

CHAPTER VIII

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

EVERY delicacy which love could devise and her money buy Stella lavished on John and his friends. Each day added to the list of men who returned to jail condemned to the infamy of a convict's pen at Albany.

When the deep-muttered curses against Steve Hoyle for the betrayal of his men reached John's ears, he sent through Stella his sternest orders and his tenderest entreaties to Dan Wiley to prevent violence. Dan had successfully eluded every effort to arrest him. John knew that he was hiding in the mountains with the men he had commanded armed to the teeth, and he lived in constant dread of the news of Steve's assassination, even under the noses of the United States troops.

A single burst of sunlight came to brighten for Stella the gloom of the day before John's departure for Albany. She succeeded in liberating "Jim," the big brother of her little tow-headed friend. Her interest in the boy had been noted, and she received the usual mysterious message—that money placed at the right spot would prevent any witness