

# The Amethyst Cross.

(By Charlotte Callahan.)

The sound of the monastery bell ringing through the long corridors brought Pere Antoine suddenly to his feet.

The little cell fronted on the street and the jingling of sleigh-bells from below tempted him to the window. It was the Kingsley sleigh and Mr. Kingsley himself was in the rear seat. Pere Antoine hastened down to hear the news which he had expected all day.

He was needed at the Hotel Dieu. Reverend Mother had telephoned that the doctor had grave fears for Esther, and wished her father to see her before night. She had been unconscious at times during the day but had rallied sufficiently to ask that her father bring Father Anthony to the hospital.

The sun was just setting in the late, cold afternoon as the sleigh flew over the deep snow, accumulated during a long Quebec winter. Neither of the men spoke for a while, but at length the priest broke the silence.

"There may be hope yet," he said, "Doctors do not always know."  
"No, no," was the reply. "She can not stay with us much longer. What shall we all do? She was too beautiful, too good, to remain here long. The Lord is going to take her, and leave her mother and myself to pine away in our desolate old age."

"Ajá Monsieur le Corporal," the priest mused, half to himself. "How will it be for him? He grows pale and thin watching at the hospital doors for news of her, whenever he is off duty."

"Monsieur le Corporal, indeed!" was the reply. "Let him take care of himself. If it had not been for his reckless driving our Esther would not have been injured in a runaway accident; she would have been well and happy to-day instead of waiting for death on a hospital bed."

With these words he buried himself more deeply in his fur coat, and once more there was grim silence.

Father Anthony watched anxiously for the first glimpse of the hospital walls.

At last the journey was at an end, and the Sisters, porters, conductors, them to Esther's private room, in the accident ward.

The beautiful white face, nestling in a mass of tangled golden hair, looked drawn with pain, but the girl had revived enough during the afternoon to talk a little. She was very weak, however, and it was not long before the appearance of the nurse at the door reminded the visitors that they must go.

"You will come to-morrow?" Esther feebly asked. "Oh, Father Anthony, wait a minute please. I had almost forgotten. How is Babette?"

Babette was a poor sick girl in the Lower Town whom Father Anthony visited occasionally, usually after he had called at the hospital to see Esther. He had told Esther all about her; and then whenever he saw Babette he would tell her about Esther, who was soon to be released from her sufferings. He told her too about the wonderful golden hair that looked like a crown, and the daily visits of the heart-broken French officer. Always upon leaving Babette he had said to himself: "Babette will live, but Esther will die." So with the Franciscan as a mutual friend a bond of sympathy had been formed between the two girls, although they had never met.

"She improves slowly," said the priest, in answer to Esther's question. "Give her this," whispered the girl when she saw that her father was engaged in conversation with the nurse, and she drew a small jewel-box from beneath her pillow.

"Tell her when she is well she must bring it to a good jeweller and sell it. It is valuable. With the money she will get for it perhaps she can

do much for the old grandmother." Tears came into Father Anthony's eyes as he stored away the little box in his deep pocket.

The Kingsley sleigh drew up to the entrance of their home on Grand Allee just as the Angelus was ringing clear and sweet over the snow-clad roofs.

A few days later, the same bell tolled at solemn intervals while the funeral procession of Esther Kingsley wound its way down the quiet streets.

Next morning a flurry of snowflakes was whirling against the window-pane in one of the poorer dwellings in Lower Town, and whiter even than the snowflakes was the little face that peered out at the storm.

Babette was so small and frail that she seemed to be only a child, though she was nearly twenty. "It is the day of Father Anthony's visit," she told herself, "but he will not come in the storm."

Her grandmother was vainly trying to make the fire burn more brightly in the old-fashioned stove and did not hear the shaking of the door.

In the midst of the roaring of the wind outside Babette thought she heard a knock at the door. She listened, and heard it distinctly now.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the old lady at the prospect of a visitor on such a stormy morning, and hurrying to the door, she found Father Anthony, shaking the snow from his big coat.

"And how is it with Babette?" he asked kindly, as he took the thin hand. "You are better, I see, my child."

