

The Landscape of Fear

In "The Landscape of Fear," set in 1860, Ruffin is disheartened by Lincoln's nomination as the Republican candidate, perceiving him as too moderate to incite the necessary outrage for Southern secession. Ruffin had anticipated a nomination for Seward, whom he believed would incite the South more effectively. Traveling through Virginia en route to meet his daughter Mildred, Ruffin is engulfed by a pervasive fear of slave insurrections, fueled by recent events like John Brown's raid and ominous rumors about poisoning and uprisings spreading through the South.

As Ruffin navigates this anxious landscape, troubling incidents, such as the murder of Congressman Keitt's brother by enslaved individuals, heighten Southern fear and paranoia about Lincoln's potential leadership. These anxieties are compounded by natural disasters, like a severe drought affecting crops and threatening food supply, which deepen Southern distress as the impending election draws nearer.

Upon reaching White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, Ruffin finds a bustling resort, historically frequented by Southern elites seeking social engagement and refreshment. However, he is disillusioned by the atmosphere and the indifference of fellow guests to his fervent advocacy for secession. Notably, he learns that his daughter will not join him as planned, prompting a change in his journey.

Traveling to Frankfort, Kentucky, Ruffin encounters staunch Union sentiments, even among his son-in-law, creating a tense environment for political discussions. His efforts to promote secession through letters to Southern newspapers yield little interest, and the release of his own book, "Anticipations of the Future," is met with silence.

As Election Day looms, Ruffin grows increasingly convinced that Lincoln's presidency would herald a dire fate for slavery and the South's prosperity. Beset by a sense of impending doom, worry about the nation's future amplifies his isolation as a pro-secessionist amidst a climate fraught with tension and division. The chapter conveys the palpable fear among Southern leaders, the social climate of the time, and Ruffin's unwavering commitment to his cause, even in the face of overwhelming opposition.