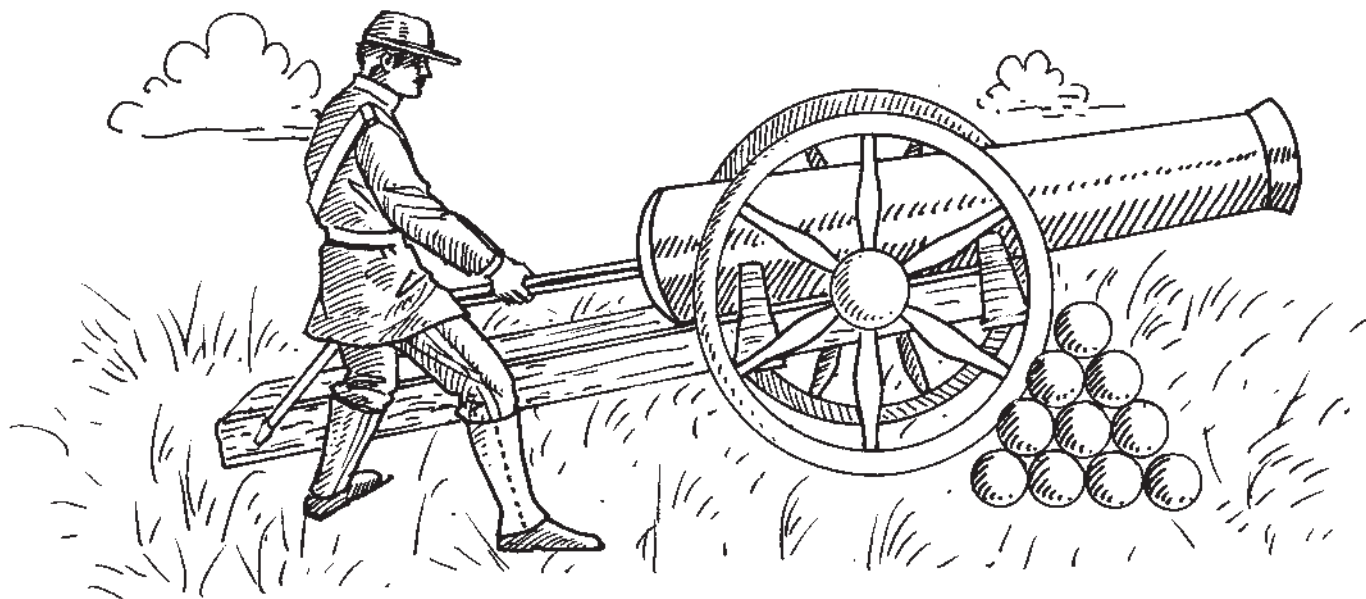


THE SOUTH BREAKS AWAY

# Mary Chestnut and Her Diary



## CAST

(in order of appearance)

**First Narrator**

**Second Narrator**

**Anne Scott:** Friend of the Chestnuts

**Mary Chestnut:** Southern woman; writer

**Charles Lewis Scott:** Anne's husband, former member of U.S. Congress

**Clara Jansen:** Northern woman

**Varina Davis:** First Lady of the Confederacy

**James C. Chestnut:** Mary's husband; former U.S. Senator

**Maria Whitaker:** Mary's slave

**Laurence:** Chestnuts' slave

**Julia Toombs:** Mary's friend

**Louisa Hamilton:** Neighbor of the Chestnuts in Charleston

**Louis T. Wigfall:** Former U.S. Senator; secessionist

## SCENE ONE

This scene takes place in March 1861 in the parlor of a hotel in Montgomery, Alabama.

**FIRST NARRATOR:** It is 1861. Abraham Lincoln has been elected president of the United States. One of the goals of his party, the Republican Party, is to end slavery. As a result of Lincoln's election, Southern states have begun seceding from the Union to form their own nation. Many Southerners in the U.S. Congress, like James C. Chestnut, resigned from their offices. They left Washington, D.C., to return home.

**SECOND NARRATOR:** When a state secedes, it decides that it would be better off running its own affairs rather than being part of the United States. In the case of the Southern states, they felt that the North, which was industrial, didn't understand the agricultural way of in the South. The South felt the North was imposing rules that would hurt their economy and culture. Much of the talk, in both the North and the South, was about what would happen between the two sides.

**ANNE SCOTT:** Lincoln, you know, despite his appearance, is the cleverest Yankee type there is. Ugly as sin, you know, always sitting on boxes at the country store, telling the most awful—the funniest—stories and whittling away with a knife.

**MARY CHESTNUT:** Mr. Douglas of Illinois confided to my husband that Lincoln was the hardest fellow to handle that he'd ever met. And Lincoln surely did hammer Mr. Douglas into the ground in the debates.

**CHARLES LEWIS SCOTT:** Mark my words, if this country can be joked and laughed out of its right, then Lincoln's the man to do it. Let's just see what happens if there's a war, and Yankee pockets get pinched instead of filled—

**CLARA JANSEN** (*overhearing and interrupting*): Northerners are no more mean and stingy than Southerners, sir!

**CHARLES LEWIS SCOTT:** My apologies, of course, ma'am. You're quite correct. Northerners and Southerners share the same vices and virtues.

**CLARA JANSEN:** You will *try* to make war based on Mr. Lincoln's appearance, but that will not do! We know what this is all about! Slavery, pure and simple!

**MARY CHESTNUT:** On the contrary, there's nothing simple about it. Think of the North and the South as having different temperaments. We are incompatible in so many ways—climate, economy, geography, society—we must divorce each other. But let's not fight about it. Let each of us go our separate ways and say no more about it.

**CLARA JANSEN:** *I* hold my tongue, Mrs. Chestnut, you know that I do, but what am I to do when I, a Northern woman, am attacked? Why, just this morning, I was playing "Yankee Doodle" on the piano and the judge came in and asked me to leave out the Yankee while I played the Doodle!

*(The others can't hide their laughter, and she stalks out.)*

**MARY CHESTNUT:** We *are* terrible. Poor woman, if I were up North, I would expect them to argue against the South—and I would hold my tongue.

**VARINA DAVIS:** You were until quite recently in the North, Mrs. Chestnut, as was I, until our husbands resigned from Congress. As I recall, you did not always hold your tongue.

**MARY CHESTNUT:** No, but I knew that I should, and I felt quite sorry about it.

**VARINA DAVIS** (*sighing*): You are quite right about Southern and Northern temperaments. Heading the Confederate armies as general would have suited my husband so much better than being president of the Confederacy. People are so hard to please. You should have seen his face when he received the telegram telling him that he'd been elected. You would have thought his best friend had died.

**ANNE SCOTT:** Still, it may not come to war, you know.

**CHARLES LEWIS SCOTT:** It may not, but if it should—the South is ready.

**MARY CHESTNUT:** Are we?

**SECOND NARRATOR:** That night Mary wrote in her diary.

**MARY** (*as she writes*): Tonight . . . we talked of ourselves and the North. We only want to separate from them, and yet they put such an inordinate value on us, they are willing to risk all. We are like an unwilling bride. I think incompatibility of temper began when it was made plain to us that we get all the problems of slavery and they all the money through their factories. We would only be too grateful to be left alone!