

***“The Comedy of Secession” – Elementary  
The Student and Schoolmate 11 (August and September 1862),  
279-83, 314-19***

***Characters***

**Madam Columbia**, Principal of the Union Girls’ School

**Madam Britannia**, an old Lady who likes to give advice

**Madam La Russe**, a conservative old lady.

**La Belle France**, a very beautiful but careful lady.

**Goddess of Liberty**, a very popular girl

**Pupils of the Union Girls’ College:**

Miss Caroline, Miss Georgiana, Miss Flora Dee, Miss Louisa Anna, Miss Alie Balmy, Miss Virginia, Miss Mary Land, Miss K. Tucky, Miss Sue Wyre, Miss Tennie C., Miss Maine, Miss N. Hampshire, Miss Vermont, Miss Massachusetts, Little Rhody, Miss Connecticut, Miss N. York, Miss Penn, Miss Ohio, Miss Indiana, Miss Illinois, et al.

**Madam Columbia:**

This is awful! For 86 years this has been one of the best schools in the world. Now everything is a mess. Six of the girls won’t do anything they are supposed to do, and they say they’re going to leave the school – secede, they call it. They don’t have any good reason to leave. And their fathers and mothers don’t want them to leave. Six other girls have really bad attitudes, and I don’t know whether they will do what they are supposed to do, or if they will leave the school like the other six girls. These kids are making a world of trouble, but I’m going to make them behave.

***(Enter Caroline, singing “Dixie”.)***

**Caroline:**

Well, madam, I have come to say good-bye.

**Madam Columbia:**

Really! Where do you think are you going?

**Caroline:**

I am leaving the Union Girls’ School. It’s none of your business where I am going.

**Madam Columbia:**

Yes, it is, Miss Caroline. And the Union Girls’ School has the power to make you follow the rules.

**Caroline:**

I don’t care about the Union Girls’ School! In fact, I don’t like this place at all!

**Madam Columbia:**

Caroline, I am ashamed of you, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You have disgraced your family.

### **Act One**

**Caroline:**

You are using very strong language.

**Madam Columbia:**

I have always respected your family! What would the Sumters, the Marions, the Pinkneys, say, if they could come back from the dead, and behold the infamy of their darling child?

**Caroline:**

Infamy, Madam?

**Madam Columbia:**

Shameful behavior, Caroline. Haven't you trampled upon my flowerbeds, broken into my cupboards, and even robbed my chickens of their eggs?

**Caroline:**

These things are mine as much as they are yours!

**Madam Columbia:**

They were the property of the Union Girls' School – a school created for the education of future schoolgirls – not just you. O look -- here come your partners in crime.

*(Enter Flora Dee, Louisa Anna, Alie Balmy and Georgiana.)*

**Caroline:**

You are insulting, Madam Columbia. You treat us like children – like we have no rights.

**Madam Columbia:**

As pupils in the Union Girls' School, with someone to take care of you, you are important and have rights. But on your own, wandering thieves on your Uncle Sam's property, you will become a bother to yourself and everybody else.

**Georgiana:**

I think we can take care of ourselves.

**Madam Columbia:**

You have broken into your Uncle's cupboards, and stolen his money and his tools, Georgiana. This isn't the way to take care of yourself!

**Flora Dee:**

We have been wronged! These things belonged to us anyway.

**Madam Columbia:**

You rotten little kid! How dare you! You are little better than a beggar, Flora Dee. Who paid for the very ground you stand upon, but Uncle Sam? Who has poured out money like water to protect and defend you? For shame, Flora Dee! To be so ungrateful!

**Louisa Anna:**

Madam, you are taking advantage of Flora's good nature to abuse her like that.

**Madam Columbia:**

No doubt she is a very nice thief, a lovely and friendly rebel! No wonder you get along so well, because "birds of a feather flock together." All I have said of her, and more, is true of you.

**Louisa Anna:**

Remember - I have done more for this Girls' School than anyone else.

**Madam Columbia:**

You did very well while you acted like a lady. And remember that this school has done more for you than for any six of its pupils combined!

**Alie Balmy:**

What have we done to deserve such treatment from you? We are not happy here, so we plan to leave – in short, to secede. Why do you have a problem with that?

