

Three Long Coats

Part 1

Faster. Faster. Faster.

Rain splashed under her boot.

Keep going. Keep going.

She heard six footsteps behind her, as the grey worn buildings all around turned into a blur.

Almost there...!

She rounded the corner and ran across the wall, over a fence gate and rolled to land.

Don't look. Have to get away as far as possible!

The gate door smashed open as they gave chase. She vaulted over a line of crates and pushed one as she went past into their path to slow them down, but the big guy just kept coming.

Fuck's sake!

She turned and drew an arrow from her belt, and in one leaping shot fired it into his boot.

She landed and kept running the way she meant to. His shouts told her it had worked.

She gazed up, spying a path.

There!

She jumped onto a ledge, slid across, climbed a ladder, flipped onto the roof. She gazed and found across the adjacent river another building in reach. Another arrow nocked, this one with a wound rope and a hooked tip. She fired it and saw it spin and latch over her mark, tested it, tied it off to the chimney stack next to her. She saw her pursuers follow close. They wouldn't be for long.

She took her bow and jumped off the building and slid down the rope all the way to the other side and cut it off from the end.

She disappeared down winding alleys. When she had the chance to take a few deep breaths, she finally risked checking her pockets. A sigh of utter relief left her when she pulled out a single note.

"I still have it..."

She read it again. This had better be worth the effort.

"I'm very interested in hearing what you have to offer. I'll be sure to let my security know you'll be coming so you won't have any trouble.

Perhaps a demonstration would be beneficial? I've heard stories of these weapons, but never had the chance to use them myself. You say anyone can use it. Anyone at all? The City Guard should be very pleased at this proposal.

Shall we say tonight, an hour before noon?

You know where to find me."

She snorted. Obviously it would be ridiculous if they had signed this letter... she needed hard proof.

The media, the courts. They couldn't just go off an unmarked letter dragged from a gang leader's office, no. But if they had a stack of papers from a journalist who had clearly done her research, and hundreds of the public demanding answers?

Maybe then they'd open an investigation.

Naomi just needed...

Footsteps. They're close!

She spun around and saw him in the corner of her eye moments before he reached her. It was the big guy from before. His eyes were furious, likely from having an arrow shot through his foot earlier, and Naomi didn't have enough time to move before he plowed into her and threw her to the floor. He beat his fists down on her and she barely managed to move her head out of the way to avoid the worst of the strikes, then reached down to her leg to pull out her knife.

Pinning it into his shoulder was enough to let her break free, but she realised when she got up she no longer had the letter with her. The thug ripped it up and went in for the kill.

Naomi could see his swipes coming from a mile off but the problem with fighting a truck is that making one wrong move would mean it was over. She was faster than him, and in his padded jacket she could mark the points under his arms where the lining was thinnest. She'd already lost her evidence, so as much as it stung she'd need to distract him long enough to run and try again another day. This case would be massive... if she just had the chance to make it.

Two strikes under his arms were made, one slash and one deep thrust which plunged up all the way till she felt the bone, but the bastard was tough and it didn't put him down like she planned. He grabbed her by the neck and had arms too long for her to reach and pull her knife back out. She'd need a miracle to get out of this one.

Or maybe, fate just didn't feel like killing her off yet.

The thug stopped in his tracks, unable to move. It was like he was paralysed. His grip weakened enough for Naomi to squeeze out and she was taken aback as to why for a moment until she saw a violet aura closing around the thug.

Someone stood behind him and lifted him up, before throwing their arm outwards and slammed him against the wall so hard his ribs broke.

Naomi spotted a woman with long copper hair, standing in the rain. Her nose ran red.

"Inefficient." A voice spoke from her staff. *"You're burning energy even more than usual. This is not productive."*

The woman snarled at her staff and paid it no more heed as she came over to Naomi and reached out a hand to help her up.

"Erin Langley?" Naomi asked.

"What gave it the fuck away?" She snapped back.

Naomi shivered. "Thanks for the help. I'll leave." She and Erin had, admittedly, never been on the best of terms. Since Erin and Apples had infiltrated and destroyed a Black Saturday auction; the same case which had kickstarted Naomi's career, Naomi had been curious what

magic user was strong enough but also so involved as to get down in the trenches and help in the fight against organised crime.