"I was afraid you would not come," said the girl. "Surely you have not been to the Hotel Dieu today?"

"No, ah, no! I have not been there to-day—for Esther is no longer there. They have taken her away—where she will need us no longer."

"She is dead?" exclaimed Babette, the tears springing to her eyes. "Yes, and you must pray for her," said the old priest, gently. "She wished me to give you this," and he drew out a jewelled cross from the case, and gave her the rest of Esther's message, that it was to be sold to procure some assistance for her grandmother and herself.

He had finished his speech, with his eyes on the threadbare carpet, and when he raised them he saw that Babette was crying.

"It is beautiful," beautiful, but O Esther!" she was saying, "we would rather you had lived to wear it your self. I shall never sell it, mon Pere, unless you make me do it." She sobbed, for grandmother's sake. O, I don't want to sell what belongs to Esther."

The priest wisely left her to her own reflections. At the door he spoke a few words of parting admonition, as he saw her fondling the beautiful ornament.

"Remember, Babette, if you do sell it, bring it to a good jeweller, for those are valuable amethysts and the chain is fine gold. Do not let it go for nothing."

Before he had finished Babette fastened it about her neck and the jewels were sparkling against the folds of her black dress.

"I won't sell it at all," she insisted, "not unless we are starving," and she repeated her resolve often and over again long after Father Anthony's retreating figure had disappeared down the narrow street.

A week had passed, and Babette had hidden the amethyst cross safely away in a corner of her quaint old walnut bureau, when one afternoon, a stranger came to the door and asked to see Mademoiselle. He was conducted to the scanty furnished parlor where the girl was propped in a chair against the pillows.

He explained in his native tongue that he was a French officer, though now in citizen's clothes, and Babette understood at once that he was "Monsieur le Corporal," who had been bereft of all his happiness.

He told her his errand briefly; how he had tried to obtain some little token of remembrance, but owing to Mr. Kingsley's antipathy for him it had been impossible. He had known that Esther had had the amethyst cross about her neck during her last illness, had missed seeing it a little before her death, and when he questioned Father Anthony he had told him all, to whom it had been given, etc. Would she not, if she were to sell it anyway, accept a liberal offer from him? He would like to be of assistance to her, and in this way by carrying out her beneficent wishes. He was not wealthy, but he would give her anything she asked. Would three hundred and fifty dollars be sufficient? He knew the gems were costly, and if necessary she could get an estimate of a reliable jeweller, and he would place the price of it in her hands that very day. Babette at first smiled at the sum of money that would be already hers, and then she suddenly remembered the lovely jewels glittering out from their setting of frosted gold as the cross lay hidden in the box upstairs.

"You tell me once for all that I will not sell it. I wish to keep the cross that Esther gave me, and unless grandmother and I are driven to it, I will never part with it."

The officer urged her no further, but he did where she might find him if she ever changed her mind and wished to dispose of her treasure. On certain nights in the week he was on sentinel duty at the citadel, and for a few hours of the day also, but these days were uncertain. She might get word to him in some way, he explained. As he rose to go, Babette tried to imagine how he would look in his scarlet uniform, and thought to herself that he must look very grand indeed.

When the last traces of snow had melted from the remotest corners and alleys and the long Quebec winter had yielded at last to spring, the little French maiden found herself restored to health, but she was unable to find any work to do. Her grandmother had been ill for several days, and the doctor told her that unless she could have better nourishment and care she might never be well. So Babette was sadly worried.

The girl would go daily to the furrier who had employed her, but as the busy season was over she could only work a few hours now and then. She began to think how selfish she had been not to sell the cross at any price long ago, rather than have her grandmother want for anything during her illness.

So one evening after she had finished her scanty meal, having seen dismally that her grandmother seemed weaker even since morning, she dressed hastily, and that no one might recognize her, threw a black shawl over her head. With the box containing the cross and chain in her pocket she started up the steep hill towards the grass-grown fortifications that crowned the summit. It was a long journey through steep and crooked streets, and she had to stop many times to get breath.

