

Frustration

Frustration fills the air during the period between December 20 and 24 as Navy Lieutenant David Dixon Porter finds himself navigating the increasingly complex political landscape in Washington amidst the secession crisis. On his way through downtown, Porter passes the residence of Senator Jefferson Davis, where a lively party is in full swing. Despite his unwavering loyalty to the Union, Porter has maintained relationships across party lines, seeking to understand the potential paths to peace. His connection with the Davis family draws him to the celebration, where the mood is charged with excitement over South Carolina's recent decision to secede. This event underscores the deepening divide, as those in attendance celebrate what is seen as a bold step toward independence, further intensifying the political turmoil surrounding the nation's future.

During the celebration, Mrs. Varina Davis, filled with exuberance, invites Porter to accompany her to the White House to inform President Buchanan of the "glorious news" about South Carolina's secession. While Porter understands the importance of the event, he senses an underlying unease in the situation. The carriage ride to the White House becomes an uncomfortable journey, as Varina proposes that Porter join a secessionist navy and even hints at the possibility of a monarchy in the newly formed Confederacy. Porter, grappling with the implications of these ideas, imagines the chaos and fragmentation that might follow in the wake of such drastic changes. His concern grows as he contemplates the viability of a confederate government and the potential for deep instability among the rebellious states, underscoring the uncertainty surrounding the nation's future.

Upon their return to the Davis residence, Porter is confronted with an atmosphere of drunken revelry, where Davis's supporters celebrate South Carolina's secession with unabashed joy. The stark contrast between their jubilation and Porter's growing doubts

about the course of action becomes increasingly apparent. Although Davis remains composed, seemingly pleased with the secession, Porter becomes disillusioned with the fervor for rebellion. He chooses not to accompany the group to visit Buchanan, reflecting on the awkwardness of having the president engage with individuals who are actively working against the Union. This moment exemplifies the growing divide within the country, as Porter's internal conflict deepens, and the nation edges closer to an irreversible rift.

As tensions rise, the narrative shifts to New York, where Horace Greeley writes a letter to President-elect Abraham Lincoln, urging a firm stance against the Southern secessionists. Greeley emphasizes the importance of maintaining national principles, cautioning that any compromise that sacrifices core beliefs will only weaken the Union's position. His words reflect the growing alarm over the escalating instability and the impending threat to the nation's unity. Greeley's warning underscores the urgency with which Lincoln must navigate the rapidly deteriorating political situation, as public confidence wanes and the risk of conflict looms ever larger. The situation is complicated further by concerns over the safety of Lincoln's inauguration, as Greeley highlights the growing tension and the need for decisive leadership to steer the country through its most perilous moment.

Meanwhile, in Washington, President Lincoln is faced with mounting pressure as General Winfield Scott informs him of the vulnerability of key U.S. forts, specifically Fort Moultrie and Fort Sumter. Scott's report underscores the inadequacy of the fortifications in the face of possible Confederate military action. Lincoln's frustration is palpable, as he grapples with the possibility that surrendering the forts to the secessionists might be imminent. This prospect deeply troubles him, as he is unwilling to concede to the demands of the Confederacy, yet he finds himself cornered by a series of political and military challenges. His growing frustration signals a critical moment in the nation's history, as the tension between the Union and the secessionists escalates, leaving Lincoln in a precarious position as the nation stands on the brink of war.