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CHAPTER I. Jane Gerson, Buyer

HAD two trunks-two, you ninny; Two! Ou est l'autre?"

FOUNDED ON

EALR DERR BIGGERS' PLAY OF

THE SAME NAME

The grinning customs guard lifted his shoulders to his ears and spread out his palms, "Mais, mamselle-"

"Don't you 'mais' me, sir! I had two trunks-deux troncs-when I got aboard that wabbly old boat at Dover this morning, and I'm not going to budge from this wharf until I find the other one. Where did you learn your French, anyway? Can't you understand when I speak your language?"

JANUARY 9, 1916

The girl plumped herself down on top of the unhasped trnuk and folded her arms truculently. With a quizzical smile, the customs guard looked down into her brown eyes, smoldering dangerously now, and began all

over again his speech of explanation.
"Wagon-lit?" She caught a familiar word. "Mais oui; that's where I want to go—aboard your wagon-lit, for Paris. Voila!"—the girl carefully gave the word three syllables-"mon ticket pour Paree!" She opened her patentleather reticule, rummaged furiously therein, brought out a handkerchief, a tiny mirror, a packet of rice papers, and at last a folded and puched ticket. This she displayed with a triumphant flourish.

Voila! Il dit 'Mis Iane Gerson'; that's me -moi-meme, I mean. And il dit 'deux troncs'; now you can't go behind that, can you? Where is that other trunk?

A whistle shrilled back beyond the swinging doors of the station. Folk in the customs shed began a hasty gathering together of parcels and shawl straps, and a general exodus toward the train sheds commenced. The girl on the trunk looked appealing about her; nothing but bustle and confusion; no Samaritan to turn aside and rescue a fair traveler fallen among customs guards. Her eyes filled with trouble, and for an instant her reliant mouth broke its line of determination; the lower lip quivered suspiciously. Even the guard started to walk away.

"Oh, oh, please don't go!" Jane Gerson was on her feet, and her hands shot out in an impulsive appeal. "Oh, dear; maybe I forgot to tip you. Here, attende au secours, if you'll only find that other trunk before the train-'Pardon; but if I may be of any assist-

Miss Gerson turned. A tallish, old-younglooking man, in a gray lounge suit, stood heels together and bent stiffly in a bow. Nothing of the beau or the boulevardier about his face or manner. Miss Gerson accepted his interven-

tion as heaven-sent. "Oh, thank you ever so much! The guard, you see, doesn't understand good French. I just can't make him understand that one of my trunks is missing. And the train for

Already the stranger was rattling incisive French at the guard. That official bowed low, and, with hands and lips, gave rapid explanation. The man in the gray lounge suit turned

"A little misunderstanding, Miss-ah-"Gerson-Jane Gerson, of New York," she promptly supplied.

"A little misunderstanding, Miss Gerson. The customs guard says your other trunk has already been examined, passed, and placed on the baggage van. He was trying to tell you that it would be necessary for you to permit a porter to take this trunk to the train before time for starting. With your permission-The stranger turned and halloed to a porter,

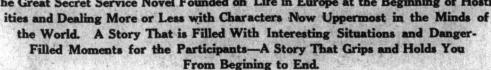
who came running. Miss Gerson had the trunk locked and strapped in no time, and it was on the shoulders of the porter.

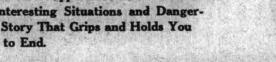
"You have very little time, Miss Gerson. The train will be making a start directly. If I might—ah—pilot you through the station to the proper train shed. I am not presuming?" "You are very kind," she answered hur-

