



Jayne DeMarco

*Don't
Go
Away*

Also by Jayne DeMarco:

Painting Stephen (DreamCraft)

Coming soon:

More Than Human (DreamCraft)

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Cover by Jade

A shorter version of this story
appeared on the All Gay Romance blog.

<http://bookworld.editme.com/JaynedeMarco>

This storyline was inspired by Jade, whose artwork
got me to thinking...! See the art here:

<http://3d-adventures.blogspot.com/>

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Don't Go Away

Jayne DeMarco

The lights are soft among the trees. Lamps mark out the boundaries of our camp like lonely guardians trying to hold out the dark. But you can't hold out the dark. I've tried for so long, and so hard, and in the end – where am I?

Here, under a cypress tree, listening to crickets and watching the stars burn in a deep blue sky while I wait, and wait. Looking inward, intent on my own thoughts while I wonder, deep down, if I'm wasting my time here, and this time he's not coming back at all.

I wish ... I wish so many things, some that can be put into words, others that defy words, even defy thoughts. But everything I wish comes back to him. He's a man now – young and inexperienced, yet still a man. He's drifting away, but, being a man, it's his right to drift if he wants to ... and, gods help me, he wants to.

We are Zapatasti, and we're proud of it. Some of us are proud of it. Mischa doesn't seem to be. He wears the tattoos, as every man of the tribe wears them, but he's drawn to the lights and the music, they call him away from the family. Away from me.

We're camped three miles outside the city. The forest shields us from the road but if you listen hard you can still hear the traffic, and in the west the sky is orange and the stars are dim. The lights of the city wipe away the night as they overwhelm the world. My world, at least ... the world Mischa wants to leave.

Every night this week, since we camped, he's followed the sounds of music and revelry into the city, and I know he's met people --

alluring, fascinating people who'll seduce him away. When he left tonight was dressed to kill ... or to dance. I don't even know where he got the clothes, but intuition tells me he won't keep them on for long. Long enough to finish the dance? Maybe. But I know where he's been running, this last week, and who he's been running with. He comes home before dawn and I can feel the difference about him.

If this is what he wants – if the yearning to live the city life, dusk till dawn, dance in smoke and lights, sweat and writhe and groan with strangers – there's nothing I can offer him to tempt him back to the family.

For a thousand years the Zaparasti have wandered – Romany, gypsy, people of the steppes, the forest and the open road. But even in my lifetime it's all changed, and I'm still young. The horses are mostly gone now; we travel in trucks, we're told where we can park, we need papers and licenses and documents, or borders are closed to us. I don't blame the ones who wander away. The life isn't what it used to be; the magic is vanishing.

But I worry for Mischa. Too young, too beautiful. The city will devastate him. He'll dance ... he'll love, and he'll be betrayed. They'll use him for his beauty, and they'll scorn him for what he is. I've tried to tell him how it is, but he won't listen. The truth? We're outsiders, wanderers, people of the roads – always the first ones suspected if there's been a crime, and the first ones expelled in times of trouble.

He promised me he'd come back tonight, and I don't really believe him, but still I'm here, waiting, hoping. Wishing. And I'm tired – it's been a long day, full of withering apprehension as well as the hard work of the life on the road. I put my back against the tree a while ago; I slithered down, not intending to doze, but dozing just the same.

My dreams are weird. I see things, people, places that shouldn't exist, faces that are lost in the past, events that should never take place in any reality. I wander in these phantasms for long enough

to have lost all track of time and reality –

His voice surprises me. My eyes jolt open and I see him clearly against the sky and the lanterns, which have started to flicker out. It's late. I struggle up, palms pressed against the coarse bark of the old cypress.

“You came.” My voice sounds strange. “You came back.”

“Of course.” He moves like a shadow, a little closer, avoiding the light. He's beautiful, my Mischa. I'd have said he was the best of us, if he shared the Zaparasti pride. He's my fifth cousin – an ocean of unrelated blood washes between us, but we share the same name as if by a trick of fortune. “Vanja.” He speaks my name reluctantly, and I hear the catch in the word.