But obviously, it was never about altruism. It was about personal agenda. Naomi knew Erin positioned herself as someone “for the people” but that couldn’t be any further from the truth. She was just another member of the rich and powerful who threw their weight around for their own agenda.

Meanwhile, as far as Erin was concerned Naomi was just a deadbeat reporter dead set on making a name for herself and getting herself involved in matters she had no business in. For all she said about freedom of speech and holding the corrupt accountable, what the hell would writing an article in a newspaper no one would bother to read achieve?

With that being said, Naomi could spy that Erin was tense, at her wit’s end. She pried further. “Gilneas isn’t usually your spot. So why come?”

Erin folded her arms. “Got a situation I’m trying not to let spiral out of control. You?”

“Another case. Some special weapon being sold to the mayor through the black market.”

Erin raised an eyebrow. “Special weapon?”

“No idea what it is specifically, just that ‘anyone can use it’ and he’s considering arming the guard with it.”

Erin rubbed her eyebrows when serendipity struck again. “I know what it is.”

She held out an object in her hand. Made of gnarled blackwood and with blank, empty crystals set into it, it seemed to be a rather chunky looking wizard’s wand. But it had been molded and shaped. There was a handle, a barrel, sights. A trigger.

Naomi gazed at it. “Some weird, fucked up gun.”

“It’s a wand.” Erin said. “Originally it was in development by the Kirin Tor... but someone broke into one of their transports and stole the prototypes. They were never supposed to get out onto market... but now they’re popping up in the underworld over and over again.

I can’t let him do this.”

“Who’s him?” Naomi asked.

Erin shook her head. “You’re investigating this. Got any leads? Scrying can only get me so far.”

“They’re meant to be doing a meeting at the mayor’s hall tonight at eleven.” Naomi replied.

Erin breathed a deep sigh and rolled her shoulders.

“Just don’t get in my way.”

Part 2

"I can't explain. No, I don't have time. I'm not..."

Naomi spied Erin from their stakeout point in the bell tower of a chapel overlooking the town hall, and watched as she held that peculiar rock against her ear and frustratedly shout into it.

"Look. I just need you to be ready in case I call you in. Okay? If I'm lucky I won't need it." Erin couldn't relax, even when she put down the stone.

Naomi stood there with her arms folded against the wall and reached into one of the many pockets of her coat. It was sleek and black, with a tall collar that popped up around her neck and ended just under the waist. When she reached into it, she pulled out a bar of something and chewed. Her eyes were peeled towards the town hall.

"Who was that?" She asked, but Erin only scoffed in reply. "Backup. In case things go bad."

"Things always go bad." Naomi said. "It's why I try have Apples as mine."

"And where's Apples now?" Erin asked. "She here?"

Naomi shook her head. "She's got better things to be doing."

Naomi held up a hand, eyes locked to the building across the way and through the stained-glass windows. "I see something. Movement."

Erin frowned. "How the hell...?"

Naomi didn't bother giving her an answer to that. "There's a lot of them in there. Must've come in the back door... didn't see them go in the front. They're carrying something. Something heavy, with that many people on it."

"One of the shipments?"

Naomi checked her watch. The clock had just struck eleven.

The city mayor was a pleasant man, at least as fair as the public was concerned.

Elected in as the first since the city's reclamation he had run his campaign on something that everyone could easily get behind; crushing the city's rampant crime problem.

Everyone knew Gilneas had become a hotbed for criminal activity even worse than Boralus and there were still so many tunnels and streets held hostage by syndicates or worse.

The mayor promised he would stop them. And maybe, he truly, truly believed he could.

Eight men dressed in suits came to him, four carrying a large long chest.

The first of the eight came forwards and took off his hat and shook the mayor's hand, but seemed to frown when he noticed the mayor take particular attention to the shape of his ears.

"It's inside here?" The mayor asked and came over, evidently eager to skip any further formalities, but the well-dressed man leading the criminals stopped him in his tracks.

"Just because anyone can use it doesn't mean that you can't accidentally shoot yourself in the foot. Let us."

He snapped his finger to release the arcanic lock and opened it up to reveal a series of 'wands' placed in the soft-padded container as if it was a weapons locker.