They set off, the providential Samaritan in the lead. Through the waiting-room and on to a broad platform, almost deserted, they went. A guard's whistle shrilled. The stranger tucked a helping hand under Jane Gerson's arm to steady her in the sharp sprint down a long aisle betwen tracks to where the Paris train stood. It began to move before they had reached its mid-length. A guard threw open a carriage door, in they hopped, and with a rattle of chains and banging of buffers the Express du Nord was off on its arrow

flight from Calais to the capital. The carriage, which was of the second class, was comfortably filled. Miss Gerson stumbled over the feet of a puffy Fleming nearest the door, was launched into the lap of a comfortably upholstered widow on the opposite seat, ricochetted back to jam an elbow into a French gentleman's spread newspaper, and finally was catapulted into a vacant space next to the window on the carriage's far side. She giggled, tucked the skirts of her pearlgrey duster about her, righted the chic sailor hat on her chestnut-brown head, and patted a stray wisp of hair back into place. Her meteor flight into and through the carriage dis-

turbed her not a whit. As for the Samaritan, he stood uncertainly in the narrow cross aisle, swaying to the swing of the carriage and reconnoitering seating posThe Great Secret Service Novel Founded on Life in Europe at the Beginning of Hostil-





vacant place next to Jane Gerson. The Samar- wonderful women?" the captain was saying. itan caught the girl's glance in his indecision, read in it something frankly comradely, and chose the seat beside her.

"Very good of you, I'm sure," he murmur"I did not wish to presume—"

"You're not," the girl assured, and there ing good on the job. This is my first trip—was something so fresh, so ingenuous, in the my very first as buyer for Hildebrand. And, tone and the level glance of her brown eyes of course, if I should fall down—" that the Samaritan felt all at once distinctly satisfied with the cast of fortune that had thrown him in the way of a distressed traveler. He sat down with a lifting of the checkered Alpine hat he wore and a stiff little bow from

"If I may, Miss Gerson-I am Captain Woodhouse, of the signal service.' "Oh!" The girl let slip a little gasp—the need of admiration the feminine heart always

pays to shoulder straps. "Signal service; that means the army?" "His majesty's service; yes, Miss Gerson."
"You are, of course, off duty?" she suggested, with the faintest possible tinge of regret at the absence of the stripes and buttons

hat spell "soldier" with the woman. 'You might say so, Miss Gerson. Egyptthe Nile country is my station. I am on my way back there after a bit of a vacation at

home-London, I mean, of course." She stole a quick side glance at the face of her companion. A soldier's face it was, lean and school-hardened and competent. Lines about the eyes and mouth—the stamp of the trouble comes.' sun and the imprint of the habit to command -had taken from Captain Wodohouse's features something of freshness and youth though giving in return the index of inflexible will and lust for achievement. His smooth lips were a bit thin, Jane Gerson thought, and the out-shooting chin, almost squared at the angles, marked Captain Woodhouse as

anything but a trifler or a flirt. She was satisfied that nothing of presumption or forwardness on the part of this hardmolded chap from Egypt would give her cause to regret her unconventional offer

of friendship. Captain Woodhouse, in his turn, had made a satisfying, though covert appraisal of his traveling companion by means of a narrow mirror inset above the baggage rack over the opposite seat. Trim and petite of figure, which was just a shade under the average for height and plumpness; a small head set sturdily on round smooth neck; face the very embodiment of independence and selfconfidence, with its brown eyes wide apart, its high brow under the parting waves of golden chestnut, broad humorous mouth, and tiny nose slightly nibbed upward: Miss Up-to-the-minute New York, indeed! From the cocked red feather in her hat to the dainty spatted boots Jane Gerson appeared in Woodhouse's eyes a perfect, virile, vividly alive American girl. He'd met her kind before; had seen them browbeating bazaar merchants in Cairo and riding desert donkeys like strong young queens. The type appealed to him.

The first stiffness of informal meeting wore away speedily. The girl tact-fully directed the channel of conversation into lines familiar to Woodhouse. What was Egypt like; who owned the pyramids, and why didn't the owners plant a park around them and charge admittance? Didn't he think Rameses and all those other

old Pharaohs had the right idea advertising-putting up stone billboards to last all time? The questions came crisp and startling; Woodhouse found himself chuckling at the shrewd incisiveness of them. Rameses an advertiser and the Pyramids stone hoardings to carry all those old boys' fame through the ages! He'd never looked on them in that

"I say, Miss Gerson, you'd make an excellent business person, now, really," the captain voiced his admiration.

