

*The Dead Do Not Forgive* by Ieva Melgave  
Published by Zvaigzne ABC in 2013  
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Excerpt

A magician can never let himself even think that ordinary people are like him, for he is cut from completely different cloth. Although they seem to feel passion, anger, fear and even love, it is only reflected light. An ordinary person is like a dusty mirror that might reflect fire but can never know its burning heat. An accomplished magician sees ordinary people as tools, as playthings. Only when this understanding has been reached can he become a master in the grand game called “magic.”

—Garle’s *The Simplest Magic Secrets for the Novice*

[The first section has been omitted]

"You are late," Brood said. I could see his eyes and the frown lines between them, but not the jaw line, not the lips. That was one of the many ways that magicians worked: observing, watching, knowing everything about the other but showing next to nothing of themselves. I clenched my teeth. All desire disappeared as suddenly as it had come. There he was, obsessed by his own power. There he was, showing his superiority over ordinary people. Even with a shawl that an ordinary person would not have been allowed to wear. As though magicians did not have enough advantages as it was.

"Why are you so late?" he asked. He touched my cheek, and I forced my face to relax so that I could at least pretend that I was affected by his magic.

"I—" I swallowed, looked sideways and away, trying to come up with an excuse.

"Were you afraid of me?"

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His hand moved down my neck, reached the base of my skull and held on. It would only take a single sharp, strong jerk to snap my spine, I thought. I looked at him, because that seemed to be what I was expected to do.

"Because you should be scared."

And I, obediently, was scared. So scared that I did not dare to be angry.

"You should have been more scared of not coming than of coming," Boord said, more to himself than me. He studied my face distractedly, as if I was an insect with extra appendages or one that lacked the usual markings and he could not quite understand what was wrong with me.

He's not even trying listen, a small voice said. Small and childish and just as scared at me, but also proud and defiant. I am nothing to him, I thought. Nothing!

Boord pulled me closer to him and put his other arm around my waist. He felt my body tense and shiver. He listened to me breathe. And I was not there. Not for him, not for me. Did he brush my skin with his lips, or was it just with the soft fabric covering his mouth? Did he inhale the scent of my hair? I did not know. I am not here, I thought. I am nowhere. And he could do anything. Anything. But he would not be able to reach me, much less touch me. He would not know.

"What happened?" Boord muttered in my ear. I felt his body tense. As though he had left for a moment, as though he, too, was not there. Two people alone in the moonlight at the silver mines, locked in what any onlooker could construe as a lovers' embrace, and neither of them—

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"There was someone else," I whispered. I was afraid to lie. "Someone who wanted to stay with me, to protect me from you." And I slipped back into that moment again, afraid to think beyond it, afraid say his name.

I breathed in Boord's scent. Bitter musk and another familiar smell, reminding me of darkness and fear, from some forgotten time. Boord's hand at the base of my neck turned strong and cruel.

"Someone else?" he growled and pushed me away. I stumbled but kept myself from falling. He moved toward me, and I stepped back, afraid of the anger in his eyes, afraid for my life.

"You whore, you promised!"

"I couldn't resist him," I said weakly. That was a lie, but Boord did not catch it. My eyes widened in surprise. A magician should not be this careless. My lie should have been as easy to spot as a full moon above.

"Who is he?" Boord asked, yelling, but did not wait for my response. He grabbed me by the throat and pushed me against a rock wall. I could not breathe. I grabbed his hand, tried to free myself, but did not succeed. I kicked him, but not hard enough. I was ashamed of myself, caught like a newborn kitten. Like a little girl who does not understand anything yet. Ashamed to die like a little girl who does not fight back.

"Someone better than you," I thought, feeling ferocious anger. My inner voice became so loud that Brood must have heard it even though no sound escaped my lips.

He looked at me with bloodshot eyes.

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"I know," he said. "I know who it is. That fucking bastard. He is always—always—trying to steal my women. But this time, yes, this time I will beat you!"

He strengthened his grip on my neck. Suddenly, with intoxicating clarity, I saw that it was over, that there was no point pretending anymore. I will die right here, I thought. Alone with a magician who believes I am just an ordinary person, just a foreigner. I will die here, and the only thing that I will regret is not putting up a fight.

"You will not get me," I thought, with astounding conviction. My demeanor now was different from his. So different that he could not help but notice.

And he noticed. He looked at me as though he was seeing my face for the first time. Which, in a way, was true.

I smiled and looked back at him, taking note of each detail. The sweat pouring down his brow, the bloodshot eyes, the damp scarf covering his mouth. He drools like an animal, I thought. I would have laughed had I had any remaining breath.

So now it's you who's getting worked up about me, I thought. So worked up, you little prick. But guess what? They are coming for you, and they will get you."

I knew that he would get the gist of my thoughts, if not the actual words.