~ * * * ~

Melv and John appreciated Taz. It meant they could concentrate on more spiritually nourishing matters.

Girls.

As innocent as his liaisons were, Melv was never short of girl-friends. He 'found' them in ample supply at church, especially church outings. (Or did they find him?) It was the *source* of his romances that made it all the more exotic. Rarely were these girl-friends from the village – not Blaby, at least – but from neighbouring Glen Hills. The posh part. Of course, that had its advantages when it came to keeping these girls away from John.

Much to John's relief, Melv had not spotted, or was not yet aware of, the new girl in the village - 'Dark Eyes'. How many times did he think *he* had seen her? Half a dozen at the most? There was the couple of times on the school bus and once when he had been sent on an errand to buy half a loaf at Grove Road Stores (Dark Eyes had been on her way back home with her mother and sister, from church), and twice when she had turned up at the youth club in Glen Hills just out of the blue. At least these sightings were what John claimed, or was it all in his imagination?

The question Melv always asked - *was she even real?*

John insisted she was, even though he *knew* he wasn't quite certain. Not *definitely*. But he wasn't going to admit to any uncertainty. It was *his* secret. His secret love.

Nobody else would have her as a friend, imagined or... and definitely not as a *girlfriend* - even though, in his dreams, week after week now, she didn't even want to *look* at him. But in his imagination she *was* real, and he could prove it. That's what he told himself; it's what he told Melv. His most compelling evidence remained the *recurring* dream that was *so* real.

'She *must* be real.'

When she appeared in his dream he was so captivated that he could hardly take his eyes off her.

In his dream she was so naturally beautiful. She had jet black hair, a ready smile, was always laughing with her friends, and had deep dark eyes that pierced you like a dart if you were lucky enough to catch a glance. But that in itself was so *very* rare. He even thought he had seen the mere hint of a smile, but that was also in his imagination.

Instead of being friendly and welcoming, she would avoid him.

She avoided *any* attempt *by him* to catch a glance, or give him any indication - *whatsoever* - that she had the slightest interest in talking to him. If he started walking towards her she would turn to walk away. He was sure it was deliberate – she would deliberately walk the other way, rubbing it in by joining another boy and making conversation, or even blatantly flirting with someone else *right in front of him*.

So much for dreams coming true.

Twice – in separate dreams - she had been at the youth club; twice John had spent the whole evening in sheer torment and ultimate misery as she ignored him.

John dreamed he had poured his heart out in a letter addressed to Dark Eyes, which Melv's girl-friend, her classmate Sandy, delivered on his behalf.

Finally, after days of tortuous waiting, he got a reply.

It read:

Dear John

I got your letter and did not know you had all those feelings for me. Nobody has ever said such kind and loving words to me before. It made me sad, and even more sad because I do not feel the same about you. Don't ask me why. I don't have any answers.

I am really sorry.

Try to think about someone else. Not me. We cannot be

together like you say. I cannot go out with you, so please do not ask me out again. I am sure you will find someone one day who can give you the love and friendship you need. I cannot. I am sorry. There are lots more fish in the sea. Go and look for them.

Yours truly 'R'

It was dream over.

He had kept the letter and saved it in a special place. With her words memorised he went over them again and again – searching for any clues, hidden clues, that there could be hope. Hope for him. Hope for him with a future – any future – with Dark Eyes. But right now there was only one source of comfort.

John took out a packet of five Park Drive tipped cigarettes, offering one to Taz. Melv didn't smoke but he still took a piece of smoldering wood out of the fire, giving each of his friends a light.

“You've got to forget her,” said Mel. “Even if she *were* real she's clearly not interested in you.”

That hurt John even more. What he wanted – what he *really* needed – was that hope. That proof. He wanted Melv to accept that she really *did* exist, even if he simply had not seen her for real. Yet. He was confused as to what was real and what wasn't and, because he was unsure, because he couldn't be *with* her, he wanted to hear *about* her. Even if she was a ghost. He longed to hear her name spoken – or just to hear accounts that she was seen in

the village walking down the road with whoever-it-was – as long as it was not another boy. But sometimes in those dreams it *was* another boy, one he might even know.

'But why?' he would ask himself, 'what has *he* got that I haven't? What does she see in *him*?'

On those occasions, *then* it all seemed so real.