'Just cable that at my expense to old Pop Hildebrand, of Hildebrand's department store, New York," she flashed back at him. "I'm trying to convince him of just that very

"Really, now; a department shop! What, may I ask, do you have to do for-ah-Pop

Hildebrand?" "Oh, I'm his foreign buyer," Jane answered with a conscious note of pride. "I'm over here to buy gowns for the winter season, you see. Paul Poiret-Worth-Paquin; you've heard of those wonderful people, of course?"

"Can't say I have," the captain confessed, with a rueful smile into the girl's brown eyes. "Then you've never bought a Worth?" she challenged. "For if you had you'd not forget

the name—or the price—very soon."
"Gowns—and things are not in my line, Miss Gerson," he answered simply, and the girl caught herself feeling a secret elation. A man who didn't know gowns couldn't be very intimately acquainted with women. And-

sibilities. There was a place, a very narrow one, next to the fat Fleming; also there was a here alone just to buy pretties for New York's time in the comfortable doze of security. The

"Aren't you just a bit-ah-nervous to be over in this part of the world-alone?"

"Not in the least," the girl caught him up.
"Not about the alone part, I should say. Maybe I am fidgety and sort of worried about mak-

"Fall-down?" Woodhouse echoed, mystified. The girl laughed, and struck her left wrist a smart blow with her gloved right hand. "There I go again—slang; 'vulgar Ameri-can slang,' you'll call it. If I could only rattle

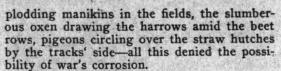
off the French as easily as I do New Yorkese I'd be a wonder. I mean I'm afraid I won't make good.

"But why should I worry about coming over alone?" Jane urged. "Lots of American girls come over here alone with an American flag pinned to their shirt-waists and wearing a Baedeker for a wrist watch. 'Nothing ever happens to them."

Captain Woodhouse looked out on the flying panorama of straw-thatched houses and and fields heavy with green grain. He seemed to be balancing words. He glanced at the passenger across the aisle, a wizened little man, asleep. In a lowered voice he began:

"A woman alone-over here on the Continent at this time; why, I very much fear she will have great difficulties when the ah-ah-

"Trouble?" Jane's eyes were questioning.
"I do not wish to be an alarmist, Miss Gerson," Captain Woodhouse continued, hesitant. "Goodness knows we've had enough calamity shouters among the Unionists at home. But have you considered what you would do-how you would get back to America in case of-



"Don't you think everybody is suffering from a bad dream when they say there's to be fighting?" she queried. "Surely it is impos-sible that folks over here would all consent to destroy this." She waved toward the peaceful

"A bad dream, yes. But one that will end in a nightmare," he answered. "Tell me, Miss Gerson, when will you be through with your work in Paris, and on your way back to America?"

'Not for a month; that's sure. Maybe I'll

be longer if I like the place.'

Woodhouse pondered.
"A month. This is the tenth of July. I am afraid- I say, Miss Gerson, please do not set me down for a meddler-this short acquaintance, and all that; but may I not urge on you that you finish your work in Paris and get back to England at least in two weeks?" The captain had turned, and was looking into the girl's eyes with an earnest intensity that startled her. "I can not tell you all I know, of course. I may not even know the truth, though I think I have a bit of it, right enough. But one of your sort—to be caught alone on this side of the water by the madness that is brewing! By George, I do not like to think

"I thank you, Captain Woodhouse, for your warning," Jane answered him, and impulsively she put out her hand to his. "But, you see. I'll have to run the risk. I couldn't go scampering back to New York like a scared pussycat just because somebody starts a war over here. I'm on trial. This is my first trip as

buyer for Hildebrand, and it's a case of make or break with me. War or no war, I've got to make good. Anyway"-this with a toss of her round little chin-"I'm an American citizen, and nobody'll dare to start anything with me."

"Right you are!" Woodhouse beamed his admiration. "Now we'll talk about those skyscrapers of yours. Everybody back from the States has something to say about those famous buildings, and I'm fairly bursting for first-hand information from one who knows them."