**Madam Columbia:**

Your parents sent you to the Union Girls' School, and they want you to stay here. Uncle Sam, the Chairman of the Board, has taken excellent care of you. He has watched you grow and learn and likes you a lot. In fact, he has spoiled you!

**Alie Balmy:**

He's so old-fashioned!

**Louisa Anna:**

He won't let us do anything!

**Caroline:**

He's a nasty old man!

**Georgiana:**

He's so old and stupid!

**Flora Dee:**

He's such a jerk!

**Madam Columbia:**

I'm not surprised, you ungrateful little girls.

**Louisa Anna:**

Really, madam, I can't see what your problem is. We're going to make another school, to be called the Confederate Girls' School. What's the problem with that?

**Madam Columbia:**

Where are you going to build this school?

**Louisa Anna:**

O, just south of here.

**Madam Columbia:**

Right. Do you really think Uncle Sam will let you build another school, right here, on land that HE owns?

**Georgiana:**

How's he going to stop us? We made our plans, and we're going to build the school right now.

**Flora Dee:**

Jeff. Davis will be our Principal.

**Louisa Anna:**

And Beauregard will be our dancing master. **(1 – explanation on last page.)**

**Alie Balmy:**

And Cobb will be our treasurer. **2**

**Caroline:**

"Still so gently o'er me stealing" – and Floyd will get our supplies. **3**

**Flora Dee:**

And Wigfall for Chaplain. **4**

**Louisa Anna:**

And Wise – let me see – what shall we do with Wise? **5**

**Alie Balmy:**

We will invent an office for him. We will make him Bragmaster-General.

**Madam Columbia:**

Fine. I fired those sneaky, lying misfits, and they're not allowed to come back. As for you, young ladies, if you don't go back to school right now, and follow the rules, I'm going to tell Mr. Lincoln to punish you.

**Caroline:**

But, madam, we left this school. There's nothing Lincoln can do about it.

**Madam Columbia:**

You are making a huge mistake. You are not allowed to leave the Union Girls' School. Your plan will fail, and you will be punished for disobeying the rules.

**(Exit.)**

**Georgiana:**

The old lady is really mad!

**Flora Dee:**

Don't worry – she's not important.

**Louisa Anna:**

But we still ought to be careful. Especially with Uncle Sam.

**Alie Balmy:**

That's silly! He would be as powerless as a spring chicken in a northeast gale.

**Caroline:**

You're right. Everybody will be on our side. Besides, we have strong friends on the other side of the ocean. That stiff old lady, Madam Britannia, and sweet, smiling La Belle France will support our cause. They'll send as many girls to the new school as they can.

**Georgiana:**

But there are only about six of us. What about the rest of the girls in the Union Girls' School?

**Flora Dee:**

Do? They will go with us, or course – at least, most of them will.

**Georgiana:**

Perhaps not.

**Louisa Anna:**

We mustn't get into a scrape that we can't get out of. There are those six New England Yankee girls – I am sure they will stand by Uncle Sam.

**Alie Balmy:**

I hope they will; we don't want them in the new school.

**Caroline:**

No; we don't want them around. Nearly all the rest of the ladies will join us.

**Flora Dee:**

Let me see: we can count on Virginia, Mary Land, Miss K. Tuckie, and Miss Sue Wrye and Miss Tennie.

**Georgiana:**

Sure, they will come to the new school. But we'll have to talk them into it first.

**Alie Balmy:**

But we must do something besides talk. – Ah, here's the most popular girl in school. We HAVE to get her to come with us! She's the lady whose portrait is on the coin – you know, the Goddess of Liberty.

**Caroline:**

She is so obnoxious!

**Georgiana:**

We don't want her either!

**Flora Dee:**

No way! She doesn't know her head from a hole in the ground.

**Louisa Anna:**

Quiet! Are you crazy? Don't you see how important she is to us? She is very pretty, and the common girls love her. We must use her to win over our doubtful sisters.

**Alie Balmy:**

Well, Caroline, you go right ahead. We've got better things to do.

*(Exit all but Caroline.)*

**Caroline:**

Goddess of Liberty! It's a pretty name, but she still drives me nuts. Oh well, I guess we better stay on her good side.

*(Enter Goddess of Liberty.)*

**Caroline:**

I am your very obedient, humble servant. *(Bows low.)*

**Liberty:**

No, you are not.

