

Urban Sorcery

by Michael Petritis

Atticus sidestepped around a small kitchen, and hummed quietly to himself. He very neatly placed a sandwich and energy drink into a paper bag, and placed the bag down next to a backpack.

He cast his eyes around the apartment, as though he was making sure nobody watched. When he focused his attention back on the paper bag, with a wave of his fingers and a slight turn of his wrist, the bag closed and folded itself.

“Heather, are you ready yet? Your classes start in less than an hour,” he shouted to a closed door on the other side of the small apartment.

“Classes?” asked a chipper voice from the other side of the door, followed by an audible gasp.
“My semester starts today? Are you sure?”

“Pretty sure, love,” he replied quickly.

The bedroom door opened, and out walked Heather, her blonde hair just barely peeked out from the hoodie she hastily pulled over her head.

“Big talk, coming from the one who gets to make their own class schedule,” she teased.
“Online classes, a cushy job as secretary. You’ve got it made.”

“I wouldn’t go that far, but I guess I see your point,” he admitted. “Good news is that I’ll be up with you every morning, even when I don’t have work. So you don’t have to miss me too much.”

“Well aren’t you the sweetest,” she hummed. She walked up to him and gave him a peck on his lips.

“Plus, I’ll make you lunch every morning, so you don’t have to spend anything you don’t have to.”

“For someone with such a nice job, you really don’t like spending money.”

“While you focus on your future, I’ve decided to focus on ours,” Atticus explained chipperly.
“This is how I do that, and you’ll see it soon.”

“Cryptic, but alright,” Heather chuckled. She shoved the bag of food into her hoodie pocket, grabbed her backpack, and led the way out of the building and into the New York City streets.

A gentle dust of snow coated the ground. Atticus’ first step onto the sidewalk caused a quiet crunch from the snow.

“So, what’re your plans today?” Heather asked up to meet the eyes of her boyfriend.

“Probably just going to hit the shops. Grab us some groceries, maybe get something for dinner,” he explained, albeit hesitantly. “What about you? Which classes are you suffering through today?”

“Not too sure. I’ll check my schedule when I get there, it’s in my bag,” Heather shrugged. She cast her eyes towards the nearest subway station entrance.

“Fair enough,” Atticus conceded. “No matter what they are, good luck. I’ll see you tonight.”

“I love you!” the woman shouted, and started towards the subway.

“Love you too!” Atticus replied loudly. He waved her off, waiting until she was fully out of view to turn and walk the other way.

An hour went by, and the snow had picked up. Atticus kept his head down as he walked through the busy city streets, only looking up to read the signs above each shop that he passed.

He passed by a man sitting against one of the shops, who held a sign in front of him that read “Amateur Sorcerer. Magic Tricks for Cash.”

The man flipped a coin, making it disappear midair before opening his other hand to reveal it. He had gathered a sizeable crowd around him, though most of them were audibly trying to get him off of the street. Atticus quickly walked past them, avoiding the situation the best he could.

It wasn’t long before he spotted a sign reading “Carlyle Jewelers,” and slipped in through the small door.

A bell rang quietly above the door as he entered, and he was met with an entirely empty store, save one slim man who turned to Atticus and gave a toothy smile.

“Hello there, welcome! My name is Carlyle. Putting in an order today?” the jeweler asked chipperly.

“Picking up, actually. Name’s Atticus Reval.”

After a moment of sizing Atticus up and down, Carlyle’s smile only grew. “Ah, yes! I remember you!”

He rifled through a few drawers, found what he was looking for, then placed a ring box onto the top of the case. “Whoever’s receiving this must be very lucky.”

“Honestly, I’d say I’m the lucky one,” Atticus admitted, taking the box and slipping it into the inner pocket of his coat. “Thank you, sir.”

“Good luck!” Carlyle exclaimed.

Atticus steps back onto the street, and was greeted with heavier even snow than before. Continuing his walk, he nearly slipped once, but managed to keep his footing.

Seeking refuge under the awning of a deli, Atticus’ eyes grazed over the people around him. For the most part, they all kept their heads down to keep the snow from their faces.

As he was about to go inside, Atticus spotted a very heavily bundled man approaching the crosswalk in front of the deli. The man’s head was down and almost entirely covered. Atticus noticed the light for oncoming traffic turn green. However the man didn’t and walked out into the street.

Atticus saw a car veer to the right towards the man. In an instinctual reaction, Atticus waved his hand, turned his wrist, and yanked at the air as though he was pulling at a rope. In that instant, the man was pulled back into the street and fell onto his back, narrowly avoiding the car as it sped past.

Around the deli, people stopped walking and looked between Atticus and the man he'd saved. They started muttering to each other while Atticus ran to the side of the man to help him up.

"Hey, are you alright?" Atticus asked, only now coming to the realization of what he'd done. He glanced to the crowd gathered around them.

"Was that you?" the man asked slowly, brushing himself off and rising he got to his feet. "Thank you, sir."

"Of course. I'm just glad I was here," came the nervous reply.

