

# A Toast

### Summary of "A Toast, The Demon of Unrest"

On April 14, 1865, President Lincoln sought to raise the American flag over Fort Sumter, four years after it had fallen under Confederate fire. The ceremony was set exactly four years after the fort's evacuation by its commander, Robert Anderson, who was approached by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to oversee the flag-raising. Despite Anderson's desire for a simple commemoration of loss, Stanton orchestrated a grand public event attended by thousands, marking a climactic moment in the Civil War's aftermath.

As the nation healed from the war, with General Lee's surrender just days prior, the loss was palpable. The war claimed 750,000 lives, with South Carolina alone mourning 21,000 fatalities among its fighters. The end of slavery also dealt a significant financial blow to Southern planters, costing them significantly in human capital. On the day of the ceremony, the fort resembled a shattered monument, reduced to rubble by years of conflict.

Attendees included notable figures such as abolitionists Henry Ward Beecher and William Lloyd Garrison, who arrived via steamships to honor the occasion. The ceremony began with prayer and scripture readings, acknowledging the sacrifices on both sides. Major General Abner Doubleday, a survivor of the original garrison, was present, reminiscing about those tumultuous years.

Anderson's emotional state during the event was noted; the hardships of the past years weighed heavily on him as he prepared to raise the flag. The ceremony unfolded with much fanfare—bleachers were filled, and the flag was adorned with floral tributes before being hoisted amidst cheers and gun salutes. The moment resonated deeply, offering a sense of closure and unity—a turning of the page for a nation bruised by conflict.

That evening, in Charleston, tributes continued in a celebratory dinner. Anderson proposed a toast to Lincoln, unaware that the President was fatally wounded at Ford's Theater at that very moment. This stark coincidence haunted attendees, particularly John Nicolay, who felt a heavy sense of regret for not being in Washington to possibly avert the tragedy.

As the nation celebrated, the looming shadow of Lincoln's assassination cast a pall over the newfound peace, intertwining the themes of victory and loss against the backdrop of a fractured nation moving toward reconciliation.