**Caroline:**

I'm your friend, really, I am.

## ***Act Two***

**Liberty:**

You are a hypocrite – you say one thing and you mean another.

**Caroline:**

O no, no! You don't understand. We are going to start a new school, the Confederate Girls' School, just south of here, and we would really love your help.

**Liberty:**

Oh really? You are very kind; I just wish I could trust you.

**Caroline:**

You don't understand. We want you to be one of the family.

**Liberty:**

In other words, you want to use me – you want me to trick people into supporting the new school. Remind me – why do you want to leave the Union Girls' School to begin with?

**Caroline:**

Because our rights have been trampled upon.

**Liberty:**

Nonsense! You mean if you cannot be the greatest toad in the puddle, you will set the river on fire, if you can.

**Caroline:**

You misjudge me.

**Liberty:**

You know me well, Caroline. You know that I never fool around with my friends. You are a hypocrite! Uncle Sam has done everything he can to make the Union Girls' School a nice place for you. He has supported and defended you, and given you every privilege you could possibly want.

**Caroline:**

You are mistaken. What do you think of that clumsy, rail-splitting redneck – the school's new manager?

**Liberty:**

He is one of my friends – an honest and true man. He will respect all your rights. He'll take care of you.

**Caroline:**

But we will not stay in his school.

**Liberty:**

O you won't? Maybe the manager will make you stay here!

**Caroline:**

Ha, ha, ha! That is very good. I'd like to see that!

**Liberty:**

Don't worry – you'll see him very soon. You forget that almost everybody loves the glorious Union. It's been in this community for almost eighty years. In fact, your grandparents helped build the Union Girls' School! When it was built, the community gave it a flag and they called it the Star Spangled Banner. Here it is. **(Displays the flag.)** When the old Union is in danger, all we have to do is point to this, and everybody will come running to save the Union. Everybody except you and your worthless friends, that is.

**Caroline:**

I don't think so. Here are some more girls – I know they'll leave the Union School too.

***(Enter Virginia, Mary Land, Miss K. Tuckie, Miss Tennie C, and Miss Sue Wrye.)***

**Caroline:**

Of course you will go with us into the Confederate Girls' School, Virginia?

**Virginia:**

Well, I don't know. I have my doubts about all of this.

**Liberty:**

Shame on you, for even having to think about it! Virginia, can you be false to the memory of Washington, your truest and best friend, one of the respected founders of the old Union?

**Virginia:**

Well, the truth is, my friends are all going, and I can't very well help it.

**Mary Land:**

If Virginia goes, I guess I have to go too.

**Liberty:**

Shame, Mary Land!

***Enter Massachusetts and Little Rhody.***

**Mary Land:**

I have to go.

**Massachusetts:**

No, you won't!

**Little Rhody:**

Not if I can help it!

**Caroline:**

But you *can't* help it! (*Takes her by the arm, and is helped by Virginia.*)

**Massachusetts:**

We will try, at any rate. (*Takes Mary by the other arm.*)

**Little Rhody:**

Don't let her go. (*Helps Massachusetts. They pull in opposite directions.*)

**Mary Land:**

O dear! Let go of me! You will pull me all to pieces! You will kill me! (*Caroline and Virginia release her.*)

**Caroline:**

But you will come with us, Miss Sue Wrye?

**Miss Sue Wrye:**

Well, I want to go, and I don't want to go.

(*Enter Indiana, Illinois and Iowa.*)

**Virginia:**

O, come! Come over! Your friends are all with us.

**Indiana:**

No, they are not, and you can't go. (*The struggle is repeated, and Indiana wins.*)

**Virginia:**

You will certainly join us, Miss K. Tuckie.

**Miss K. Tuckie:**

Yes, I think I will. (*Walks over.*)

**Caroline:**

Bravo! Kate, I honor, respect and love you!

**Virginia:**

Just what we might have expected of Kate – noble, generous, and truehearted.

**Miss K. Tuckie:**

On second thought, I guess I won't go over. (*Walks back.*)

**Liberty:**

Just what I might have expected of Kate – noble, generous and true hearted. Your friends, Kate – Clay, Crittenden, all your noble ones – they were my friends. They were always so true to this. (*Pointing to the flag.*)

**Miss K. Tuckie:**

So am I. Breckinridge may go to grass! **6**

**Virginia:**

Ah, Miss Tennie, there can be no doubt about you.