Laughingly she acquiesced, and the grim shadow of war was pushed away from them, though hardly forgotten by either. At the man's prompting, Jane gave inti-mate pictures of life in the New World metropolis, touching with shrewd insight the fads and shams of New York's denizens even as she exalted the achieve-

ments of their restless energy. Woodhouse found secret amusement strasse?" the woman asked tensely. and delight in her racy nervous speech, in the dexterity of her idiom and patness of her characterizations. Here was a new sort of girl for him. Not the languid creature of studied suppression and feeble enthusiasm he had known, but a virile, vivid, sparkling woman of a new land, whose impulses were as unhindered as her speech was heterodox. She was a woman who worked for her living; that was a new type, too. Unafraid, she threw herself into the competition of a man's world; insenibly she prided her-self on her ability to "make good"—expressive Americanism, that,-under any handicap. She was a woman with a "job" Captain Woodhouse had never before met one such

Again, here was a woman who tried none of the stale arts and tricks of coquetry; no eyebrow strategy or maidenly simpering about ane Gerson. Once sure Woodhouse was what she took him to be, a gentleman, the girl had established a frank basis of comradeship that took no reckoning of the age-old conventions of sex allure and sex defence. The unconventionality of their meeting weighed nothing with her. Equally there was not a hint of sophistication on the girl's part.

So the afternoon sped, and when the sun dropped over the maze of spires and chimney

pots that was Paris, each felt regret at parting. "To Egypt, yes," Woodhouse ruefully admitted. "A dreary deadly 'place in the sun' for me. To have met you, Miss Gerson; it has been delightful, quite.

"I hope," the girl said, as Woodhouse president before he has a chance to send out handed her into a taxi, "I hope that if that war comes it will find you still in Egypt, away 'Europe is so different from Mexico," her from the firing line.' companion continued, the lines of his face

"Not a fair thing to wish for a man in the service," Woodhouse answered, laughing. "I may be more happy when I say my best wish for you is that when the war comes it will find you a long way from Paris. Good-by, Miss Gerson, and good luck!"

Captain Woodhouse stood, heels together and hat in hand, while her taxi trundled off, a farewell flash of brown eyes rewarding him for he hurried to another station to take a trainnot for a Mediterranean port and distant when they paid Billy Capper.' Egypt, but for Berlin.

CHARLES THE TOTAL PROPERTY OF THE PERSON

EARL DER BIGGERS ROBERT WELLS RITCHIE

> CHAPTER II. From the Wilhelmstrasse

"It would be wiser to talk in German," the woman said. "In these times French or English speech in Berlin-" she finished, with a lifting of her shapely bare shoulders, suffici-ently eloquent. The waiter speeded his task of refilling the man's glass and discreetly with-

"Oh, I'll talk in German quick enough," the man assented, draining his thin half bubble of glass down to the last fizzing residue in the stem. "Only just show me you've got the right to hear, and the good fat bank-notes to pay; that's all." He propped his sharp chin on a hand that shook slightly, and pushed his lean flushed face nearer hers. An owlish caution fought the wine fancies in his shifting lynx eyes under reddened lids; also there was admiration for the milk-white skin and ripe lips of the woman by his side. For an instant— half the time of a breath—a flash of loathing

made the woman's eyes tigerish; but at once they changed again to mild bantering.

"So? Friend Billy Capper, of Brussels, has a touch of the spy fever himself, and distrusts an old pal?" She laughed softly, and one slim hand toyed with a heavy gold locket on her bosom, "Friend Billy Capper forgets old times and old faces-forgets even the matter of the Lord Fisher letters-

"Chop it, Louisa!" The man called Capper lapsed into brusk English as he banged the stem of his wineglass on the damask. "No sense in raking that up again-just because I ask you a fair question—ask you to identify yourself in your new job."

"We go no further, Billy Capper," she re-turned, speaking swiftly in German; "not another word between us unless you obey my rule, and talk this language. Why did you get that message through to me to meet you here in the Cafe Riche tonight if you did not trust me? why did you have me carry your offer to -to headquarters and come here ready to talk business if it was only to hum and haw about my identifying myself?"

