

Blood and Dishonor

****Chapter Summary: Blood and Dishonor****

On December 27, in Washington, former Assistant Secretary of State William Henry Trescot met with Senators Jefferson Davis of Mississippi and R.M.T. Hunter of Virginia to discuss urgent news. They rushed to the White House to speak with President Buchanan, who was visibly anxious. Trescot noted Buchanan's nervousness as he made a casual reference to the consul in Liverpool, prompting Davis to shift the conversation to the real concern at hand.

Davis inquired if Buchanan had heard from Charleston recently, to which Buchanan responded negatively. Davis then revealed the alarming news of Major Anderson's relocation from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter, articulating the dire situation by stating that blood and dishonor surrounded the presidency. Buchanan, overwhelmed by the implications of this news, expressed his disbelief and frustration, claiming that it contradicted his orders.

Amidst this turmoil, Secretary of War Floyd, upon being summoned, denied having received any telegrams confirming Anderson's actions and was skeptical of their truth. He insisted on a cabinet meeting, which turned into a lengthy discussion spanning several days about how to address the untenable situation. During the gathering, tensions escalated when Floyd presented a statement that blamed Major Anderson for violating the government's commitments, advocating for the evacuation of Sumter to prevent civil war.

This stance was met with robust opposition from Secretary of State Jeremiah S. Black, who supported Anderson's decision. The cabinet was divided, with Floyd's suggestion of withdrawal viewed by most as surrendering to South Carolina's demands. Fearing the administration could appear weak, Attorney General Stanton criticized Floyd's approach, citing the damage to public trust and the loss of both a million dollars and a fort.

As the cabinet deliberated, Senator Robert Toombs visited Buchanan, emphasizing that the situation at Fort Sumter had implications for the entire South, awakening Buchanan to the gravity of the crisis. Pressure mounted from all sides, with Anderson's actions earning him accolades in the North, where he became a symbol of courage, contrasting sharply with the inaction of the administration. Buchanan recognized that withdrawing Anderson would likely incite public outrage, marking the beginning of a much deeper conflict.