Then I see the bruises. This is why he's holding to the shadows, trying to prevent me from seeing them and at the same time desperate to tell me, have me know, so I can chew him out, get the anger out of my system, and then hold him. Heal him.

But I don't want to chew him out – maybe tomorrow, when the fear isn't choking me. My hands shake as I reach out to him. Bare skin is cold, prickling. “Mischa, what's wrong? What happened? Where did you go? Are you –”

Are you all right? I'm trying to ask impossible questions. Did they hurt you? What did they do to you? Who was it – who do I have to hunt down in the old way, for vengeance, which is the only kind of justice our kind ever get.

“I'm all right,” he says, trying to be brash. Like the city people he's been rubbing shoulders with.

But it's a lie. I hear the untruth in his voice, but I know what he means on the superficial level. His bones aren't broken. His skin isn't gashed. He's not bleeding, he was 'all right' enough to walk three miles back to camp, even after his beautiful face was bruised.

He comes hesitantly into my arms, as if he thinks I'll push him away. I crush him against me instead, hear him yelp and flinch. Ah, so the bruises are not all on his face. I release him a little and he relaxes again.

“Mischa —” against his cheek, breathless with dread “— you need a doctor?”

“No.” He buries his face against my shoulder. “I'll be fine. I'm ... done, Vanya. No need to go back there again. Not again”

“No need?” I go down on the turf under the tree, take him down with me into moonshadows. The lamps are going out. “You danced?”

He pushes me down on the turf and I look up at his face against the stars. “I danced ... you should've seen me, Vanya! I was good. They threw money onto the stage. I was going to come home and show you more money than you ever saw before. I was going to take you to Prague and ...”

He says no more, but I can guess the rest. It would have to be the thug, the one with the broken nose, I don't even know his name. I don't have to ask – the thug took the money, as fast as Mischa earned it by flaunting his body, his beauty, for the entertainment of strangers.

And I think the bastard also took my Mischa, but I'm not going to ask. He's learned a hard enough lesson tonight, he doesn't need to have it said out loud. The words would flay him alive. Did he go willingly to the thug?

Did the bastard promise to give back the money he had earned, if only the little gypsy whore would get down on his knees and open his mouth? Or if he fell face-down over the table and spread the long, dancer's legs that have always lured me with their promise of paradise. I think I can imagine the scene that was played out in some smoky little room behind the stage at that place with the purple neon and the reek of cigarettes and booze. Anger rises up

in my chest, enough to hurt me, as if I'm ill, or injured, myself.

His hands on my skin fetch me up in prickles of delight. I squeeze shut my eyes and struggle for the words. "No need to go back? To the city?"

"To the city," he whispers, touching my face. "I'm done now, Vanja."

"We're leaving tomorrow." I can barely speak. "Some of the trucks have already gone ahead. We're heading east ... we won't be back this far before spring. If then. I might not return at all. "You'll be with us?" *With me?* But I don't say those words. I can't.

"I came back ... back to you," he says simply, as if those few small words answer everything. Maybe they do, but I yearn to hear him say it. Perhaps he never will.

I go down onto the turf under the light burden of him, delighting in the press of his bones, the sharp jab of his knees and elbows, the murmur of his breath on my neck, smelling a hint of ale and spirits. He's been drinking, too, but I don't care because he came back. He came home. Nothing is wrong that can't be fixed –

Tomorrow.

Tonight, there is only the rustle of the wind in the trees, the smell of cypress and a little lamp oil, and *him*. I don't see his bruises as he rests himself on me; his hands are skilled ... much more skilled than my own, and I wonder for a moment how. But then, I know how, even if I don't ask.

He strips me to the skin in moments, and then I can barely think any more, for his mouth is there, where I need it most. I don't even remember that the last man to pass between these beautiful lips was a thug and a thief. I don't care to remember.