Atticus stepped back, but was blocked from leaving the scene by the people blocking the way.

"Excuse me, if I could just—" he started, before being cut off by a booming voice behind the group.

"You Regulars are actin' like you've never seen a lick of magic before. Back off!" a woman yelled in a thick New York accent, causing the group to disperse. "Sorry about them. Not everyone's got what we got, right?"

"Regulars?" Atticus questioned as he watched the people go back to their routes.

"Non-magic folk," she explained, clearly uninterested in the subject of the non-magical. "Sorcerer's have got to stick together, I say. Plenty more of them than us."

The woman held a hand out for Atticus, which he warily shook. She let her gaze drift up and down the man.

“Name’s Ember Methir.”

“Atticus Reval,” he answered after a momentary pause.

“Fancy name,” she complimented, keeping her hand wrapped around Atticus’ and pulling him close. Her tone then dropped to a whisper. “You might want to follow me. I’ve got a safe little space for us to talk for a while.”

“Why exactly would I want to go talk with a complete stranger?” he asked, raising a brow.

“Like I said. Sorcerer’s have got to stick together. Besides, you know as well as I do that magic isn’t exactly appreciated by some. Best to hide for a little bit, let anyone who saw you move along.”

Confused, Atticus just looked at her for a second, before he was suddenly pulled along by the woman.

“C’mon, I don’t have all day!” she yelled back at him, her grip on his hand tightening further.

Reluctantly, Atticus decided not to fight the pull of the woman.

“Fine, but you better at least answer any questions I have when you’re done pulling my arm from its socket,” he murmured, quickening his pace to keep up with her.

After ten minutes of being dragged along without a word, Ember led Atticus into an alleyway, causing a bit of resistance.

“Hey now, where the hell are we?” he asked, trying to pull his arm out of the woman’s grasp. To his surprise, she let go.

“We’re with good people,” she promised, dragging her fingers along the alley walls. With a quick bang of her fist against one of the bricks, the wall receded like a door

Atticus poked his head inside, and was met with a small café. Two bookshelves lined the back wall, and there were nearly a dozen people practicing various forms of magic within.

“Welcome to my library,” Ember mused, walking inside after Atticus. Once they were both fully inside, the bricks returned to cover the entrance. “This is where the magic happens.”

“Literally,” Atticus mumbled, amazed by what surrounded him. “How long has this place existed?”

“Two years, give or take,” Ember replied. “People have come and gone, in search of bigger, better things. I’ve stayed, to help each new sorcerer get a step in the right direction. Learn what they can about the basics, and even so they could teach me a thing or two.”

“I still have so many questions,” Atticus sighed, shuffling to the center of the room.

“Ask, and I’ll do my best to answer. As long as you don’t mind me askin’ some of my own, hotshot.”

Atticus walked a circle around the café, stopping once he got to the bookshelves. He ran his fingers along the spines of each book, some named in languages he didn’t recognize.

“Hotshot?” he asked, after processing the comment. “What makes you call me that?”

“That spell you fired off. First of all, nice work. You’re a real hero, even if the Regulars don’t see it that way,” she complimented, still with disdain in her voice over the thought of non-magical people.

“Secondly, it was strong. Half of the Sorcerer’s I’ve ever met studied for years to learn how to move somethin’ as heavy as a person, but you did it just like that. Raw talent like that is rare, assumin’ it is just that. You’ve never studied, have you?”

“Well, thank you,” Atticus started, before shaking his head. “No, I taught myself everything I know. Though I’ve never done anything like that before. It was more instinct than anything else.”

“Well, when you’re done gawkin’ at my library, we can head into my office. Get to know each other better, and maybe I’ll give you the spell to get in here.”

Something about the tone she used caused Atticus to hesitate, but he nodded.

With a wave of her hand, Ember opened a new door within the café, behind the bar.

“Grab a coffee if you want. Or somethin’ stronger if you prefer,” she invited, hopping over the counter.

Atticus made his way around to the opening on the side of the counter, walking in through the new door.

Ember walked in behind him, waving her hand to close and lock the door. The room was a small, plain looking office. On the left wall was a bookshelf, with books that were much bigger than most of those in the main room.

“So, I’ve really only got one question, and you’re free to come and go as you please.

Assumin’ I like the answer, of course,” Ember teased, sitting on the desk and crossing her legs.

“Ask away,” Atticus beckoned, taking the seat in front of the desk.

“Who’s the lucky lady?” she asked simply, reaching into her jacket pocket and placing a familiar ring box onto the desk.

“When did you—” Atticus stammered, his eyes locked on the box.

“I had other talents before I learned I had magic. When we got all close on the street, I snagged it from you,” she answered proudly

“And I have to answer?”

“If you want in the coven, yeah.”

Atticus stayed quiet for a long minute. He was tempted to take the box and leave, but he decided to answer the question.

“Her name’s Heather. We’ve known each other since high school. We moved in together last year. I love her.”

“Aw, isn’t that just adorable,” she ribbed. “What kind of magic has she got?”