~ *** ~

Melv did what he could to help John get over Rose, but to no avail. He tried everything. Best of all at least Melv was a very good *listener*. He *had* to be. That helped. But when he got bored or tired of it all, he tried to head John off into a new line of conversation. It didn't last long. John always found a way back to Rose. Melv was beginning to believe John was losing his mind, but that made him want to help even more.

But how? He had an idea.

The next Valentine's Day - after John had revealed his secret - Melv put idea into practice. The day came and, surprise, surprise, there on John's doormat was a letter. A card. A *Valentine's* Card. He opened it, a weird feeling in the pit of his stomach – like the one you get just before opening your school report or exam results - fear mixed with hope as you braced yourself for disappointment.

Or elation?

Inside was a simple message:

'Ride On Sweet Excellence'.

What on earth did it mean? *Who sent it? Were they nuts?*

Then he got it.

It was meant to be from Rose; but actually it was Melv,

pretending to *be* Rose.

~ * * * ~

The three friends sat talking around the fire. The late afternoon sunset had set and left the skies clear but, with that, the temperature had dropped sharply.

“There'll be a frost tonight,” said Taz. It was one of the few opinions he had expressed the whole day. It could only mean one thing: he was right.

Even so they didn't actually *feel* the cold. They finished their smokes, putting up with as much heat as they could from the fire, even though their faces glowed, almost scorched. It competed with the cool breeze on their backs. Later, with the fire dampened by handfuls of soil, the three friends headed home at a brisk pace – partly due to the chilly air, but also suddenly realising they had hardly eaten a thing since breakfast.

And John dare *not* be late for tea, no matter what.

~ * * * ~

During that day they had been considering the future of the Tomato Farm. It was under threat – from the boys' perspective at least. After all it was already derelict and abandoned, leaving the only evidence of its former glory in the debris of the greenhouse foundations. The war – now a distant memory for their parents of some ten years earlier - had seen to that. Necessity, born from the locals inability to buy building materials during rationing, resulted in any reusable glass panes and other fittings being salvaged.

You couldn't call it theft.

The Shultz family had fled to Germany in fear of

persecution at best, or enforced imprisonment at worst. The irony of both outcomes was, at least they would be safe. The real tragedy was that it put the survival of the 'Blaby Special' tomato in deep jeopardy. Unless some rare seeds – left to grow wild – could be preserved. Brick foundations were gradually over-run by nature – buddleia, hopefully rogue plants of the famous 'Blaby Special' tomato, plus elderflower and long, dry grass. Where once the groundsmen of Schultz's farm had toiled to keep weeds down, now bees and butterflies worked with equal enthusiasm to pollinate, and the occasional newt shared tenancy with yellowhammers and other birdlife. The only disturbance to this new-found routine were the incursions from John, Melv and Taz – plus other village lads.

And of course Martin T to burn it down every so often.

No, the real threat was housing development as a consequence of the post-war expansion of the economy and the population. It also included a new primary school and another local pub, adding to The Bakers' Arms, The George, The Bull's Head, The Black Horse, with The Dog and Gun on the fringe of the village at Whetstone Gorse - bringing it to six.

Plus The County Arms at Glen Parva.

With change comes opportunity. The boys adapted, and adopted the building site as a recreational area 'after (builders' working) hours' as it were. But that was destined to be short-lived. Eventually, even the shells of the work-in-progress houses and flats - their impromptu 'playground' - were superseded by ready-to-live-in accommodation

served by the new streets.

But even those essentials provided new opportunities.

Street signs doubled as goal posts, and street lamps became their floodlights. That said, the boys still yearned for the open space afforded by the Tomato Farm. *Green* space. There – on the new 'playground' of streets and street signs - they could still exert their energies and creativity, but on soccer and cricket.

With new houses came new people.

Possibly new friends; even a new girlfriend.

Potentially. That's what they hoped for and, over time, they were not disappointed. They also turned out to be decent houses, mainly semi-detached houses, but affordable. The Tom Thumb pub was built on the corner of Grove Road and The Fairway, the latter road forming the main thoroughfare through the estate, running through the centre of the whole development, almost linking with Auburn Road and the old part of Blaby.

How would the 'ghosts' of the Tomato Farm workers take to being over-run by people from all over the county – from all over the country – moving into new semi-detached houses with two and a half bedrooms, bathroom, separate toilet, and a garage?

How would Melv, Taz, and John take to it?

