

The Shuttle

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THE SHUTTLE

CHAPTER I

THE WEAVING OF THE SHUTTLE

No man knew when the Shuttle began its slow and heavy weaving from shore

to shore, that it was held and guided by the great hand of Fate. Fate alone saw the meaning of the web it wove, the might of it, and its place in the making of a world's history. Men thought but little of either web or weaving, calling them by other names and lighter ones, for the time unconscious of the strength of the thread thrown across thousands of miles of leaping, heaving, grey or blue ocean.

Fate and Life planned the weaving, and it seemed mere circumstance which guided the Shuttle to and fro between two worlds divided by a gulf broader and deeper than the thousands of miles of salt, fierce sea--the gulf of a bitter quarrel deepened by hatred and the shedding of brothers' blood. Between the two worlds of East and West there was no will to draw nearer. Each held apart. Those who had rebelled against that which their souls called tyranny, having struggled madly and shed blood in tearing themselves free, turned stern backs upon their unconquered enemies, broke all cords that bound them to the past, flinging off ties of name, kinship and rank, beginning with fierce disdain a new life.

Those who, being rebelled against, found the rebels too passionate in their determination and too desperate in their defence of their strongholds to be less than unconquerable, sailed back haughtily to the world which seemed so far the greater power. Plunging into new battles, they added new conquests and splendour to their land, looking back with something of contempt to the half-savage West left to build its own civilisation without other aid than the strength of its own strong right hand and strong uncultured brain.

But while the two worlds held apart, the Shuttle, weaving slowly in the great hand of Fate, drew them closer and held them firm, each of them all unknowing for many a year, that what had at first been mere threads of gossamer, was forming a web whose strength in time none could compute, whose severance could be accomplished but by tragedy and convulsion.

The weaving was but in its early and slow-moving years when this story opens. Steamers crossed and recrossed the Atlantic, but they accomplished the journey at leisure and with heavy rollings and all such discomforts as small craft can afford. Their staterooms and decks were not crowded with people to whom the voyage was a mere incident--in many cases a yearly one. "A crossing" in those days was an event. It was planned seriously, long thought of, discussed and re-discussed, with and among the various members of the family to which the voyager belonged. A certain boldness, bordering on recklessness, was almost to be

presupposed in the individual who, turning his back upon New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and like cities, turned his face towards "Europe." In those days when the Shuttle wove at leisure, a man did not lightly run over to London, or Paris, or Berlin, he gravely went to "Europe."

The journey being likely to be made once in a lifetime, the traveller's intention was to see as much as possible, to visit as many cities cathedrals, ruins, galleries, as his time and purse would allow. People who could speak with any degree of familiarity of Hyde Park, the Champs Elysees, the Pincio, had gained a certain dignity. The ability to touch with an intimate bearing upon such localities was a *raison de plus* for being asked out to tea or to dinner. To possess photographs and relics was to be of interest, to have seen European celebrities even at a distance, to have wandered about the outside of poets' gardens and philosophers' houses, was to be entitled to respect. The period was a far cry from the time when the Shuttle, having shot to and fro, faster and faster, week by week, month by month, weaving new threads into its web each year, has woven warp and woof until they bind far shore to shore.

It was in comparatively early days that the first thread we follow was woven into the web. Many such have been woven since and have added greater strength than any others, twining the cord of sex and home-building and race-founding. But this was a slight and weak one, being only the thread of the life of one of Reuben Vanderpoel's daughters--the pretty little simple one whose name was Rosalie.

They were--the Vanderpoels--of the Americans whose fortunes were a portion of the history of their country. The building of these fortunes had been a part of, or had created epochs and crises. Their millions could scarcely be regarded as private property. Newspapers bandied them about, so to speak, employing them as factors in argument, using them as figures of speech, incorporating them into methods of calculation. Literature touched upon them, moral systems considered them, stories for the young treated them gravely as illustrative.