The moon was well up in the sky by the time she neared the top of the hill and a chill spring breeze was blowing her dark hair vigorously from beneath the shawl and tinging her cheeks with the tint of the rose.

It was no wonder that many looked after her for she was indeed an attractive picture.

But Babette saw not one; her eyes were straining towards the enclosure from whence she heard the measured footfall of the guard passing up and down.

The place was deserted now, and the moon threw queer shadows across the sidewalk. She crept towards the embankment that rose like a green wall above the white strip of pavement.

It was his night on duty, she was sure, and, of course the men had retired their hours, as was frequently done.

As she drew nearer, to see if she could recognize the sentinel, there was a halt in his step, and "Who goes there?" rang out on the clear air. The girl was too frightened to move. Would he shoot her perhaps if she did not answer? She stood as if turned to stone. The officer seeing that she was frightened came nearer. "O, c'est toi, Mlle. Babette Vallee!" was his salutation.

She was too delighted to answer and simply drew out the jewel-box. "It is the cross," she whispered, "I have decided to sell it." He pushed it towards her with a swift gesture as he saw another officer turning the opposite corner. Babette understood and with a whispered promise that he would call the next day the sentry resumed his military pace, and the girl vanished in the darkness.

Her interview had lasted only a few moments, but long enough for the soldier to notice that Babette looked bewitching in the black shawl with the breeze blowing the color into her cheeks; and long enough also for the girl, though filled with anxiety for her grandmother, to remark to herself upon the corporal's fine appearance in his smart uniform.

The next day the cross passed into its new owner's hands; and Babette's grief at parting with it was fully compensated by her satisfaction in feeling that she had made this sacrifice for the poor old grandmother.

The French soldier and Babette met often until they finally discovered that there was no place to enjoy a summer evening like the promenade around Dufferin Terrace, where music floated out from the direction of Chateau Frontenac. Here they would sit, when he was not on duty, watching the lights from Levis opposite twinkling out from the darkness and throwing long rays across the St. Lawrence far below.

When the maple trees along the broad avenues were beginning to take on their autumn colors, Babette's grandmother went to her long rest, and it was then that the great wave of pity rose in the heart of the soldier at the sight of the girl's desolation.

The loss of Esther had wounded him deeply, but now he had begun to feel that if any one could heal the wound it was the girl to whom Esther had been a benefactor.

So it happened one morning at the Franciscan friary that Monsieur and Mademoiselle knelt to receive the priest's blessing, and as a sign of their betrothal the young officer hung the chain with its beautiful pendant cross about Babette's neck. And this time she felt sure that it was to be hers forever.

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# The Grip of the Law.

John Underwood—late Capt. John Underwood, U.S.A.—rose rather heavily; his wound troubled him on damp days. Soon he dropped out of the Georgetown car at Dupont Circle simply because of the sudden vision of Mrs. Dashwood's bright wood fire and hot cup of tea. He had left his law office earlier than usual; he was oppressed by the raw, cold March—so unseasonable, everybody said—in Washington—and by a problem.

Alice Dashwood was his sister—widow of that gallant General Dashwood, who had met his death through the Chinese trouble. Her three children were still at school; she lived alone; but everybody knew that, at the hour of five, there was no pleasanter house in Washington. She appeared seldom in society, yet nearly everybody went to her. She was barely forty years of age, tall, graceful, handsome in her way, which was rather vague; her bright eyes and the contour of her face were like her brother's.

There was a gentleness about them both, which moderated a certain arrogance in him and just a touch of over-independence in her.

"Well, I must go," he said, having finished his second cup of tea. "A man that has no home hates to leave a place like this. I say, Alice, you know what comfort is; I believe you value comfort more than anything else in this world."

"No," she said slowly. "No." Peace Underwood looked down for a moment.

"I really must go. It's too bad that I have to drop into law, just to save father's practice. I was useless in the army with this leg of mine, but one has leisure on a pension—I wonder where that deuced Spaniard is that shot me just where the old sciatica in the world seems to gather on a dark day."