Even after the new estate was completed John rarely took that through road, even if he was walking or cycling back from The Grove Road Stores. Queens Road was still closer and more logical, cutting through to his house on the main Lutterworth Road. But his new pal down from Cumberland, Mick, lived on The Fairway, so he sometimes

dropped in from The Grove Road end.

(Mick was a brilliant sportsman, all round, and even taught him the rudiments of Cumberland wrestling. Some 'newcomers' – like Mick - you *welcomed*.)

As the boys had grown older, camps, grass huts, and brick fights with the neighbouring village had to step aside for more serious pursuits: soccer and cricket. They often played soccer for a solid five hours during school holidays – with two coats put down for goal posts at each end, accommodating anything from four to six a side. Some days they might play from ten o'clock in the morning until gone three o'clock.

Lunch was often a Mars bar and a bottle of Tizer.

Unfortunately for Melv and John, (Taz was more interested in mending cars and motorbikes by then) the Blaby park was a good half mile walk to the other side of the village, and they had the same to walk back after a grueling game.

It was a long day!

Then one of the new boys in the village – a posh kid called 'Gibbo' – came up with a new idea for a playing field: the home of Westleigh rugby team. It was ideal, just up the road towards the Dog and Gun pub. Best of all, they had it exclusively to themselves.

There was also another bonus.

When they had tired of playing – which was rare, that's true – there was a small shelter – actually the score box for the summer when rugby gave way to cricket, where they could sit and chat or have a smoke. Officially it was only needed during match days but it was perfect for the boys -

even though they could only get five of them in at once.

At a pinch.

Sometimes John would bring his transistor radio (well, his brother's if you *really* want to know the truth) so they could listen to the Top Twenty show – checking out the chart positions of their favourite pop songs. Or they could simply relax and talk about their other main interest – more often as they were getting older.

Girls.

John preferred it when there was just the two of them, himself and Melv. Then he could talk about Rose. It was still their secret. *His* secret, with Melv as his sole confidant. They never talked about her in front of the others. John was embarrassed, and Melv was worried about John's sanity in any case. They might think his friend was daft. That worried Melv. There was still no evidence that Rose actually existed. John was still having his dreams – the same dream or very similar, every month or so. If he felt it was too long since he had last dreamed about her, he *made* himself dream.

Then it got worse, or better, depending on how you looked at it.

He swore to Melv he had *seen* Rose, *in real life* this time, on more than one occasion. He was explaining this to Melv when sheltering in the score box at Westleigh. Just the two of them. The others had risked a soaking from the sudden thunderstorm and had gone home. As the Number One hit single was just finishing, John began the story of his last 'sighting'.

“You know the market garden my dad used to run?” he

said to Melv, lighting another Park Drive tipped. "Hillview Nurseries? Just up the road before the Dog and Gun?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Well, I was taking Bess (his collie dog) for a walk the other afternoon, when I saw her."

"Where?"

"In the field. On the nursery. Pea picking, with a load of others. Gypsies, they were, along with university students. She was there, plain as day, not far from the road as I walked past."

"Oh *come on*," said Melv, not really annoyed, more exasperated than anything at the lengths he thought his pal would go - just to make up a story. "First you dream about her going to the youth club. Then you reckon you saw her on the girls' school bus. Now she's some gypsy. Stretching your imagination now, aren't you?"

"It was *her*, I tell you. She was *there*, with her family, I imagine. When my dad ran the place we always relied on gypsies for casual labour. Every year. I knew I'd seen her before. Last year. It must have been about the same time. *Now will you believe me?*"

"Did she see *you*?" Melv asked.

"Don't think so. Well... yes... she might have done. I think she might even have smiled at me. Almost. Perhaps." John's uncertain tone gave him away. Melv knew he wasn't *absolutely* sure.

"Did you speak to her then?"

"I... I couldn't," said John. "She was busy. She looked away as soon as she saw me."

Now *he* avoided Melv's eye contact. "I know you think I'm making all this up," John continued, "but I'm not. Not *this* time. This time she's real. I *know* she is."

"Then I suppose we'd better find her," said Melv decisively, getting up to go. He was calling John's bluff. "Come on, let's get home. The rain's stopped. We can work out a plan on the way. If she *does* exist, we'll find her.

"I promise."

"We have to," whispered John, more to himself than Melv. "We most certainly do," echoed Melv, sighing and using his best impersonation of W.C. Fields.