The first Reuben Vanderpoel, who in early days of danger had traded with savages for the pelts of wild animals, was the lauded hero of stories of thrift and enterprise. Throughout his hard-working life he had been irresistibly impelled to action by an absolute genius of commerce, expressing itself at the outset by the exhibition of courage in mere exchange and barter. An alert power to perceive the potential value of things and the possible malleability of men and circumstances, had stood him in marvellous good stead. He had bought at low prices things which in the eyes of the less discerning were worthless, but, having obtained possession of such things, the less discerning had almost invariably awakened to the fact that, in his hands, values increased, and methods of remunerative disposition, being sought, were found. Nothing remained unutilisable. The practical, sordid, uneducated little man developed the power to create demand for his own supplies. If he was betrayed into an error, he quickly retrieved it. He could live upon nothing and consequently could travel anywhere in search of such things as he

desired. He could barely read and write, and could not spell, but he was daring and astute. His untaught brain was that of a financier, his blood burned with the fever of but one desire--the desire to accumulate. Money expressed to his nature, not expenditure, but investment in such small or large properties as could be resold at profit in the near or far future. The future held fascinations for him. He bought nothing for his own pleasure or comfort, nothing which could not be sold or bartered again. He married a woman who was a trader's daughter and shared his passion for gain. She was of North of England blood, her father having been a hard-fisted small tradesman in an unimportant town, who had been daring enough to emigrate when emigration meant the facing of unknown dangers in a half-savage land. She had excited Reuben Vanderpoel's admiration by taking off her petticoat one bitter winter's day to sell it to a squaw in exchange for an ornament for which she chanced to know another squaw would pay with a skin of value. The first Mrs. Vanderpoel was as wonderful as her husband. They were both wonderful. They were the founders of the fortune which a century and a half later was the delight--in fact the piece de resistance--of New York society reporters, its enormity being restated in round figures when a blank space must be filled up. The method of statement lent itself to infinite variety and was always interesting to a particular class, some elements of which felt it encouraging to be assured that so much money could be a personal possession, some elements feeling the fact an additional argument to be used against the infamy of monopoly.

The first Reuben Vanderpoel transmitted to his son his accumulations and

his fever for gain. He had but one child. The second Reuben built upon the foundations this afforded him, a fortune as much larger than the first as the rapid growth and increasing capabilities of the country gave him enlarging opportunities to acquire. It was no longer necessary to deal with savages: his powers were called upon to cope with those of white men who came to a new country to struggle for livelihood and fortune. Some were shrewd, some were desperate, some were dishonest. But shrewdness never outwitted, desperation never overcame, dishonesty never deceived the second Reuben Vanderpoel. Each characteristic ended by adapting itself to his own purposes and qualities, and as a result of each it was he who in any business transaction was the gainer. It was the common saying that the Vanderpoels were possessed of a money-making spell. Their spell lay in their entire mental and physical absorption in one idea. Their peculiarity was not so much that they wished to be rich as that Nature itself impelled them to collect wealth as the load-stone draws towards it iron. Having possessed nothing, they became rich, having become rich they became richer, having founded their fortunes on small schemes, they increased them by enormous ones. In time they attained that omnipotence of wealth which it would seem no circumstance can control or limit. The first Reuben Vanderpoel could not spell, the second could, the third was as well educated as a man could be whose sole profession is money-making. His children were taught all that expensive teachers and expensive opportunities could teach them. After the second generation the meagre and mercantile physical type of the Vanderpoels improved upon itself. Feminine good looks appeared and were made the most of. The Vanderpoel element invested even good looks to an

advantage. The fourth Reuben Vanderpoel had no son and two daughters. They were brought up in a brown-stone mansion built upon a fashionable New York thoroughfare roaring with traffic. To the farthest point of the Rocky Mountains the number of dollars this "mansion" (it was always called so) had cost, was known. There may have existed Pueblo Indians who had heard rumours of the price of it. All the shop-keepers and farmers in the United States had read newspaper descriptions of its furnishings and knew the value of the brocade which hung in the bedrooms and boudoirs of the Misses Vanderpoel. It was a fact much cherished that Miss Rosalie's bath was of Carrara marble, and to good souls actively engaged in doing their own washing in small New England or Western towns, it was a distinct luxury to be aware that the water in the Carrara marble bath was perfumed with Florentine Iris. Circumstances such as these seemed to become personal possessions and even to lighten somewhat the burden of toil.

