

Suspense

Suspense grips both sides of the conflict as early April unfolds, with Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet becoming increasingly uneasy about the situation. Their confidence relies heavily on the reassurances of their intermediary, Justice Campbell, whose promises are beginning to feel less reliable as tensions escalate. Meanwhile, the Confederate commissioners in Washington, who are used to positions of power, feel disrespected by Secretary of State Seward's refusal to meet with them. They had hoped to be recognized as legitimate representatives of a newly formed republic, but instead, they were met with indifference, further fueling their frustration and sense of injustice. This situation highlights the stark reality of the Confederacy's diplomatic struggle, as they faced not only internal disagreements but also external obstacles that threatened their standing on the world stage.

The tension grows as Campbell's reassurances clash with increasing rumors of military action against the Confederacy. Reports of ships carrying armed troops en route to Fort Sumter add to the rising unease, especially as the Confederate commissioners learn that President Lincoln is meeting with naval officers. This revelation intensifies their fear, as they believe that a military confrontation is imminent. In response to these growing concerns, Confederate Secretary of War L. P. Walker issues instructions to General Beauregard, urging him to maintain "watchful vigilance." It is clear that the Confederate leadership is bracing for an attack, unsure of when it may occur but certain that the situation is reaching a critical point. This sense of anticipation becomes a defining aspect of the chapter, as both sides prepare for what they fear could be a violent escalation.

At the same time, Charleston serves as the backdrop for a more personal and somewhat lighter aspect of life during this tense period. John Manning, an aide to Beauregard, continues to engage in a flirtation with Mary Chesnut, offering a brief

respite from the heavy political and military climate. In her diary, Mary captures these moments, detailing how Manning confided in her about his secretive exchanges with his wife regarding their flirtation. Despite the gravity of the situation surrounding them, this playful interaction provides a stark contrast to the otherwise dire circumstances. Mary's reflections offer a glimpse into the human side of life during such tumultuous times, where personal relationships and emotions still played out amidst the backdrop of war. These encounters, though seemingly lighthearted, add layers of complexity to the lives of individuals caught in a historical maelstrom.

Meanwhile, in Richmond, the Virginia Convention faces a crucial moment on April 4, when a vote on the proposed ordinance of secession is overwhelmingly rejected. The outcome sparks outrage among figures like Edmund Ruffin in Charleston, who sees the reluctance of Virginia's leadership as a significant hurdle to the South's cause. Ruffin, deeply frustrated by the hesitance shown by the convention, wishes for a naval attack from Lincoln to force Virginia into seceding. He believes that only such an event could justify the action and alleviate the burden of explaining why Virginia is holding back from joining the Confederacy. This desire for external action to catalyze Virginia's secession highlights the urgency felt by many in the South, who were impatient for the nation's break from the Union to be finalized. The rejection of secession in Richmond underscores the divisions within the Confederacy and the broader South, where not all states were eager to sever ties with the Union.

Thus, this chapter reveals the deepening foreboding of impending military conflict, with political decisions and social dynamics intertwining. The contrasting emotions of power and personal connections are examined, demonstrating the complex interplay between duty and human relationships during a time of crisis. As the Confederacy grapples with internal divisions, external threats, and the uncertainty of the future, the personal lives of individuals like Mary Chesnut offer a poignant reminder of the emotional toll of living in such a charged atmosphere. The chapter poignantly reflects how, despite the looming shadow of war, human desires, fears, and connections continue to shape lives even during the most turbulent of times.