~ *** ~

With that agreed the two pals set out for home, John relieved that Melv at last believed him. Melv was just glad to see his best friend in better spirits – hoping it wasn't temporary, unlike previous times.

They only had half a mile to go and never minded the walk. They didn't even mind the last of the rain since it had now been reduced to a light drizzle. In fact, quite often they would go for a walk *because* it was raining. It was the mood it created. Melancholy. Or the colour, grey, perfect for mooching around the village, hardly seeing anybody else, just chatting about... well... just 'stuff'.

Music was their most favourite subject. It was almost like a competition between them to see who had heard the latest Del Shannon release first, or John's special favourites - The Everly Brothers. Of course, right now the British bands were making an impact in America as well as Britain. So much so that, on their personal agenda was the plan to form their own group.

One day. That was one dream they *shared*.

Soccer ranked alongside music – especially as they could play it as well as follow it – with Leicester City in challenges for the FA Cup and league titles. And, similar to music, each had their favourite players – John preferring defenders whilst Melv wanted to be like the leading goalscorers – even though he was a pretty handy goalkeeper himself on the quiet. But strikers grabbed the glory.

As did Melv.

And it was on one typical rainy evening in early spring when the most remarkable thing happened. This time they *both* witnessed it.

Melv had called round for John. It was half term but the rain was so heavy during the day it totally ruled out soccer. It was well after six in the evening. The drizzle was no more than a heavy mist – you could hardly call it rain.

Heading into the village (for one reason, they might buy a bottle of brown ale at the Bottle and Jug at The George Inn, using their rain hoods to disguise their under-age faces from the landlord) they made their way along Lutterworth Road towards The Bakers Arms and the old part of Blaby.

It seemed only a few years before that they still had a village blacksmith, at the central crossroads.

This time they concerned themselves with the third item on their list – or was it becoming top priority now?

Girls - or, in John's case, 'Girl' – singular: Rose.

They had previously – over recent days - followed through on Melv's 'plan', as he called it, embarking on a series of expeditions to visit all the places where gypsies

were known to pitch their camps. Sites were traditionally at obvious locations – not too far from the village, on country lanes with wide grass verges for both horses and the vardo and, ideally, running water close by.

They searched, but to no avail, so far. They even went as far as Dunton Bassett in one direction, and Wigston in the other. Surprisingly, Hospital Lane - on the way to Countesthorpe - drew a blank, as did the road to Cosby.

Where could John's mysterious 'apparition' be hiding?

Barely had John spoken her name when they heard a soft regular rhythm of hooves on the side road below, and the familiar rattling of a horse pulling a trap. The sound was gradually getting closer, converging with their arrival at Blaby cross-roads. They reached the intersection first, sitting on the bench by the post office in anticipation.

John lit a cigarette.

They watched, and waited.

The breath from the horse's nostrils came into view first, a cloud billowing out ahead of the animal in the cooling night air. A pie-bald cob could now be seen powering up the hill leading from Sycamore Street, before pausing as it came to the corner by The George Inn. Checking the road clear it first began to cross directly opposite towards Enderby Road, but instead of going straight on it turned a sharp right towards The County Arms and Glen Hills along the Leicester Road.

There were three people on board.

Their faces were hidden as they sought to protect themselves against the cool breeze and damp air. The boys

couldn't make out who the passengers were at first. Nor the driver, but next to the driver hung a lantern on a pole, swinging frantically between the rear end of the horse and the driver's seat. Intermittently, they could just make out a profile of the figure holding the reins.

Its light revealed a gypsy lady – middle aged, he guessed – but skilled at managing a pony and trap in any weather, or so they imagined. Sat *in* the trap itself and on opposite sides were two others; one no doubt was the husband of the driver, being male and quite heavy set. He swayed to the rhythm of the horses steps.

But what of the third?

As the trap turned sharp right it lurched, causing the lamp to swing even more wildly, its beam flashing ever more erratically from side to side as it finally revealed the face of the last passenger – a slight figure. The sudden tilt of the trap had caused the shawl of the girl – for it was a young girl – to fall from her face to rest on her slim shoulders. John caught his breath as he saw who it was. Melv merely looked at John, then back to her, his mouth open, speechless.

He, too, understood. A second or two later they spoke.

“Rose,” they said in unison, whispering the word rather than saying it out loud – almost as if they were afraid to speak too loudly in case it spirited the apparition away. Or perhaps she might hear them and her natural shyness cause her to bury her face behind the shawl.