Atticus closed his eyes, and took a breath.

“She not magical,” he confessed.

After another long moment of silence, Ember stood up and leaned over Atticus’ chair.

“Your girlfriend...” she started, her tone not shifting from its playful calm. “Is a Regular? Does she even know about you?”

“No,” he replied ashamedly.

“Of course she doesn’t,” Ember interrupted sternly. “Because half of them hate us. Another good chunk think we’re not bad folk, but that we’re unnatural.”

“Which is why I haven’t told her. Or anyone, for that matter. Today’s the first time I did magic in front of anybody,” Atticus tried to defend.

“Well you’ve got to tell her!” the Sorceress demanded. “She’ll find out eventually, and do you really want to be married to her when she does? On the off-chance that she hates you?”

“How can you ask me to choose between the life I’ve built, and learning about my abilities?” Atticus asked quietly, changing the subject.

“Do what I did. What I have everyone in my library do,” Ember whispered, leaning down to be closer to the man. “Realize that magic *is* the life of a Sorcerer. Nothin’ else is needed. If you want to learn, you’ve got to be prepared to lose everythin’.”

Atticus shifted uncomfortably in his seat as he listened to Ember continue to speak.

“Besides, what good is a Regular anyway? I’m sure you can find someone who’s not only a perfect fit for you...” she went on ruffling Atticus’ messy hair. “But who can understand how it feels to have this thing at the core of your being, that you can’t get rid of. The one thing that sets you apart from anyone else.”

“So, I’ve got to choose. Keep my secret from Heather, and lose out on joining your coven...”

“Or tell her everythin’. No matter how she takes it, I teach you how to get into the library,”

Ember finished, with a hint of mischief in her tone.

“Would it be wrong if I didn’t tell her? If I wanted to keep my secret?”

“Oh, who knows?” the woman smirked. “Maybe she’ll find out anyway, from a little birdie who doesn’t like it when strong Sorcerers deny their potential.”

Atticus looked up to Ember, his eyes narrowed.

“But if that happens, you lose out on both! No library, and *certainly* no girlfriend.”

“You wouldn’t dare,” he threatened, only for Ember to get back up, and take her place in her office chair.

“You have no idea what I’m capable of. Go, make your choice. And don’t try anythin’ funny. I’ll know what you choose either way.”

With that final threat, Atticus grabbed the ring box, and silently walked out. He planned to spend awhile thinking it over.

That night, Atticus stepped back into the apartment, groceries in hand. He placed the bags down in the kitchen and hung up his coat.

“Heather, I’m home. I’ll get dinner started,” he called out, planning to at least get some food in him before any serious conversations were had.

“Hey, I thought you’d be home by the time I was,” Heather noted, walking out of the bedroom.

“Yeah, sorry. Got a little caught up with a few things,” Atticus defensively tried to explain.

“But I’m here now.”

Heather walked around the kitchen, standing at Atticus’ side and looking up at him.

“You said you were going to the shops, but all you brought back were groceries,” she pushed.

“What exactly can you get caught up in that makes you hours late?”

“Can we please talk about this after dinner?” Atticus begged.

“No. We’re talking about this right here, right now. I want to know why you’re keeping secrets on the first day we’re not stuck in here together all day in months.”

Atticus pinched the bridge of his nose, and sighed.

“Look, it’s a really long, complicated story. And I promise to tell you all about it after we eat. Please?”

“You’re always like this! You’re always keeping secrets! You’re afraid to open up to anyone, including me. I’m done with it. All of it. Spill it, or leave.”

Atticus looked down at Heather for the first time during this conversation, and saw tears welling in her eyes. Then, with one fluid wave of his fingers and a quick flick of his wrist, he wordlessly told her everything.

The groceries took themselves out of the bags, and placed themselves neatly on the counter. Heather looked on with shock.

“How long?” she asked accusatively.

“My entire life. I learned that I had the ability from my dad, but he never taught me any of it.”

Heather took a step back, and shook her head.

“Why didn’t you tell me? Do you not trust me?”

“No, that’s not it—” he started. “Look, I know how people look at Sorcerers, okay? The disgust, the hatred. We’re abnormal.”

“And you thought that I would be the same way? I love you, Atticus. I have for years, and I never would have judged you for telling me. But at this point...”

“You’re done with the secrets,” Atticus repeated her words from earlier.

There was a beat of silence, before Heather spoke up once more.

“I think you should leave.”

“W-What?” Atticus asked, as though he may have misheard her. Though, he knew what she said.

“Leave, Atticus. Now,” she ordered.

“Heather, please. Can we talk about this? I promise, no more secrets,” he continued to plead.

Heather turned away without a reply.

Atticus moved to the door in silence, grabbed his coat, and walked out the door.

On the street, Ember stood leaning against a lamppost.

“That badly, huh?”

Atticus walked up to her, and held out a hand.

“Let’s just go.”

Without another word, Ember flicked two fingers. Above them, the streetlights sputtered out as they walked back down the quiet city road.