Rosalie Vanderpoel married an Englishman of title, and part of the story of her married life forms my prologue. Hers was of the early international marriages, and the republican mind had not yet adjusted itself to all that such alliances might imply. It was yet ingenuous, imaginative and confiding in such matters. A baronetcy and a manor house reigning over an old English village and over villagers in possible smock frocks, presented elements of picturesque dignity to people whose intimacy with such allurements had been limited by the novels of Mrs. Oliphant and other writers. The most ordinary little anecdotes in which vicarages, gamekeepers, and dowagers figured, were exciting in these

early days. "Sir Nigel Anstruthers," when engraved upon a visiting card, wore an air of distinction almost startling. Sir Nigel himself was not as picturesque as his name, though he was not entirely without attraction, when for reasons of his own he chose to aim at agreeableness of bearing. He was a man with a good figure and a good voice, and but for a heaviness of feature the result of objectionable living, might have given the impression of being better looking than he really was. New York laid amused and at the same time, charmed stress upon the fact that he spoke with an "English accent." His enunciation was in fact clear cut and treated its vowels well. He was a man who observed with an air of accustomed punctiliousness such social rules and courtesies as he deemed it expedient to consider. An astute worldling had remarked that he was at once more ceremonious and more casual in his manner than men bred in America.

"If you invite him to dinner," the wording said, "or if you die, or marry, or meet with an accident, his notes of condolence or congratulation are prompt and civil, but the actual truth is that he cares nothing whatever about you or your relations, and if you don't please him he does not hesitate to sulk or be astonishingly rude, which last an American does not allow himself to be, as a rule."

By many people Sir Nigel was not analysed, but accepted. He was of the early English who came to New York, and was a novelty of interest, with his background of Manor House and village and old family name. He was very much talked of at vivacious ladies' luncheon parties, he was very

much talked to at equally vivacious afternoon teas. At dinner parties he was furtively watched a good deal, but after dinner when he sat with the men over their wine, he was not popular. He was not perhaps exactly disliked, but men whose chief interest at that period lay in stocks and railroads, did not find conversation easy with a man whose sole occupation had been the shooting of birds and the hunting of foxes, when he was not absolutely loitering about London, with his time on his hands. The stories he told--and they were few--were chiefly anecdotes whose points gained their humour by the fact that a man was a comically bad shot or bad rider and either peppered a gamekeeper or was thrown into a ditch when his horse went over a hedge, and such relations did not increase in the poignancy of their interest by being filtered through brains accustomed to applying their powers to problems of speculation and commerce. He was not so dull but that he perceived this at an early stage of his visit to New York, which was probably the reason of the infrequency of his stories.

He on his side was naturally not quick to rise to the humour of a "big deal" or a big blunder made on Wall Street--or to the wit of jokes concerning them. Upon the whole he would have been glad to have understood such matters more clearly. His circumstances were such as had at last forced him to contemplate the world of money-makers with something of an annoyed respect. "These fellows" who had neither titles nor estates to keep up could make money. He, as he acknowledged disgustedly to himself, was much worse than a beggar. There was Stornham Court in a state of ruin--the estate going to the dogs, the farmhouses

tumbling to pieces and he, so to speak, without a sixpence to bless himself with, and head over heels in debt. Englishmen of the rank which in bygone times had not associated itself with trade had begun at least to trifle with it--to consider its potentialities as factors possibly to be made useful by the aristocracy. Countesses had not yet spiritedly opened milliners' shops, nor belted Earls adorned the stage, but certain noblemen had dallied with beer and coquetted with stocks. One of the first commercial developments had been the discovery of America--particularly of New York--as a place where if one could make up one's mind to the plunge, one might marry one's sons profitably. At the outset it presented a field so promising as to lead to rashness and indiscretion on the part of persons not given to analysis of character and in consequence relying too serenely upon an ingenuousness which rather speedily revealed that it had its limits. Ingenuousness combining itself with remarkable alertness of perception on occasion, is rather American than English, and is, therefore, to the English mind, misleading.

At first younger sons, who "gave trouble" to their families, were sent out. Their names, their backgrounds of castles or manors, relatives of distinction, London seasons, fox hunting, Buckingham Palace and Goodwood

Races, formed a picturesque allurements. That the castles and manors would belong to their elder brothers, that the relatives of distinction did not encourage intimacy with swarms of the younger branches of their families; that London seasons, hunting, and racing were for their elders

and betters, were facts not realised in all their importance by the republican mind. In the course of time they were realised to the full, but in Rosalie Vanderpoel's nineteenth year they covered what was at that time almost unknown territory. One may rest assured Sir Nigel Anstruthers said nothing whatsoever in New York of an interview he had had before sailing with an intensely disagreeable great-aunt, who was the wife of a Bishop. She was a horrible old woman with a broad face, blunt features and a raucous voice, whose tones added acridity to her observations when she was indulging in her favourite pastime of interfering with the business of her acquaintances and relations.