She *did* hear them.

Momentarily she smiled, the lamp picking out her fine

features. The look on Melv's face spoke for both of them.

She *was* real.

Before they knew it the vision of her face, and the horse and trap carrying her, were both gone. With a sharp, "Giddup, Jessie girl," from the driver, it hurried along on the road towards the railway station – the branch line for local passengers to and from Leicester, and beyond.

'Under the bridge and in the field next to the railway lines was where they probably had their camp,' thought John. But that was nearly a mile away and, besides, it was now dark. They were too much in shock to follow. They sat down again on the bench outside the newsagents, eyeing the door to The George Inn on the opposite corner of the crossroads. John took out another cigarette and lit it.

This time, Melv took one too.

"So you were right after all," he said, choking on the unfamiliar draw from the Park Drive tipped.

"Did you see her?" John knew it was the obvious, but he just needed to hear Melv *admit* how beautiful she was.

How special.

How real.

He *had* seen her. They *both* had. They recalled the full beauty of her face, albeit only caught for a few brief seconds now and then in the flickering beam of the lamp. But it lasted for the longest time in their memories, as was the brightness of her eyes, captured in the lamplight. At that moment they could see she was excited, exhilarated and invigorated by the night air, the freshness of the misty rain, and the pace at which her mother was driving Jessie.

Home.

“She's so beautiful she actually shines in the dark,” John declared the force of his feelings, his relief, out loud now as her image continued to burn into his consciousness.

As it would from that moment on. Forever.

~ *** ~

They finished their smokes in silence, walking home. In silence. It was as if their work was now done.

Their quest was over. She *did* exist.

They *both* knew it now. John's dream had come true, in part at least. He had *seen* her – actually *seen* the vision of her – exactly the way she had appeared in his dreams just days earlier and on so many occasions before.

But how could that be?

Had he ever really seen her before albeit fleetingly, in *real* life? He hoped so. The thought of him only *dreaming* her up and then her actually *being* somebody real, was too difficult – too confusing – too scary to get his head around.

Was he, in fact, losing his mind?

This time Melv had no answers. He didn't even try. For him it was surreal. Mystical. Almost spooky.

But *not* frightening.

The next morning John woke up early, even though it was gone two o'clock before he had finally fallen asleep.

He felt bright, he felt happy.

He felt that life had real meaning at last. There was just one thing left to do. He *had* to find out where she lived – where the gypsy camp was. One place he and Melv had *not* checked beforehand was the fairground. Right under their noses, just outside the village.

They would do that now.

The fair came to the village a couple of times a year, sometimes it was on Farmer Atfield's meadow just off Grove Road, on the left hand side before the road took you into Whetstone. Usually it set up between Northfield Park and The County Arms, in the field below the path to Blaby Station. Just under the bridge. That was as long as the River Sence wasn't in flood. Then the road was impassable, engulfing the fields on either side, and the site of the fair.

This year had been dry.

It was traditional for gypsies to help out at fairs, or even have a fortune teller booth. *Perhaps that was what her mother was? And maybe her dad helped to put up and break down the rides, and do maintenance on the site.* John's head was full of the possibilities.

Maybe she had her own booth, billed as 'The Most Beautiful Girl In The World!'

Maybe... but, thinking about that option he sincerely hoped *not*. He would call round to Melv's first to see if he wanted to go with him. He pedaled his bike the few hundred yards up Lutterworth Road to Melv's house, past the garage until he was opposite to Western Drive.

"You want to go for a bike ride? John stood eagerly on the front step in anticipation as Melv answered the door.

"Anywhere in particular?" But Melv knew the answer.

"I thought we might cycle up to the canal bridge near The County Arms to see if we can spot any signs of tench."

John's face gave him away.

"Oh," Melv was onto him right away, "you mean just up

the road from where the fairground is - and where they have gypsies who sometimes help out - and, who knows, who might even be camping there - and, guess what, in one of the camps there might be this *beautiful* gypsy girl that someone - but I can't say who - has been dreaming about *for ages and ages...* - and, or so we now believe, is not just a dream but really, *really* exists?"

He paused, grinning at the thought of his own brilliant, insightful, intuitive monologue.

"Do you mean *that* bike ride?"

