

The Flirtation

On March 30, James Chesnut embarked on a journey with fellow men to explore the forts in Charleston Harbor, while Mary chose to stay back, concerned about the strong wind and dust on the islands. She received a bouquet of roses from friends upon returning to her rooms, anticipating a peaceful Saturday, which was soon interrupted by a loud knock at her door. When she opened it, she found John Manning, who had mistakenly knocked on the wrong door. He invited her to join their gathering at Quinby's, a popular photography studio, where everyone was eager to have their portraits taken.

Mary obliged and spent the day touring the city with Manning in an open carriage, accompanying him on various social calls. In her diary, she initially referred to him as "my handsome ex-governor," but later revised it to "the." Meanwhile, James returned from his excursion in a foul mood, accusing Mary of staying home to flirt with Manning. Mary, feeling exasperated, went to bed distressed over the accusation.

Later that evening, General Beauregard visited their home, but Mary chose not to greet him, noting in her diary that he was being celebrated as a hero despite having only held positions as a captain. The following day, March 31, did not seem to alleviate James's bad mood. They had multiple friends over for tea, including relatives and acquaintances, some of whom carried their own tumultuous backgrounds. Notably, John Manning took the initiative to speak with Mary privately, which only fueled James's displeasure.

In the background of these social events, Governor Pickens, at the Charleston Hotel, expressed his impatience regarding the situation at Fort Sumter. He had received assurances from Lincoln's emissary, Ward Lamon, about the fort's imminent evacuation, but nothing had transpired. On the same Saturday, Pickens communicated these details to Confederate commissioners in Washington, igniting further discussions about the fort's status. However, Secretary Seward found himself caught between conflicting messages, as he had informed the commissioners of an impending surrender while the cabinet favored a different approach, leaving the situation in a precarious state as he promised to update them on April 1.