

MARIA DALE

The hour was early, but the bargain seekers of the city were already thronging the store, and Maria was scarcely inside before she found herself immersed in this sea of humanity who pushed and jostled her as they pressed towards the various counters.

It was an unexpected experience for the timid little woman from the obscure village, and her heart throbbed tumultuously as she mingled with this stream of eager buyers who forced her to drift aimlessly over the long lines of attractiveness stretched in endless directions.

At one point where the broad aisles crossed she freed herself from the thickest of the throng, and approaching a clerk inquired for the office of "Mr. James."

Directing her to a line of elevators further on, she was whirled a few minutes later to another floor, where she was soon after ushered into a small, richly furnished reception room.

"What name, madame?" brought her to conscious attention.

For a second the question puzzled her, but quickly collecting her thoughts, she nervously unfastened her little netted bag, and taking from it a card bearing her name, she handed it to the clerk, who immediately left the room.

Albert James was in conversation with a caller when the clerk handed him the card. He was speaking in a voice which indicated a curbed and well-disciplined mind, which had in a surprisingly short