"That's the one." John grinned as he realised, '*Rumbled again.*'

"OK." Melv disappeared for a second, returning with his coat on before collecting his bike from the side shed.

He joined John at his front gate.

"Let's go!" he said, getting a head start.

~ *** ~

The two set out, cycling along Lutterworth Road through the village until they came to the Social Centre, opposite Northfield Park. They pulled into its lay-by. Melv had one question.

"What do we do when we get to the fairground?"

"We've got to *find* her first," said John. "The gypsies will be grouped together in a camp. That's where she'll be. With the Romanies."

"OK. You go first." Melv held back whilst John took the lead, turning into the gateway under the railway bridge.

But the fair had gone.

All that remained was a single caravan and the Zephyr

Zodiac to pull it. Plus it's owner, who spoke first.

“What do *you* want?”

Not the reception the boys expected. John stepped in.

“Where is everybody? Where's the gypsies, Mister?”

“Gone.”

“Gone where?”

“Dunno. But you're too late. I'm about to lock up.”

Zephyr man had his keys at the ready to prove his point.

“Was there a girl called Rose, here?”

John was desperate and it showed in his voice.

“Don't know about no Rose,” said Zephyr man.

“They had a horse. And a trap. The pie-bald cob horse was called Jessie.”

John had heard the mother call her by name that night.

“Yes. Pretty little thing,” said Zephyr man. “The girl that is. Yes. She did call the horse Jessie.”

“Where did they go? When did they leave?” John was *really* desperate now, almost frantic. How could he be too late, letting her slip through his fingers?

“Musta left about six s'mornin',” said the man, “can't say where they was goin' though. Mighta been Lutterworth, with the fair.”

John was devastated. It might just as well have been on the moon. There was no way he could look for her there. Not now. Melv did his best to smooth over his pal's disappointment.

“She *will* come back, John,” he said. “Gypsies have a set territory just like the rest of us. They go to the same places at the same time of the year - year in, year out.”

“But how long do I have to wait?” asked John, not expecting an answer that made any sense.

Melv took a different tack. “At least we know she *does* exist, *you* know for sure, now. We'll check out all the known gypsy sites every now and then, until we *do* find her. I promise.”

John took comfort in the fact that Melv had come up with a plan and sounded convinced they would find her. At last he had someone on his side; someone who believed in him. Even so, he was still racked with doubt and anxieties at the prospect of not finding her, or finding her only to discover she wanted nothing to do with him – the common theme throughout his dreams. Those secret fears multiplied alarmingly in his mind the more he thought about them.

The sooner they did trace her, the happier he would be.

Meanwhile, his mind was filled with 'what ifs'.

'What if she had a boyfriend already? What if she was already promised to someone else (which did happen in Romany culture)? What if he never *did* find her again? Maybe they had come from Ireland, like so many gypsies, but they didn't like it here and had gone right back?'

Then he had his 'positive' days when he would look at it all in a totally different light.

'What if he *did* find her again and it was somewhere close by, and sometime soon. He would find her camp, her family, and they would be standing waiting for him, watching him as he walked into their camp almost as if they had always been expecting him.'

He *would* find her.

“Here you are at last, young man,” the gypsy girl’s mother would say as she greeted him with a smile, offering him a seat by the fire and a cup of tea. “Rose will be back soon. She’s just been out to get us some milk from the farm. Sit down here for now.

“She’s so looking forward to meeting you.”

After a while as he sat watching the fire lick round the stew pot over the open campfire, in silence, he would eventually hear her returning, singing to herself. He would look up to watch her approach, although she hadn’t noticed *him* at first. She would be dressed in a white blouse and a skirt he had seen her in before, almost full length and festooned with flowers.

Flowers embroidered by her own hand.

She looked like some lead in a Hollywood film. Her black hair would be in ringlets with a rose – to match her name – pinned by a ribbon in her hair. Behind her right ear. Her younger brother and sister would be skipping along beside her, chattering, laughing, playing, hurrying back from the village farm near the church. Making sure they returned to the warmth of the campfire first, before her.

Then *she* would see *him*. Her lovely dark eyes would now be fixing him in her gaze, with a look that said she already knew him. Just as he already knew her – even *before* they had met. There was a relief in her expression that said she had been *expecting* him, *dreaming* about him. Arriving back in the camp, carefully setting down the milk she would walk over – sitting down on the straw bale close to him. Feeling the warmth of his body.

