

The Great Darkness

The chapter titled "The Great Darkness" takes place on Friday, April 12, during a significant moment in the history of Fort Sumter. At midday, Private Thompson of Fort Sumter observes a third steamship joining two others that have been present since dawn. This raises the hopes of the men stationed at the fort, as they believed these vessels were part of an expedition to relieve them. However, as time passes, the ships remain stationary, leading Thompson to anticipate that they would wait until nightfall to make their move.

Confederate lookouts confirm the presence of these ships, identifying two as warships—the *Pawnee* and *Harriet Lane*—and a third, the *Baltic*, which seems to carry rowboats for landing troops. As Ruffin, a Confederate officer, surveys Fort Sumter's condition, he notes some damage from artillery fire but finds no significant breaches in the fort's walls. Meanwhile, the return fire from Sumter is ineffective, with most cannonballs either missing the target or being deflected by the Confederate Iron Battery.

As night descends, anxiety grips both sides, with Confederate soldiers mocking the federal fleet's inaction. The stormy weather adds to the tension and visibility issues while the shelling continues intermittently. Ruffin, unable to sleep, ventures outside to observe the conflict as the night unfolds, and at about 12:30 a.m., he is startled awake by gunfire, prompting him to fear a landing operation by federal forces.

The narrative then describes the chaos on the beach as a small boat with two passengers lands, only to be confronted by Confederate artillery fire. Confusion reigns as the occupants, who claim to be "friends" from the Southern Confederacy, are apprehended. They turn out to be disoriented and intoxicated men who had intended to transport guardsmen. As the chapter concludes, the tension remains high with Sumter's guns silent and Confederate artillery still firing sporadically, reinforcing the ominous atmosphere as the fort's defenders wait for their relief or further conflict.

The juxtaposition of the weary soldiers at Fort Sumter and the steadfast federal ships shrouded in darkness spins a narrative of anticipation, confusion, and the looming threat of warfare .