He pulled out one and the mayor could see how odd it looked, a strange imitation of technology through magic and yet it fit so perfectly in his hand.

"Find me something to shoot with this."

Naomi had her own mission here. Evidently, she cared about not letting these weapons get into the hands of guards as they would inevitably become accessible to criminals too. However, as someone who had long believed other news outlets within the city consistently failed to properly hold their officials accountable she knew she would need solid evidence to make her case.

Erin had her route in, and she had hers too. With a bit of luck she cracked the lock for the kitchen entrance and from there was able to sneak around the hallways. If they were still in the main hall, she could stalk around undeterred.

She followed the signage all the way up the stairs and to the end of the wall. The mayor's office would be close. But as she began to unlock it Naomi heard footsteps again. With no other way of escaping, she fired a rope arrow and climbed up to a rafter in the ceiling, and breathed a sigh of relief when a patrolling guard who walked past never looked up.

Getting into the mayor's office was easy from there, and she snuck the door shut.

She checked the filing cabinets.

She checked his desk.

She checked the piles stacked on the floor next to where he sat.

And then she found a folder, hidden behind the dresser and the wall.

Naomi flipped through it, and found the evidence she needed.

But downstairs, she heard a bang.

While Naomi was still breaking in, Erin was cloaked in invisibility observing the town hall from a good vantage.

Evidently one of the new builds from after the reclamation it was modern and well furnished but abjectly lacking character. Eight rows of ten chairs lined up, with higher chairs at the back for special guests. It all overlooked a stage at the other end of the room with a podium with a microphone for speakers, but the mayor and the gang only bothered to stand in the aisle between the two seating areas while they did their deal.

The criminal leader lifted up the wand, and Erin saw a glimmer of blonde hair over pointed ears and grit her teeth. "No, there's no way..."

Ze'rani replied. She was an intelligent arcane entity that Erin had recently rescued on another adventure, but it was now stuck inside her stave's crystal and neither of them were pleased about it. *"What is it. Do you know..."*

"It's HIM." Erin said. "I fucking knew it... there was only one person it could be."

"Explain yourself. Why are they significant?"

Down in the town hall, the elf pointed the wand outwards. His thugs had been dragging in stacks of crates and boxes from outside and thrown them all into an enormous pile.

He stared down the warped-wooden sights, and aimed the barrel just right.

And pulled the trigger.

Magic coursed; surging from its crystal magazine and spiralling around the enchanted rifling on the wands' barrel before it erupted like a cannon. A huge bolt of arcane energy screamed outwards and caused shockwaves just from its presence, but then it struck its target. The boxes and crates glowed as they were enveloped by violet light. They first turned to crystal and then in the same moment shattered into arcane dust. One shot had completely vaporised the whole thing.

"Excellent! Haha!" The mayor clapped. "Truly excellent..."

The elfen criminal cracked a smile too. He held it away from the mayor when he reached to grab it and shook his finger. "Very dangerous... they used to burrow straight through things, drill through the target... but with some adjustments, I believe I have made this is much more efficient. Less collateral. More control."

The mayor nodded professionally. "And more potency, evidently. So... how effective is it against a human target?"

The elf looked at the seats at the other end of the hall as he sensed something, and pursed his lips. "We're not alone."

Erin gripped her staff tightly. "I'm stopping this... I'm going down there right now and I'm stopping this."

"Don't! You saw what it did, you know getting hit by a shot from that wand means death!"

Ze'rani snapped back. But Erin's aura flared for a moment, even through her invisibility. She inadvertently had revealed her position just by the sheer amount of energy pouring out of her body in preparation to harness her next spell.

"You're losing control. They'll sense you!"

Erin saw the elf stare directly at her and stood up. "He already has."

Erin held Violetspire outwards, its pointed tip thin enough to pierce at high enough speeds. It hovered just under her hand.

The elf readied the wand and pointed it outwards, sights trained on an 'empty' chair.

Their silent standoff lasted for five seconds, until all hell broke loose.

A massive blast erupted from the gun and fired outwards and disintegrated half of the upper seating. Crystal dust exploded and stained the wall pink.

The spear-like staff then shot out of the unseen, launched with furious intent. The elf moved an inch to stop it from impaling him through the shoulder and saw it instead rip through his arm and pin itself like a javelin in the ground.

