

Any Minute Now

Any Minute Now, the growing tensions at Fort Sumter marked a critical period in early April, as Major Robert Anderson found himself grappling with the weight of an uncertain fate. Anderson, a composed military leader, was awaiting a possible order from Washington to vacate the fort, but the possibility of military action loomed over him. While he had mentally prepared to fight if necessary, he also began to see surrender as the best means of avoiding unnecessary bloodshed. However, Anderson's concerns ran deeper—he lacked the authority to make such a pivotal decision on his own. His fear of being seen as a traitor or coward, akin to General Twiggs, who had handed over all federal positions in Texas without a fight, prevented him from taking immediate action. The pressure of making the right decision in a volatile political climate weighed heavily on him. With the fate of the fort—and his career—hanging in the balance, Anderson struggled with his role in what seemed to be an inevitable conflict.

On April 1, Anderson's concerns were further amplified when he reported the deteriorating situation to Col. Lorenzo Thomas, the new adjutant general. A thick mist had settled over the area, reducing visibility and contributing to a sense of isolation for Anderson and the soldiers stationed at the fort. Anderson described the situation as an “imprisonment,” a sentiment shared by many of his men, who were growing anxious about their precarious position. Food supplies, already dwindling, were quickly running out, and Anderson warned that if Governor Pickens did not allow civilian laborers to leave, the fort could be completely cut off by April 8. The restriction of food supplies only heightened the sense of desperation, as the men at Fort Sumter were increasingly vulnerable to starvation. The reality of the situation was becoming unbearable, as the fort’s inhabitants were cut off from the outside world, with little hope for a resolution in sight. As Anderson communicated these dire circumstances, the looming possibility of

having to abandon the fort weighed heavily on his mind, though he still felt powerless to make the decision himself.

On April 3, the situation escalated further when Captain Joseph Marts, aboard the schooner *Rhoda H. Shannon*, mistakenly sailed into Charleston Harbor instead of the Savannah River, due to poor visibility caused by the ongoing mist. His accidental entry into the harbor was met with immediate artillery fire from the Confederate-held forts surrounding Charleston, further intensifying the already volatile situation. In response to the attack, Captain Marts attempted to navigate his ship out of the harbor, but the Confederate fire made his escape all the more difficult. However, Major Anderson chose restraint, sending officers to seek clarification from Confederate officials rather than retaliating with force. His decision to avoid direct conflict was driven by a desire to prevent escalating the situation into open warfare. Yet, the restraint Anderson displayed only seemed to frustrate his men, with some questioning his leadership and wondering if a more decisive action should have been taken. Anderson's refusal to engage in active defense, despite the provocation, was seen by some as a sign of weakness, casting doubt on his ability to lead the garrison during such a critical time.

As the day wore on, Charleston's citizens became increasingly anxious, and rumors began to spread regarding the actions of the North and the future of Fort Sumter. In this climate of uncertainty, Confederate leader Louis Wigfall took the opportunity to address a crowd at the Mills House hotel, delivering a fiery speech that declared war with the North was not just likely but imminent. His rhetoric seemed to resonate with the citizens of Charleston, whose anxiety was now channeled into anticipation of an inevitable conflict. For individuals like Mary Chesnut, the notion of a naval attack seemed increasingly probable, and she found herself grappling with the unsettling thought that war was just around the corner. Mary, reflecting on the mounting tension, acknowledged the impending reality of violence and felt the weight of the crisis bearing down on her, knowing that the peace they once enjoyed in Charleston was rapidly slipping away. The closing moments of the chapter highlighted the sense of unease and nervous anticipation pervading the city, with every interaction filled with

the weight of what was yet to come.

The chapter effectively juxtaposes the personal struggles of Major Anderson and his men with the broader political and social climate in Charleston. Anderson's internal conflict about his role in the potential abandonment of Fort Sumter provides a human perspective on the difficult decisions being made at the time. His restraint in the face of provocation, while aimed at avoiding conflict, also serves to highlight the challenges of leadership during moments of crisis. At the same time, the events unfolding in Charleston—the rumors, the speeches, and the growing certainty of war—paint a vivid picture of the tension that defined the period leading up to the Civil War. The city, with its vibrant social life, was also a place on the edge of chaos, where the personal and the political were inexorably linked. The contrast between the quiet desperation at Fort Sumter and the growing sense of war in Charleston captures the emotional complexity of the moment, as both sides of the conflict prepared for the inevitable. As Mary and others in the city awaited the inevitable clash, the tension in every conversation seemed to reflect the larger national crisis that was about to explode.