"I do not know what you are going chasing off to America for, Nigel," she commented. "You can't afford it and it is perfectly ridiculous of you to take it upon yourself to travel for pleasure as if you were a man of means instead of being in such a state of pocket that Maria tells me you cannot pay your tailor. Neither the Bishop nor I can do anything for you and I hope you don't expect it. All I can hope is that you know yourself what you are going to America in search of, and that it is something more practical than buffaloes. You had better stop in New York. Those big shopkeepers' daughters are enormously rich, they say, and they are immensely pleased by attentions from men of your class. They say they'll marry anything if it has an aunt or a grandmother with a title. You can mention the Marchioness, you know. You need not refer to the fact that she thought your father a blackguard and your mother an interloper, and that you have never been invited to Broadmere since you were born. You can refer casually to me and to the Bishop and to the

Palace, too. A Palace--even a Bishop's--ought to go a long way with Americans. They will think it is something royal." She ended her remarks with one of her most insulting snorts of laughter, and Sir Nigel became dark red and looked as if he would like to knock her down.

It was not, however, her sentiments which were particularly revolting to him. If she had expressed them in a manner more flattering to himself he would have felt that there was a good deal to be said for them. In fact, he had put the same thing to himself some time previously, and, in summing up the American matter, had reached certain thrifty decisions. The impulse to knock her down surged within him solely because he had a brutally bad temper when his vanity was insulted, and he was furious at her impudence in speaking to him as if he were a villager out of work whom she was at liberty to bully and lecture.

"For a woman who is supposed to have been born of gentle people," he said to his mother afterwards, "Aunt Marian is the most vulgar old beast I have ever beheld. She has the taste of a female costermonger." Which was entirely true, but it might be added that his own was no better and his points of view and morals wholly coincided with his taste.

Naturally Rosalie Vanderpoel knew nothing of this side of the matter. She had been a petted, butterfly child, who had been pretty and admired and indulged from her infancy; she had grown up into a petted, butterfly girl, pretty and admired and surrounded by inordinate luxury. Her world had been made up of good-natured, lavish friends and relations, who

enjoyed themselves and felt a delight in her girlish toilettes and triumphs. She had spent her one season of belledom in being whirled from festivity to festivity, in dancing in rooms festooned with thousands of dollars' worth of flowers, in lunching or dining at tables loaded with roses and violets and orchids, from which ballrooms or feasts she had borne away wonderful "favours" and gifts, whose prices, being recorded in the newspapers, caused a thrill of delight or envy to pass over the land. She was a slim little creature, with quantities of light feathery hair like a French doll's. She had small hands and small feet and a small waist--a small brain also, it must be admitted, but she was an innocent, sweet-tempered girl with a childlike simpleness of mind. In fine, she was exactly the girl to find Sir Nigel's domineering temperament at once imposing and attractive, so long as it was cloaked by the ceremonies of external good breeding.

Her sister Bettina, who was still a child, was of a stronger and less susceptible nature. Betty--at eight--had long legs and a square but delicate small face. Her well-opened steel-blue eyes were noticeable for rather extravagant ink-black lashes and a straight young stare which seemed to accuse if not to condemn. She was being educated at a ruinously expensive school with a number of other inordinately rich little girls, who were all too wonderfully dressed and too lavishly supplied with pocket money. The school considered itself especially refined and select, but was in fact interestingly vulgar.

The inordinately rich little girls, who had most of them pretty and

spiritual or pretty and piquant faces, ate a great many bon bons and chattered a great deal in high unmodulated voices about the parties their sisters and other relatives went to and the dresses they wore. Some of them were nice little souls, who in the future would emerge from their chrysalis state enchanting women, but they used colloquialisms freely, and had an ingenuous habit of referring to the prices of things. Bettina Vanderpoel, who was the richest and cleverest and most promisingly handsome among them, was colloquial to slanginess, but she had a deep, mellow, child voice and an amazing carriage.

She could not endure Sir Nigel Anstruthers, and, being an American child, did not hesitate to express herself with force, if with some crudeness. "He's a hateful thing," she said, "I loathe him. He's stuck up and he thinks you are afraid of him and he likes it."