"Grab a wand and fucking find her!" The elf shouted to his thugs, and went over to lift Violetspire from the ground... but its inhabitant would not allow it. As his fingers wrapped around it Ze'rani harnessed the staff's potent energies, turned them volatile and burned the elf's hand. Meanwhile his men all collected a wand from the crate and stood around, aiming into the hall with no idea what direction the next attack would come from.

"You didn't tell me that we'd be interrupted!" The mayor huffed. "This deal had better be worth it. Send me a letter once you've cleaned up this mess!" As he collected his things and scurried out the back entrance, the elf looked at his men and made a similar decision. He didn't have time for this. He couldn't risk fighting Her.

"I need her dead. NOW." He began to teleport away, and Violetspire rose from the ground and pointed at him before launching at full speed... but it didn't reach him in time, and he was already gone.

Erin gasped for breath as her invisibility wavered, and returned the spire to her hands. All eight wand-wielding criminals pointed directly at her.

"Hey!"

A voice called from the rafters, and at the same time two arrows were embedded in the backs of the criminals who slumped over. Naomi had arrived just in time.

Naomi dove out of the way of oncoming shots, chairs and pillars of the wall turning to arcane dust all around her, and she burst out of the hall. The thugs fired at Erin too but this little distraction bought her all the time she needed. She blinked the weapons crate close to her and warped out, just before another shot would have landed which left a crater in its wake.

Part 3

Erin shivered, convulsed. Her whole body was running on pure adrenaline and she clutched herself tightly to try abate the rolling fits of nausea she felt.

"Breathe." Ze'rani said. *"You escaped. Drink some water and pull yourself together."*

Ze'rani conjured a simple flask for Erin and Erin drank it slowly.

She buttoned up her long red coat and stuck her hands inside her sleeves and pressed it against her tightly. She sat in the belltower, the stolen weapons crate beside, and waited for the sickness to pass.

Dark clouds swirled overhead.

Eventually, something came up the ladder. Erin jumped up and pointed her hands downwards with magic rolling forth off her fingertips.

"It's just me?" Naomi said, and Erin put down her hand.

"The fuck happened in there?" Naomi asked. "They saw you?"

"He saw me."

Naomi folded her arms and glared. "Can we stop with the vague, ominous comments? Who's he?"

Erin looked up to the clouds.

"His name's Sollan Suncrown. Ex-Kirin Tor. I worked with him on a bunch of stuff after Dalaran fell. Stopping these wands from getting into the wrong hands was one.

But I fucked up. I left him with a crate because he could properly disenchant them; but he was arguing with me saying how keeping them for ourselves could be a good idea."

Naomi frowned. "So you left the guy who was obsessed with keeping the ultra-dangerous magic guns with the magic guns, and asked him to destroy the magic guns."

Erin nodded.

“And now he’s actively selling the magic guns off to the highest bidder, including government officials, which means they will DEFINITELY be available on the black market within a week?’

Erin nodded.

Naomi shook her head and pressed her hand tightly into her face. “This is why I fucking hate magic. You got a plan or are you going to sit there and mope?”

Erin pushed herself up and held out a hand to begin casting a spell over the crate. Small lines of magic swirled up into her fingertips, which she then brought up close to her forehead and focused. Her lip quivered, and then her face turned resolute when no doubt was left.

“I know where to find the rest.”

Naomi took her bow. “Lead the way.”

Down by the docks, all was quiet.

No anchor was lifted.

The sea lapped up against the pier.

Wind fluttered a flag raised at full mast.

Two figures shadowed the blooming light of a lamppost as they darted past, and pressed themselves up against the wall of the port authority office.

Two fingers glowed brightly with blue-pink light, and then a nod followed.

One peered through the slits in the window and counted ten men in a room lifting crates to pack them all up so they could be loaded onto a boat.

The other asked a question. The answer was no.

But then she saw a door open.

“For all we know she’ll be here any minute and I’m not going to risk it!” Sollan lit a cigarette in his hand with a blueish flame and tried to ease the jitters in his tone. One of his men slipped and dropped one of the crates and Sollan screamed in his ear. “WE DON’T HAVE TIME FOR YOU TO FUCK AROUND! WE NEED TO GO. NOW!”

