

# A Rumor of Plaid

In the chapter "A Rumor of Plaid" from *The Demon of Unrest*, the secretive arrival of President-elect Abraham Lincoln in Washington, D.C., captivates the city. A reporter from the *New-York Times* describes Lincoln's unexpected entrance, likening it to magic, noting, "the whole city has been agreeably surprised." The article on February 25 famously depicts Lincoln in a Scotch plaid cap and a long military cloak, making him unrecognizable. This imagery incites cartoonists to humorously portray Lincoln fleeing in panic, such as one that features him peering from a freight car at a hissing cat. Mary Chesnut's diary reflects this sentiment, underscoring the absurdity of Lincoln's "noble entrance."

As Lincoln's journey unfolds, columnists from both the North and South criticize him. The *Charleston Mercury* condemns him for cowardice, asserting that "everybody here is disgusted" by his clandestine arrival, while pro-slavery outlets like the *New York Herald* liken his entry to that of a "thief in the night." Many even compared Lincoln's journey to the Underground Railroad, invoking racial connotations of him as a fugitive slave.

The chapter highlights Lincoln's precarious position; at a critical juncture, his stealthy arrival does not project the commanding figure he needs to be. A diarist referred to as "Public Man" shares a sense of national failure, remarking on the shame in an elected President being "smuggled through by night." Another observer, George Templeton Strong, worries about the authenticity of the alleged assassination plot against Lincoln, noting its importance for his moral standing as President.

Despite the claims of a conspiracy surrounding his entrance, the evidence is scant. No weapons or arrests were confirmed, and figures such as Ward Lamon express skepticism about the existence of a plot. The narrative of the supposed plot continues to be contested years later, with Pinkerton ultimately seeking recognition for "saving" Lincoln while countering others' claims. Meanwhile, Lincoln's original train ride—believed to be a target—proceeded without incident, suggesting that public fears may have been exaggerated. In stark contrast, newly inaugurated Confederate President Jefferson Davis enters Montgomery, charged with a call for war, further escalating tensions between the North and South.