“I was worried you would never find me,” she would

say, her eyes moistening, but overflowing in sheer joy. She would reach for his hand.

Was he *still* dreaming?

~ *** ~

With that last image fading, with that made-up story fashioned out of hope gradually receding, John returned to reality - to the here-and-now. He was back to the morning after, coming to his senses, realising he had only just discovered her - and had now lost her again in a heartbeat.

But, in some ways, having seen her was enough. Almost.

Over the weeks that followed he felt his previous anxieties – his insecurities about the gypsy girl - mellowing. Softening.

He rarely spoke of them to Melv who, in turn, never raised the subject of Rose. John never prompted him either, content to process all his feelings – his *perceived* feelings – on his own and internally. He was pleased with himself that he could now control his feelings without relying on anyone else for support or approval.

A self confidence grew in him. It arose from the fact that he had at least *seen* her. That part *was* real, and it was enough. He had something to go on and he could move forward again.

If ever the name 'Rose' came up – say – in conversation, he could handle it, whereas before it would send him into a deep sadness bordering on depression. The more he went over recent happenings in his mind he didn't even know she *was* called Rose. That was the name in his dreams. The one he had given her. Now the dreams had stopped as if a fever

had suddenly broken, and he was well again.

He felt normal and certainly not crazy, as Melv had once feared. But that wasn't all. Another confidence and self-assurance was born. He knew that if ever something similar to this recently imagined experience consumed him again, he would be prepared. He would be able to cope and remain rational. He had convinced himself that it was all part of growing up. Or maybe he had read that somewhere. Of course, what he was forgetting all along was the fact that the dreams *had* happened, *over months and months*.

But *why*?

That really did *not* make any sense. Not to Melv, and not to John. He lived in hope that he would find his Rose again, but he kept that faith without becoming obsessed.

Maybe dreams *do* come true eventually. But how long do you wait? Maybe John was about to find out... maybe in years from now, or months, or just weeks.

Just maybe.

This story is continued in **Rose: The Missing Years** and is included as an excerpt in **FindingRose**.

EPILOGUE

The search for a soul mate is probably the most sought-after for most of you: 'The love of your life'.

If you have just begun your search or are still on that journey after several years, rest assured it is one goal that is worth striving for and one that, with the right level of determination and faith, you will achieve.

But 'achieve' is probably the wrong word in a world where the term is so often applied to material success.

Fulfillment is perhaps much better, mixed with nourishment.

The 'Love should never be this hard' series has this theme central to each book. It is also central to 'Dark Eyes', which is included as an excerpt within 'Finding Rose'.

Each book is a stand-alone story but each follows a sequence of events beginning in the mid 1800s, in Ireland, before reaching some conclusion some hundred years, and hundreds of miles, later.

Some features, events, characters and locations may be based on reality, albeit a realism, fact as well as spirituality, where fiction plays a part to entertain or to better inform.

The other quality that is explored, in addition to love and commitment to each other, is heritage and value in tradition - with strong references to those elements that built our communities and sovereignty.

But above all, a feel-good notion runs through this series of works by the author, and those that follow, to sustain an enjoyable read to the end.

FOOTNOTE

Thank you for taking time to read 'Dark Eyes', this **Prequel** to my novels **Rose: The Missing Years** and **Finding Rose** – the latter being available in paperback on Amazon, as well as in Kindle edition

I appreciate any feedback by email to Dark Eyes – or to books in the series '**Love should never be this hard**' – and please share this with your friends ! Dark Eyes captures the essence of much of my writing in terms of style, characterisation, plot – and the messages delivered to the reader.

Thank you, and enjoy your reading - *John Morey*

Further reads - novels and short stories on Amazon

From the series 'Love should never be this hard'

Book 1: [The Sign of the Rose](#)

Book 2: [The Black Rose of Blaby](#)

Book 3: [Rose: The Missing Years](#)

Book 4: [Finding Rose](#)

[Wild Hearts Roam Free](#) and [Wild Hearts Come Home](#)

(Modern westerns set in Wyoming)

[Unresolved?](#) - a short story linked to 'Wild Hearts Roam Free'

[Those Italian Girls](#) – set in the hills of Tuscany

[Read My Shorts](#) – stories and poems with a message

[Three Easy Pieces](#) - a haunting tale plus two feel-good romances

For more by this author, [visit www.newnovel.co.uk](http://www.newnovel.co.uk)