The tenseness of exaggerated concentration on Capper's gaunt face began slowly to dissolve. First the thin line of shaven lips flickered and became weak at down-drawn corners; then the frown faded from about the eyes, and the beginnings of tears gathered there. Shrewdness and the stamp of cunning sped

entirely, and naught but weakness remained. "Louisa-Louisa, old pal; don't be hard on poor Billy Capper," he mumbled. "I'm down, girl-away down again. Since they kicked me out at Brussels I haven't had a shilling to bless myself with. Can't go back to England-you know that; the French won't have me, and here I am, my dinner clothes my only stock in trade left, and you even having to buy the wine." A tear of self-pity slipped down the hard drain of his cheek and splashed on his hand. "But I'll show 'em, Louisa! They can't kick me out of the Brussels shop like a dog

and not pay for it! I know too much, I do!" "And what you know about the Brussels shop you want to sell to the-Wilhelm-

"Yes, if the Wilhelmstrasse is willing to pay well for it," Capper answered, his lost cur ning returned in a bound.

"I am authorized to judge how much your information is worth," his companion declared, leveling a cold glance into Capper's eyes. "You can tell me what you know, and depend on me to pay well, or-we part at once.'

"But, Louisa"—again the whine—"how do I know you're what you say? You-ve flown high since you and I worked together in the Brussels shop. The Wilhelmstrasse-most perfect spy machine in the world! How I'd like to be in your shoes, Louisa!"

She detached the heavy gold locket from the chain on her bosom, with a quick twist of slim fingers had one side of the case open, then laid the locket before him, pointing to a place on the bevel of the case. Capper swept up the trinket, looked searchingly for an instant at the spot the woman had designated, and returned the locket to her hand.

"Your number in the Wilhelmstrasse," he whispered in awe. "Genuine, no doubt. Saw the same sort of mark once before in Rome. All right. Now, listen, Louisa. What I'm going to tell you about where Brussels stands in this-this business that's brewing will make the German general staff sit up." The woman inclined her head toward Capper's. He, looking not at her but out over the rich plain of brocades, broadcloths and gleaming shoulders, began in a monotone:

"When the war comes—the day the war starts, French artillerymen will be behind the guns at Namur. The English-

The Hungarian orchestra of forty strings swept into a wild Gypsy chant. Dissonances, fierce and barbaric, swept like angry tides over the brilliant floor of the cafe. Still Capper talked on, and the woman called Louisa bent her jewel-starred head to listen. Her face, the face of a fine animal, was set in rapt attention.

"You mark my words," he finished, "when the German army enters Brussels proof of what I'm telling you will be there. Yes, in a pigeonhole of the foreign-office safe those joint plans between England and Belgium for resisting invasion from the eastern frontier. If the Germans strike as swiftly as I think they will the foreign-office Johnnies will be so flustered in moving out they'll forget these papers the military correctness of his courtesy. Then I'm telling you about. Then your Wilhelmstrasse will know they've paid for the truth



war?" The last word was almost a whisper.

mean all this talk in the papers is-

here, this stirring up the animals."

were filled with something not mirth.

quietly. "Very serious."

'At home' cards."

"War?" she echoed. "Why, you don't

"Is serious, yes," Woodhouse answered

"Why, Captain Woodhouse, I though you

had war talk every summer over here just as

our papers are filled each spring with gossip

about how Tesreau is going to jump to the

Feds, or the Yanks are going to be sold. It's

your regular midsummer outdoor sport over

too far this time," he resumed. "The assassination of the Archduke Ferd—"

about that in the papers at home. But arch-

dukes and kings have been killed before, and

no war came of it. In Mexico they murder a

deepening. I am afraid you over in the States

do not know the dangerous politics here; you are so far away; you should thank God for that. You are not in a land where one man

or two or three—may say, 'We will now go to war,' and then you go, willy-nilly."

The seriousness of the captain's speech and

the fear that he could not keep from his eyes

sobered the girl. She looked out on the sun-drenched plains of Pas de Calais, where toy

villages, hedged fields, and squat farmhouses

Woodhouse smiled, though his grey eyes

'I fear the animals are—stirred, as you say,

"Yes, I remember I did read something