**Miss Tennie:**

I always liked the old Union, but I suppose it is of no use for me to stay here any longer. (*Crosses over.*)

**Liberty:**

For shame, Tennie!  
Amid the din of coming battle,  
Old Jackson's bones will surely rattle! **7**

*Exeunt all but Liberty and Caroline.*

**Caroline:**

Perhaps, my sweet friend, you will yet come with us.

**Liberty:**

Never! Where this stays (*points up to the flag*) I shall stay! When this goes down, I shall go down with it. (*Exit.*)

**Caroline:**

Don't be silly. Ah, here come some of our foreign friends. (*Enter Madam Britannia*) Madam Britannia, I am delighted to see you. Of course you intend to help the new movement?

**Madam Britannia:**

I want to help you, but there is a little problem. I have just been talking with Madam Columbia, and for decency's sake, I promised to be neutral – not to take sides.

*Enter Georgiana.*

**Caroline:**

Neutral.

**Georgiana:**

Why, that is worse than nothing.

**Madam Britannia:**

Why no, my child; I can help you a great deal. But we must be very cautious. I have certain business relations with Madam Columbia, so I don't want to argue with her.

**Georgiana:**

And you have certain business relations with us, too.

**Madam Britannia:**

Hush! I will help you as much as I can. Hush! Here comes Madam Columbia. Be very careful. *Enter Madam Columbia.*

**(To Madam Columbia:)** Madam, I am glad to meet you now, as I always am. I am so sorry that you are involved in this trouble.

**(To Georgiana:)** Certainly, I'll help you.

**(To Madam Columbia:)** I want to help you, Madam Columbia.

**(To Georgiana:)** My heart is with you – as soon as I can, I will help the new school.

**(To Madam Columbia:)** I hope, Madam Columbia, that you will be able to stop this awful rebellion.

**(To Georgiana:)** And if you want food, silverware, tools, I will send them to you; but we must be very careful.

**(To Madam Columbia:)** Yes, Madam Columbia, I hope you will be able to stop this shameful rebellion.

**(To Georgiana:)** You count on me to help, but for right now, I can't take sides. I have to stay neutral.

**Madam Columbia:**

You have a weird way of staying neutral. You have been helping the rebels.

**Madam Britannia:**

Madam, you are always starting a fight with me. I have to protest your actions. Why are you bothering these poor children, flesh of your flesh, and bone of your bone? Let them go if they want to go.

**Madam Columbia:**

They are rebels and traitors – back-stabbers. And why are *you* lecturing *me*? Haven't you put down rebellions in your Indian, Canadian and Irish schools? I think madam, that you had better mind your own business.

**Madam Britannia:**

This isn't the first time you have insulted me. Listen! If you don't apologize, I will pull the house down over your head! I will break down your doors, release all the

students, and let the entire world come into your school. **(To Georgiana:)** What do you think of that?

**Georgiana:**

Very good. Argue with the old lady if you can.

**Madam Britannia:**

**(To Madam Columbia:)** My friend La Belle France will help me.

***(Enter La Belle France.)***

**La Belle France:**

Pardonnez-moi, madame. Shall I put my fingaire in ze fire? No! I will mind my own beeseness – s'il vous plait. Ze traitaire, ze rebelleong – vat zis you call him? – trouble me vaire much. But shall I put my fingaire in ze fire? No Madame.

***Enter La Russe.***

**La Russe:**

Madam Columbia, I want to help you. When I have a rebellion in my school, I always put it down, and I hope you will do the same. Do your duty to yourself and the world. I will help you.

**Madam Britannia:**

**(To Georgiana:)** Don't worry; you're safe with me. I will get up a fight with the old lady. You are doing very well.

***(Enter Louisa Anna.)***

**Louisa Anna:**

Everything is going wrong! They have got Miss Tennie back, and Sue and Mary and Kate are actually making faces at us.

***(Enter Massachusetts.)***

**Massachusetts:**

I have the pleasure of telling you, Miss Lou, that my friend Mr. Butler is in town. **8** And all of the girls in the Union love him. He'll turn you around! He won't put up with any of your games.