They worked themselves to the bone while Erin spoke to Naomi.

“If they’re leaving who knows where they’ll go... we could lose them!” She stood up but Naomi snatched her by the arm and held her back. “Wait for them to come out, we’ll corner him on the boat.”

Erin shook her head and teleported away. She could end this right now.

A flash let everyone in the room know Erin had arrived, and she stared Sollan down.

“We need to talk.” Sollan’s cigarette fell from his mouth. He reached his holster for his wand, but Erin snapped her fingers and wrenched it from him first. She held it out, pointed it at him, pointed it at everyone. “I’m ending this tonight! No more second chances!”

Sollan held his hands up; kept an uneasy smirk, sweated a waterfall from every pore.

“Langley. So nice to see you...! You want to talk? Sure... Let’s talk.”

She grit her teeth. "Why do this... you said you wanted to help people! To keep people safe!" Sollan chuckled, as his men stood anxiously and waited. "I am helping people? These wands will help keep the peace! I heard about Black Saturday, Erin. What horrible, horrible things go on in the bowels of this city. Wouldn't the law have the advantage? Couldn't they stop it themselves?"

"You're a fucking idiot if you think that! Give it three days and cartels will have their hands on these. All they have to do is kill a guard! This will kill people!"

Sollan scoffed and felt his heart race. "Come on... I always thought you were for freedom of magic... not to restrict it. To restrict progress."

"I'll restrict any petty criminal having the chance to disintegrate anything they see at the pull of a trigger. How fucking hard is that to understand?"

"I see you won't ever get back on my side. So go on. Shoot me."

Sollan held his breath, and Erin's grip wavered.

But she would never take the shot. Sollan knew that.

He threw a blast of quick, forceful energy out which flung her backwards as he escaped further into the building. Erin scrambled and picked up the wand but didn't have time as Sollan's thugs swarmed her. She fired, but the shot went wide and blasted a hole through the wall just as Naomi managed to crack the lock into the door and speed her way in.

Chaos broke out. Ten men versus two, and in the first moment Erin got a punch to the side of the head while she struggled to take aim and dropped the wand again. Naomi rushed over and kicked the wand aside, placing an arrow in someone as they came close only for her to be forced up against the wall by another. She drew her knife and slashed him through the shoulder blade and pushed him away.

Erin, swarmed by four at once, didn't have the strength to hold all of them with her magic for long. Another thug reached for the wand and fired it at Naomi, but Erin managed to blink a crate in front of her to take the shot instead. Naomi threw her knife through the cloud of pink crystal dust it made at the wielder and jumped into a spinning kick to drive the knife straight through his chest. He fell, dropping the wand, but two more came behind her and held her down before she could reach it.

"Fuck!" Erin gritted her teeth as her nose ran red? unable to hold back the hordes for long while Naomi desperately tried to wriggle free. "I can't keep this up!"

Ze'rani whispered in her ear. *"Take the staff. I'll overcharge you, just this once. Make it count!"*

Erin took Violetspire in her hand and felt volumes upon volumes of pure energy cascading into her body, then she held both hands outwards. There was only one spell, one thing she could do to turn the tides.

Her nails dug into the fabric of reality, and just as the thugs had reached her, she tore it open.

Space warped in on itself. The thugs raised their weapons. One aimed the wand inside. But they would never have time to react.

A golden blade glimmered as it thrust through, a brown coat with the emblem of the Order of Embers on her back fluttering on an invisible breeze was wrapped around her shoulders like a cloak, and in an instant their swords and clubs and knives broke in half from just three swipes of her sword.

Naomi gasped. "Alaina?"

The Hero had arrived just in time. "Don't sound so surprised. You think Erin can handle anything on her own?"

The thug with the wand fired it, and Alaina tilted her head to avoid it. It careened past her ear and blasted open a cavity in the wall behind her.

"Alaina, handle them. I'm running out of time!" Erin begged.

Alaina nodded and jumped into the fray, facing down the group all at once. She swept through them like a blazing fire where none could escape its heat, and dodged two more shots from the gun. The crystal powering it started to seethe and let off smoke, and Alaina smirked. "Limited shots, hm? I thought this might be a challenge."

Erin teleported away, darting down the hallway to follow Sollan.

