

Not long after Mia'd seen Mark off, now wearing a helmet with a peculiarly shaped attachment atop it — one looking like a set of male genitalia flopping across his helmet — Carmilla arrived, jumping up the wall with the same silent grace Mia's learned to expect from her.

"Hi," Mia chirped, looking over her shoulder for a moment before she returned to watching the city for any sign of the goblin horde. "How was it? Could you convince them?"

"Only Avery," Carmilla said with a sigh as she sat down next to Mia, letting her own legs hang down the wall's side too. "The rest were less than thrilled about fighting with the army after their experiences. Even Avery looked at me like I was suggesting something repulsive, but she decided to come anyway once I explained that the main army died and exactly how deep in the shit everybody is."

"Oh, that's great," Mia said, swinging her legs back and forth. "You ran ahead of her? I don't hear her anywhere."

"She went off with Brent to have herself officially assigned to our 'party'."

"Alright then," Mia hummed, glancing over at the side of Carmilla's face. "Thanks for doing this for me. I'm sure her help will come in handy against that regenerating Troll if it dares show its face."

"It's nothing," Carmilla said, shaking her head softly as she briefly glanced at Mia and held her gaze. There was an uncertain, searching look in those eyes before the vampiress broke eye contact.

"What's up?" Mia asked, shuffling closer to her ... girlfriend? "You look bothered."

"Sorry," Carmilla apologised in a soft voice. "I'm just ... I don't know how to act around you anymore."

"The same as before," Mia said easily, leaning her head on the girl's shoulder. "Maybe ... a bit more relaxed though? You look like a coiled spring. That can't be healthy."

"I'll try," Carmilla said, letting out a little sigh.

"Good enough," Mia murmured, snuggling in a little closer to the strangely warm vampire.

They sat there for a while, ignoring the soldiers still bustling about behind them and setting up ladders and makeshift staircases leading up to the top of the wall. Even the large openings where the evacuated refugees had been herded through were being closed up in short order with newer walls.

A few dozen metres away atop the wall, Mia heard her mother and Brent settling down too to take up watch. Apparently, some of the scouts sent out had caught sight of the goblins getting closer. They'd be assaulting the wall within minutes.

Lina was out in a smaller clearing near the wall, just below where Mia was sitting atop it with Carmilla, playing with her magic. By the looks of it, she was trying to make herself jump higher by sending bursts of air out of her palms which ended up with her face full of dirt more often than not.

Mark was off playing mason again in his dick-helmet, making sure the wall wasn't spotty anywhere.

The tension was palpable, so thick was it in the air that Mia could practically feel it crawling on her skin.

The first goblins came not much later, just a group of forty of them wandering down a street like they were sightseeing. They pointed at the wall, cackling like hyenas before the taller Hobgoblin in their midst smacked them into order.

It was likely about to order something when Mia aired its brains out with a piercing Bolt. It died on the spot, mid-sentence with its grey matter splattering across the rest of its kin.

It fell, and that seemingly robbed the lesser goblins of all reason as they launched into a suicidal charge against the wall.

They didn't even come within fifty metres of it, a mix of gunfire and some magic here and there killing them long before that.

Mia noted the more interesting ones. There was a woman kneeling up on the wall, further towards the forested hill who was shouldering what looked to be an ethereal rifle. It was as long as Mia was tall and she'd seen it shoot out a beam of energy that went right through five goblins.

While that was by far the most interesting bit of magic currently being used on the walls, there were also some others. Namely, a man lobbing globs of molten pavement at the goblins, another man who threw honest to god fireballs at them and finally a woman who was shooting ethereal arrows out of an inscribed wooden bow.

The last woman would have gotten lost in the dozens of other mages throwing more or less effective projectiles at the monsters, but she was shooting those spectral arrows of hers by the dozens and they were the same vibrant hot pink as Mia's own magic.

That was the first Arcane mage Mia had seen aside from herself, though the woman was more of an archer than a mage, but it was still cool to see.

The second group of goblins wasn't far behind the first, but this lot ambled down the street running across the riverbank hundreds of metres away from Mia. She'd only caught the flashes of magic and the sound of gunfire before a little cheer travelled up the wall among the defenders.

The third group had fifty goblins, and didn't take as long to catch up to the second group as they did to the first. This group had three hobgoblins, two of which Mia sniped out from so far away they didn't even see it coming.

The third ate one of the energy beams of the ethereal rifle which atomised half of its head. The rest of them were once again easy pickings after that, madly rushing at the walls or just going back to eat the corpses of their kin.

So far, Mia had been the only one to do much of anything. Carmilla merely cast her fluid gathering sphere thingy and watched over Mia, while Mark and Lina seemed to be conserving their mana for now.

Helene was flying around above, occasionally sending a cooked metallic bird crashing down, still twitching from the lightning coursing through its body.