Sir Nigel had known only English children, little girls who lived in that discreet corner of their parents' town or country houses known as "the schoolroom," apparently emerging only for daily walks with governesses; girls with long hair and boys in little high hats and with faces which seemed curiously made to match them. Both boys and girls were decently kept out of the way and not in the least dwelt on except when brought out for inspection during the holidays and taken to the pantomime.

Sir Nigel had not realised that an American child was an absolute factor to be counted with, and a "youngster" who entered the drawing-room when

she chose and joined fearlessly in adult conversation was an element he considered annoying. It was quite true that Bettina talked too much and too readily at times, but it had not been explained to her that the opinions of eight years are not always of absorbing interest to the mature. It was also true that Sir Nigel was a great fool for interfering with what was clearly no affair of his in such a manner as would have made him an enemy even had not the child's instinct arrayed her against him at the outset.

"You American youngsters are too cheeky," he said on one of the occasions when Betty had talked too much. "If you were my sister and lived at Stornham Court, you would be learning lessons in the schoolroom and wearing a pinafore. Nobody ever saw my sister Emily when she was your age."

"Well, I'm not your sister Emily," retorted Betty, "and I guess I'm glad of it."

It was rather impudent of her, but it must be confessed that she was not infrequently rather impudent in a rude little-girl way, but she was serenely unconscious of the fact.

Sir Nigel flushed darkly and laughed a short, unpleasant laugh. If she had been his sister Emily she would have fared ill at the moment, for his villainous temper would have got the better of him.

"I 'guess' that I may be congratulated too," he sneered.

"If I was going to be anybody's sister Emily," said Betty, excited a little by the sense of the fray, "I shouldn't want to be yours."

"Now Betty, don't be hateful," interposed Rosalie, laughing, and her laugh was nervous. "There's Mina Thalberg coming up the front steps. Go and meet her."

Rosalie, poor girl, always found herself nervous when Sir Nigel and Betty were in the room together. She instinctively recognised their antagonism and was afraid Betty would do something an English baronet would think vulgar. Her simple brain could not have explained to her why it was that she knew Sir Nigel often thought New Yorkers vulgar. She was, however, quite aware of this but imperfectly concealed fact, and felt a timid desire to be explanatory.

When Bettina marched out of the room with her extraordinary carriage finely manifest, Rosy's little laugh was propitiatory.

"You mustn't mind her," she said. "She's a real splendid little thing, but she's got a quick temper. It's all over in a minute."

"They wouldn't stand that sort of thing in England," said Sir Nigel.

"She's deucedly spoiled, you know."

He detested the child. He disliked all children, but this one awakened in him more than mere dislike. The fact was that though Betty herself was wholly unconscious of the subtle truth, the as yet undeveloped intellect which later made her a brilliant and captivating personality, vaguely saw him as he was, an unscrupulous, sordid brute, as remorseless an adventurer and swindler in his special line, as if he had been engaged in drawing false cheques and arranging huge jewel robberies, instead of planning to entrap into a disadvantageous marriage a girl whose gentleness and fortune could be used by a blackguard of reputable name. The man was cold-blooded enough to see that her gentle weakness was of value because it could be bullied, her money was to be counted on because it could be spent on himself and his degenerate vices and on his racked and ruined name and estate, which must be rebuilt and restocked at an early date by someone or other, lest they tumbled into ignominious collapse which could not be concealed. Bettina of the accusing eyes did not know that in the depth of her yet crude young being, instinct was summing up for her the potentialities of an unusually fine specimen of the British blackguard, but this was nevertheless the interesting truth. When later she was told that her sister had become engaged to Sir Nigel Anstruthers, a flame of colour flashed over her face, she stared silently a moment, then bit her lip and burst into tears.

"Well, Bett," exclaimed Rosalie, "you are the queerest thing I ever saw."

Bettina's tears were an outburst, not a flow. She swept them away

passionately with her small handkerchief.

"He'll do something awful to you," she said. "He'll nearly kill you. I know he will. I'd rather be dead myself."

She dashed out of the room, and could never be induced to say a word further about the matter. She would indeed have found it impossible to express her intense antipathy and sense of impending calamity. She had not the phrases to make herself clear even to herself, and after all what controlling effort can one produce when one is only eight years old?