Naomi looked back at Alaina and knew she would be fine, so went after Erin instead.

Sollan scrambled to get his affairs in order. He took stacks of correspondence, notes, working documents and everything else that he couldn't risk falling into someone else's hands and teleported it away so it couldn't be found. He could still leave, hire more men, he could still start over from scratch without Her ruining everything.

He felt the shivers race up and down his entire body. Just a little more time!
Then, the door burst wide open.

"Sollan, YOU CUNT!"

Waves of overflowing magic swarmed around him and snapped shut like an iron vice. He felt the pressure grow heavy around him when the nearly unbreakable telekinetic field trapped him so wholly he couldn't even move his eyes. Erin screamed and thrashed him into the wall, slammed him against the ceiling, dropped him through the desk. She came up to him and kicked him with all her strength and saw the blood fly from his nose.

"You bastard! I trusted you! We were going to fix things! Set the world to rights! We were partners and you threw all of it away! For what, for greed? Because your emasculated little ego couldn't stand me telling you what to do?"

He looked up with shattered teeth and a swollen eye. "I'm making the world a safer place..." Erin shook her head as tears welled up in her eyes. "You really, really think that?" Somehow, it would have been easier for him to admit he was selfish or cruel or a coward. But for someone to be so, so wrong. Someone she used to respect? That hurt her the most of all.

She lifted him off the floor and he could not resist it.

"You're burning too much energy again. Calm yourself! Breathe through it... focus it... a firm hand, not a fist." Ze'rani tried to guide Erin, tutor her. Erin rolled her neck and let her fingers relax and directed the magic around him rather than at him.

Sollan sputtered. He had seen first hand how dangerous Erin could be and was genuinely terrified of drawing her ire. He played his last card.

"What are you going to do? You don't have any evidence... There's no Kirin Tor to keep me in check. The mayor can pardon me. Are you going to try to have me trialled somewhere else? Stormwind? Silvermoon? You have nothing!" Fear rolled down him to every inch. "YOU CAN'T STOP ME!"

Sollan was right.

She knew she couldn't do anything.

She couldn't arrest him.

Or keep him locked up.

Or exile him anywhere he couldn't get back from.

Her mind raced through the possibilities. All of them ended up with him escaping, getting back out, carrying on this work. She couldn't stop it. Entropy. The march of 'progress'.

Erin choked and dreamed that the Violet Eye was here to take this weight off her hands.

It was her fault this had all happened. And there was no way she could fix it.

For someone else it might be easy.

But Erin would never use magic to kill.

Naomi rushed into the room and saw Erin kneeling, collapsed in an empty office.

"Where the hell did he go?"

Erin never looked at her when she replied.

"He just... got away."

Epilogue

Alaina looked over the room as the Gilneas City Guard hauled boxes of wands out from the Port Authority office. She demanded answers from the Guard Captain. How could he let this happen in his own city. How could he be so corrupt? But her judgement fell on deaf ears, and the man was inches away from having her locked up for interfering in their business. He had a vested interest in keeping these weapons for him and his men, and Alaina could tell he was already all but drawing war plans. But her reputation preceded her. Men like that knew a cage wouldn't keep Alaina for long. He decided the best plan was to not poke the dragon and let her go, but Alaina knew as those wands fell into the guard's hands this would not be over yet.

Naomi saw the danger of posting this story. The mayor was a powerful man and he'd have clear reason to enact retribution on anyone seeking to expose him for what he had done. She wrote her article under an anonymous moniker, stating that they had insider knowledge into the Mayor's dealings and warning citizens of increasing conflicts in the city. Rumours spread far and wide, bringing unease and distrust especially towards a guard that was already seen as incompetent at best and corrupt at worst. The name 'wands' would never stick, though. In Gilneas, they would start being known as magi-guns.

Erin sat in her study with two empty bottles of arcwine next to her.

She couldn't stand thinking of what had happened.

"You know this isn't the end, right?" Ze'rani said from the corner of the room where the staff had been left. *"Nothing you said, nothing you stand for means anything if you let him go free."*

Erin put down a glass. "How the hell am I supposed to stop him?"

"You're the mage. Figure it out."

She stared out the window on a rainy night.

Her life was about to get a whole lot harder.