Brent was once again held back by his range, which started at his fists and ended at the tip of his blade.

Mia didn't doubt that soon there would be more than enough targets to hit for him, even if he didn't move a single step from his spot.

*This is a marathon, not a sprint.* Mia thought, narrowing her eyes as she heard the collective cackles of another group of greenskin in the distance.

For the next five groups coming into view, Mia only shot off one or two piercing Bolts to kill a hobgoblin or two. She had some mana potions, and could likely get some more from the soldiers who were still handing them out like candy if need be so she wasn't too worried.

*I don't want to tire myself out before anything actually dangerous comes around to fight. Plus, I'm guessing the others could really use the easy level-ups.*

Going by the few grins and cheers she saw on the mages after they killed a monster, she was pretty certain she'd been right. Most of these people were likely at most level 2 or 3. With these level 4 to 7 goblins, they'd be shooting up in levels like they had a rocket stuffed up in their asses.

Before the seventh group of goblins could arrive, a distinct sound caught Mia's ears. Screams, very human screams for help.

Carmilla twitched next to her, likely hearing the same thing.

“How is anyone even still alive out there?” Mia wondered, her face going grim. The last group of goblins was almost a hundred strong and had ten hobgoblins with even a magic wielding shaman.

The ugly withered thing had little bird skulls hanging off of its gnarled staff and a necklace of bloody human and elven ears strung across its neck. Mia gave it at least six new orifices with her piercing Bolts with all the prejudice the monster was due, it couldn't even get a single spell off before it died.

With monsters like that this close to the barricade-cum-wall, Mia honestly didn't even think of anyone managing to escape notice. Goblins supposedly had unnaturally good noses after all once they got into the upper Rank 0 levels.

“What do we do?” Mia asked, glancing over at the vampire who had her crimson claws digging into the rock. Her face was cold though, and Mia didn't know what to expect. She didn't manage to figure out on what basis the girl flip-flopped between apathy and care. “Think you could go and get them?”

“Maybe,” Carmilla said under her breath, then her gaze jumped up to the sky and Mia's heart jumped into her throat as she followed.

Helene was shooting down from the distant sky like a white comet, going *right* towards the screams of help and the echoing cackles closing in on them.

Mia leaned forwards, her hands clutching the walls' stone railings as her mother disappeared behind a line of houses.

“I'll go-“ Carmilla started, a foot already over the wall when Helene shot back up and with a heavy flap of her wings flew over to the wall. She only stopped when she was hovering before Mia.

“Hold her,” the angelic woman said and Mia dumbly held out her arm. Helene deposited a sobbing little girl with snot running down her face into Mia's arms, then she was gone again just as Mia's ears twitched at the sound of angry screams and shouts of defiance.

Carmilla took that as her own cue to move and shot after Helene, landing on the ground in a dead sprint before she moved away in a blur.

A part of Mia wanted to follow, but she knew how stupid that part was. For one, she'd likely break her legs just jumping down from the walls and two, she'd hardly be able to handle a group of a hundred goblins from up close as well as Carmilla could. And three, she had a tiny little package calling to her mommy and daddy between sniffles to protect.

Mia turned the opposite direction, holding the little girl close and ruffling her hair gently. She was at most four, maybe three years old and Mia hadn't the faintest clue how to handle her.

She never was the type to be good with children, if any aunts or uncles wanted a babysitter for their kids Sophie was their first call, then Gabe once the older girl wasn't available and Mia usually just came as a package deal with her brother.

So she tried to emulate what she'd seen Gabe do when that fiendish brat — her cousin, Noe — wouldn't stop bawling his eyes out after his mom went to work.

"It's alright," Mia whispered soothingly, navigating her way down a makeshift staircase made out of stacked crates. "They'll be back in just a bit, you have to be brave. What's your name? My name's Mia."

"Mommy ... I want mommy," the little girl sobbed, burying her face in Mia's shoulder and spreading soot all over her favourite turtleneck.

"Shhhh," Mia just whispered, glancing up as she heard the whoosh of her mother shooting off again into the distance.

A gaunt woman looked around wildly, bloodshot eyes snapping around like a cornered animal looking for which predator's neck to bite first.

Her rabid eyes landed on Mia, then at the little bundle in her arms and she froze up.

"Hey, is that mommy?" Mia nudged the little girl and that got her attention, a cherubic face surrounded by dishevelled blonde hair snapped up and towards the woman.

"Mommy!" The little girl cried out, instantly trying to squirm out of Mia's arms. Mia didn't let her just yet, instead placing her down gently as the woman practically flew right down the stairs before lunging for the small girl and encasing her in a hug.

Helene came back a short while later, holding a bloody and battered-looking man in a princess carry. She landed with him next to the medical tent the army had set up and deposited him inside before walking over to Mia.