"You are improving in health?" "Oh, yes! My trip to Europe," he blushed somewhat, "will set me all right. Doctor Laro says." There was a pause. "I must go. The Tristram dine early to-night; the dinner is for the Argentine minister—an author and all that sort of thing. The opera forces early dinners these weeks. It's wretched to have to go out again," he added with a grimace.

"Don't go out again." "There's a reason, I say, Alice," he broke out, standing now, "you really ought to call. Mrs. Tristram will, of course, send me into dinner with Blanche Dillon, and she will, as usual, ask me about you."

"I can't call, John." "You have never refused before." "Thank heaven—no! If I had, I should have less strength to refuse this—favor."

"It would be a great favor! Why, Alice, Blanche is to be my wife!"

There was silence. Carriages passed over the asphalt having hurried people on their way to dress for dinner. A gust of wind rushed at the house, trying to throw great drops of rain upon the hazy windows that filled Mrs. Dashwood's windows, but only shaking and sprinkling the glass.

"Well, I cannot call on her. Mother would not have done it. You are going to say that mother was an old-fashioned Catholic—you've said it before. There is only one sort of Catholic—the Catholic for all time, and mother's principles are mine."

John Underwood forgot his wound; his soldierly instinct of fighting came upon him; he looked at Alice as if he would have liked to pinion her arms and carry her over to Mrs. Dillon's house, knocking down policemen and all other obstacles in his way. He dropped the tea cup into the plaque of saloons on the table, and walked up and down the room.

"It's a scandal! that you should marry a divorced woman!" said Mrs. Dashwood, recovering her tea cup.

"You forgot that she and Captain Dillon could not get on; that's the worst of it. He married the wrong woman; she discovered that she could not love him."

"She thought she loved him when she married him." "She was young; that's no reflection on her. The decree was given in her favor—there was never a reflection on her character! You know that; they were incompatible, that was all."

Mrs. Dashwood frowned. The wind waited; the rain dashed against the windows; she liked this; the turmoil seemed to speak for her.

"You will not call?" "No."

John Underwood took his hat; his hand trembled a little. Alice noticed it.

"John," she said, putting her hand on his arm, "this is hard for me. You do not know how hard it is. Mrs. Dillon is a well bred woman, a beautiful woman—even a distinguished woman. People in society say that you are fortunate."

"Other Catholics call on divorced women. I'm glad mother didn't have a chance to make me a Catholic; I'm glad father took charge of that," he said, bitterly.

"I knew Blanche Dillon at the convent," his sister said, still keeping her hand on his arm. "She was devout—more devout than most of us. Afterwards, she was drawn into a very worldly set—I believe that in her heart she will never look on you as her husband."

John shook off her hand. "Alice," he exclaimed, "if you insult me again—if you insult her again I shall never enter your house!"

He withdrew his shoulder from his sister's light grasp.

"If in her heart," Alice Dashwood went on, steadily, for the brother and sister were too much alike to be easily daunted by threats—"she should not believe that you were her lawful husband would you ask me to call?"

"What do you mean?" The phrase

was as sharply levelled at her as if it came from the mouth of a cannon. "If Robert Dashwood were alive again—drunk, insane, imprisoned for hideous crime—I should still believe myself to be his wife. If Blanche Dillon was not a Catholic I might, for you, stretch a point."

"She's like the Duc de Laugan," said Underwood, with a laugh, "when somebody asked him if he were married, he said 'not enough to count'—she's that sort of a Catholic, and I am glad of it."

"Of course, if you will not call, you will not come to the wedding?" "No."

"And my niece, Alice, can't be bridesmaid?" "No, John."

John turned white. "Wait a moment," Alice Dashwood was as pale as her brother. "In those same pages in which you read the anecdote of the Duc de Laugan, we read, you remember, of the death-bed scene of Louis XV. Do you recall how they made the king's mistress leave the palace before the last sacraments could be given to the king?"

The brother and sister faced each other. If she had been a man—even a brother—he would have struck her. "Well?" He spoke in a tone that went to her heart.

"Suppose you should marry Blanche Dillon; imagine that she should be in danger of death—"

"Heaven forbid!" "It must come to us all."

"Well?" "When that test comes, you will know what I mean."

