

Frustration

In this chapter titled "Frustration," set between December 20 and 24, Navy Lieutenant David Dixon Porter navigates the political tensions in Washington amidst the secession crisis. While en route downtown, he encounters the residence of Senator Jefferson Davis, where a vibrant party is underway. Although Porter is a loyal Unionist, he maintains friendships across political lines to gauge prospects for peace. His connection to the Davis family leads him to attend the gathering, where excitement over South Carolina's recent secession is palpable.

Mrs. Varina Davis, buoyant with joy, invites Porter to accompany her to the White House to share the "glorious news" with President Buchanan. However, Porter perceives her eagerness for celebration with trepidation. The two take a carriage to the White House, during which Varina proposes that Porter join a secessionist navy and mentions the potential establishment of a monarchy, prompting him to doubt the viability of such a regime. He imagines chaos and fragmentation among rebel states instead.

Upon returning to the Davis residence, Porter observes an atmosphere of drunken jubilation among Davis's supporters, contrasting markedly with the grave concerns he harbors. Davis remains composed, seemingly pleased with South Carolina's actions, leaving Porter disillusioned about the support for rebellion. He refrains from joining the group's visit to Buchanan, contemplating the awkwardness of the president engaging with those who oppose the Union.

The narrative shifts to New York, where Horace Greeley writes to President-elect Abraham Lincoln, advocating a firm stance against Southern secession, emphasizing that compromise should not come at the expense of principles. Greeley expresses alarm at the current instability, foreseeing potential conflict and safety concerns surrounding Lincoln's impending inauguration.

Amid growing tensions, Lincoln is forced to navigate political intricacies as critical discussions about the vulnerability of U.S. forts arise. General Winfield Scott warns that forts Moultrie and Sumter are inadequately defended, pressing Lincoln to prepare for possible military action. The chapter closes with Lincoln's frustration evident, fearing a surrender of the forts, which he condemns vehemently, signaling a somber yet tense atmosphere as the nation stands on the brink of conflict.