She looked a bit tired, but had a satisfied smile on her face. Mia held back the quips and snarks playing on her tongue. After all, it was pretty hypocritical for her mother to be lecturing her about taking undue risks before taking even bigger risks herself and almost giving Mia a heart attack.

Instead, she looked at the little girl clutching onto her mother like a baby koala. The woman was up, watery eyes landing on Helene. "Thank you, thank you so much. I thought we were- Oh my god, is Jared ... ?"

"I left him with the healers," Helene said, answering the question the woman was too afraid to ask. "He was alive when I last saw him, if barely. I think one of the goblins managed to stab him in the chest and pierce a lung."

Helene spoke the second part silently, glancing at the little girl staring at her with starry eyes.

"Thank you, I'll-", the woman said, starting towards the tent before glancing back at Mia too. "Thank you too, for looking after Ava. Now, sorry I have to go."

"GOBLINS!" A shout from atop the walls stopped any hope of some small talk with her mother in its infancy. "Two hundred strong! Get ready!"

Bells rang across the street, alerting everyone and Mia shared a short, but meaningful look with her mother before they both shot off. Mia ran towards the wall while Helene shot up into the sky with a languid flap of her wings.

Carmilla flipped over the wall just as Mia managed to scramble back on the wobbly stacked crates.

Looking the vampire over, Mia noted a few scrapes and torn bits in her clothes but there was no blood and whatever skin was showing was pristine as silk. Glancing up at the sphere of blood following her along, Mia guessed it took not only the splatters of blood that would have landed on her, but her own blood too.

"You good?" She asked anyway, even if she was already heaving a sigh of relief. Carmilla was the person she had to worry about the least in their 'party'. The girl was practically unkillable and her strength and speed was bordering on monstrous.

"Perfectly fine," Carmilla said, poking a finger through a hole in her leggings. "I feel fighting isn't too good for the health of my wardrobe."

"You mean my wardrobe?" Mia huffed, and the vampire had the decency to look sheepish. She was wearing Mia's clothes after all, not that Mia was blaming her of course. The girl had nothing else to wear, and she looked damned good in Mia's old leatherwear. Even if they were a touch too short more often than not. "Any new types of greenies in this lot?"

"Nope," Carmilla said, turning to glance out over the group, or rather, the horde. Two hundred goblins rushing madly at a fortified wall had the right to be called a horde. "I saw a bunch of hobgoblins though, and two shamans."

"That's trouble," Mia mused, searching for either of the mentioned to eliminate quickly. "Both have magic. A hobgoblin almost shot a wind-enhanced arrow through my head back when I was starting out."

An inferno was raging across the horde, dozens of goblins screeching as they burned alive or were seared all over by the flames.

Fireball-guy was going wild, likely having levelled up a bunch. Mia suspected he wasn't a Mage mage, but had instead some specialised Fireball Lobber Class. If his Fireball was a Skill, that'd explain why the size, speed and power of his orbs of flaming death were all shooting through the roof.

Mia's spells were static after all, as all spells were. The only way to make them stronger would be to rip them apart and replace some parts of them with stronger ones built out of stronger runes. Stats and levels had nothing to do with that.

The woman with the fuckoff-huge gun was no slouch either, sending off beams of energy that had three or four goblins falling into a screaming pile.

Barely visible, near translucent pink arrows were also falling from the sky and there weren't just a few of them either, but dozens. They were hard to see though, and their effectiveness was even harder to guess as they had the exact same results as a rifle round meeting a goblin skull.

"I read up a bit on goblins and I think none of these should be a problem," Carmilla mused, her ruby eyes roaming the battlefield, searching for any prey worthy enough of her attention. "Goblin shamans can only use two spells at our Rank: Aegis and Dark Bolt, plus a Skill called Blessing of the Berserker."

"Pretty self explanatory, that name," Mia hummed, spinning her wand between her fingers like a pencil. "Wait, Aegis? The same spell I'm trying to learn?"

Aegis was one of the spells in the Abjuration Runic Lexicon, a spell that made a dome-shaped barrier with the caster as its centre.

"Yes," Carmilla said. "Though monsters like these will have the Minor versions at best, and a bad one at that too. They are too dumb for anything stronger."

Mia, not seeing any of the more dangerous types even then, resorted to leaning into her Spirit Sense to find them. She almost doubled over from the overwhelming inflow of repulsive information, but she'd had to contend with it while fighting the Boarlings too, so she managed.

Grimacing, she looked for harder, denser clumps of *wrongness* in the sea of vileness spreading out before her. Finding the nearest, her eyes flew wide and flew towards the rooftop of the apartment building on the other side of the intersection, just a few dozen metres away from the walls.

She caught a withered green form with a bovine skull atop its head like a helmet, leaning over the railing and pointing a hand down at the defenders. It was glowing *black*.