And he seems to need this, as if he can expunge the other, wipe him away, and when he's gone, he can be forgotten. Can I do this for Mischa? If I can bring him some kind of absolution, it might be

enough for him. For me? I'm less than sure. Part of me wants to go to the city tomorrow, find the one with the broken nose, and take back the money –

Another part of me thinks, the money is tainted. It's dirty, because it was thrown at the feet of a boy dancing naked, as if his beauty, his youth and honor, are things to be sold. Or stolen.

He's lying along me, molded against my side with his head on my belly. My hands slither along his spine. My fingertips delve into the deep, warm crevice of his ass, and I groan, low down in my throat and chest.

He freezes, starts to squeeze his buttocks together as if he wants to keep the secret, and then forces himself to relax. He knows that I know ... how could I not? There's a slick oiliness in the heart of him. And in a way I'm glad, because it means he was prepared, he was not hurt – or not much. The thug had that much respect for him. It's something.

“Mischa,” I whisper. “I can get you a doctor.”

“Don't need one,” he says against the hot, hard shaft of me, where his breath on moist skin makes me shiver. “All I need is you.” And he turns, squirming into my arms.

I hold him tight. “Hush, be quiet.” I rock him. “Do I go to the city tomorrow?”

For a second he freezes again, and then I feel him shaking. “You'd do that?”

“I'd do that. Do I take back the money? Do I break his nose again? Do I slam him over a table, tear his jeans, and take revenge in kind, and we'll call it justice?”

He's shaking, tense, cold. “You'd do that for me.” Not a question. He knows I would do it, perhaps for both of us. Perhaps for the Zaparasti. Then, “Vanja, they have guns.”

“So do we.”

“But if gypsies go to the city with guns,” he whispers, hot and moist against my ear, “the Police take us in. Arrest us. There are camps, Vanja. You’d never be free again.”

I’ve heard all the stories, and at least some of them are true. Gypsies *do* vanish off the face of the earth; there *are* camps; the Police *do* round us up like stray dogs, if we give them the slightest reason.

“Vanja, don’t go,” he murmurs. And then louder, “Say you won’t. Promise!”

Still I’m reluctant to make any such vow. “And what about your money?”

“He can keep it.”

“You earned it. You danced for it.”

“He can keep it,” he repeats, as stubborn as he’s frightened.

“And your honor?”

He hesitates. “It’s not worth it. My honor ... what’s left of it ... isn’t worth you getting a bullet in you, or going to one of the camps and never coming back.”

I sigh. But I know he’s right. Revenge is a fantasy blazing in my mind, my heart, but I’m as well aware of the risks as he is. More aware. “All right,” I allow, “but I’ll promise you this, Mischa. If that thug ever shows up on the road, beyond the reach of Police and guns and all ... I’ll have the price of it out of him.”

“For me?” He lifts his head, looks down at me. A finger of light from one of the lamps touches his face, shows me his bruises. He’s been slapped around. For fun? Or did he try to fight for the money? Or did he try to shun the bastard at first? My blood is ice.

“I’d do it for us,” I correct. “I’ll have the money out of his pocket, and if it’s less than he owes you, I’ll beat the rest out of his hide – before I put him over a log and *you* can have him. Do to him what he did to you. Then call it even.”

He sounds doubtful. “Would it being back my honor?”

The question is clever past his years. I have no answer. “It couldn’t do it any harm. But they used to tell me when I was a little kid, you have to *earn* honor. And that means you can earn it back, or earn it *again*.”

“How?” He leans down and kisses me, long and deep.

“Not in the city,” I say when he lets me speak again. “Be Zaparasti. Be Romany. Be ... with me.” *Be mine* – I want to say the words, but I can’t, even now. I knot my hands into his hair and pull his head down, wanting to kiss again. “You can start tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow,” he breathes into my mouth.

And my joy is the fact that we have that future. He came back, and nothing is wrong that can’t be fixed –

Tomorrow.