**Louisa Anna:**

I can't believe it. What bad luck!

**Madam Columbia:**

Madam Britannia, you hear the news. My manager is doing the work which I gave him to do.

**Madam Britannia:**

**(Quickly changing attitude.)** Madam Columbia, I am your most obedient, humble servant. You know I always sympathized with you, and always hoped you would be able to put down this rebellion.

***(Enter Maine.)***

**Maine:**

Madam, we caught six of the naughty girls; and we have the rest of them penned up in Miss Virginia's room. McClellan will take care of that problem very soon. **9**

**Louisa Anna:**

Things are against us – fiddle faddle!  
I think we might as well skedaddle.

***(Exeunt all but loyal ladies.)***

**Madam Columbia:**

This problem will be fixed in no time, thank goodness. I hope no one forgets what happened here. But now it is time for school to begin. **(Rings the bell, and Liberty and the loyal ladies enter.)** Ah, Miss Tennie, I am glad to see you back again. I hope the whipping you have had has cured you of any desire to flirt with that abominable Jeff. Davis, Wigfall, and Toombs. **10**

**Little Rhody:**

As for Wigfall – it will be more than a wig fall; head and all will fall with the wig.

**Massachusetts:**

I beg your pardon, Madam, but can you tell me why this rebellion is like a boot?

**Madam Columbia:**

I cannot.

**Massachusetts:**

Because we put our Foote into it. **11**

**Madam Columbia:**

Fie! Fie! Children. Punning is a vicious habit. Now let us sing our morning song, and get to work.

***(They sing the Star Spangled Banner.)***

***History Notes to Accompany Comedy of Secession:***

**1 General Pierre G. T. Beauregard** led the bombardment of Fort Sumter. He also commanded the rebels at the first Battle of Bull Run (they won) and in 1862 commanded troops in Mississippi.

**2 Howell Cobb** was the former speaker of the US House of Representatives, governor of Georgia, and secretary of the treasury. After Lincoln's election, he urged Georgians to secede. Later he became a Confederate general.

**3 John Floyd** was a politician from Virginia. He was US secretary of war before the Civil War. Northerners believed that he transferred munitions and supplies – in his capacity as head of the War Department – to Southern forts and facilities just before the secession crisis.

**4 Louis T. Wigfall** was the fire-eating Confederate and US Senator from Texas.

**5 Henry Wise** was a Virginia congressman and governor, and a huge supporter of slavery and states' rights. He became an unsuccessful Confederate general.

**6** Tennessee was the home state **Henry Clay** (who created the "Great Compromise") and of **John Crittenden** (whose compromise tried to prevent war in late 1860). Kentucky was seriously divided in its loyalties – it tried to remain neutral during the first few months of the war, but both Union and Confederate armies invaded. The battle for control of the state lasted nearly two years. About ¼ of the 100,000 Kentuckians who fought in the war served the Confederacy, including **John Breckenridge**, who as US vice president in 1860 ran as the presidential candidate of the Southern Democrats. They threatened that the South would secede if Lincoln were elected president.

**7 Andrew Jackson** was a loyal Southerner and Tennessean. He pushed the Union to the brink of civil war during the Nullification Controversy of 1831 when he threatened to use the army to force South Carolina to back away from its nullification of a federal tariff. (Nullification – declaring that a law is "null and void" in a particular state.)

**8 General Benjamin Butler** was a politician turned general. He commanded Massachusetts troops when they were attacked by Baltimore civilians on their way to Washington, earned the hatred of Southerners with his tough administration of occupied New Orleans, and he first applied the status of "contraband of war" to slaves coming into Union lines. Butler was a better politician than a soldier but remained popular among Northerners.

**9 Gen. George McClellan** was idolized by his troops and by much of the North. He was the commanding general of the Union army from fall of 1861 to summer of 1862. His caution cost him a victory in the 1862 Peninsula Campaign.

**10 Robert Toombs**, a Georgia congressman and senator, resigned from the Senate in early 1861 to organize the secession movement. He failed to become Confederate President, and served briefly as secretary of state and as a general until 1863.

**11 Capt. Andrew Hull Foote** was the commander of the US Navy on the Upper Mississippi and helped capture Forts Henry and Donelson in spring 1862.

\*Notes from *Lessons of War*, Ed. By James Marten.