"Alice," he said, hoarsely. "I will never darken your door again. I have loved each other—in all your days there was perfect sympathy and if trust—and the children I loved as if they were my own. It is part now. It will be hard to do it, but I shall forget you all, you will be to me as strangers!"

Alice Dashwood sank in the chair nearest to her, and covered her face with her hands. She knew that her brother meant what he said.

"You urged me to marry. You have seen that I need all that you found in your husband, and when I at last find a woman true as steel—"

"Blanche Dillon is true. I believe that; she would not lie."

"When I find this woman—a this woman who loves me, and whom I love, not with the glamorous love of youth, but with the love of a wise man for a wise woman, for years would have made me wise, you—you insinuate—"

"I insinuate nothing, John," Alice said, recovering herself. "I know Blanche Dillon must feel in her heart if she is not quite another woman and utterly changed. You must know that I suffer—but I suffer for the law. I wish with all my soul that this had not—but John," she broke off suddenly and her voice changed.

"I will do this. I know that Blanche Dillon is incapable of a dishonest act; she might do wrong, but she always was true to herself. To-night, Mrs. Tristram, who knows that you are engaged to her, will give you the chance—ask her."

"Ask her what?" "Ask her the question which will show you whether if she marries you, she will look on you as her real husband, 'seeing that he was going.' 'Oh wait! Make this test! And John, if she says that she to the end forbids it—the hour of death—I will call it will be hard—but I will do it for your sake, John—for you, my brother, whom I love better than life!"

She sank back, sobbing. "I will," he said. "I will do this—for you. I have no fear of the result," his voice was jubilant. "I am not going to the opera; nor is Blanche; I will drive over to Seniors and Wedon's reception with her, and as—yes, I will do it. On the way back to the Grosvenor, I will slip in and tell you, Alice," he added, kissing her on the forehead, "I almost forgive you. You are caught!"

Alice Dashwood smiled, somewhat wearily. What a battle life was! She felt like one who had come out of a fight with a broken weapon. Apart from the law—even if it could set aside—how could this sensitive high-minded brother of hers be happy with a woman who, whenever she passed a church, must say, in her heart, "A time will come when I shall have to confess that I am not this man's wife."

And if Alice knew Blanche Dillon at all, she knew that deep in Mrs. Dillon's soul was the fear of the law. Mrs. Dashwood dined alone. After

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"What do you mean?" The phrase

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dinner she went up into her little library and read some of those brilliant memoirs of the old French court. The evil that is gangrening society to-day was there, but not legalized. Madame de la Valliere and Madame Montespan and Madame de Barry were never divorced and they were always expected to fly when death threatened their kings.

It was shortly after eleven o'clock when John Underwood entered the cozy little red book room.

He seemed taller and more erect in his evening clothes; his face was ghastly.

Alice rose to greet him, her heart beating violently.

"I asked her," he said in a low tone, "I asked her."

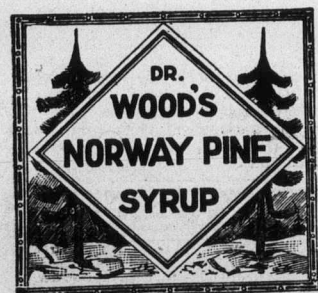
There was silence.

Alice put her hand on his arm. "First she laughed. It wasn't a serious question, she said. 'Death and all that sort of thing were not on the cards for us just now.' I pressed the question. 'Did she still believe?' 'Oh, yes, but she wanted to enjoy life.' At last I put it in your way to her, though it was hard to keep my promise to your Sacraments?" she shuddered. "No." And if the time came, and you had to choose between them and the confession that you had not looked on me as your husband during all the years, what would you do?"

"Choose," she said. "But it is a long way off, John. I knew what she meant, Alice, and I came away. It is cruel—this grasp that the outworn creed has on living human hearts! Your Gallilean has conquered again."

"You have conquered," Alice said. "The better man in you has conquered."

He did not answer; he said "good-night," after a long pause, and when a month had passed he came back; but the name of Blanche Dillon was not mentioned.



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