



# *Chapter Four*



## HER “DEAREST MARIA”



“The letters!’ exclaimed Cecilia, springing up.”

From Maria Edgeworth’s novel *Helen*, as illustrated by Chris Hammond (London 1896), p. 324

Southern ladies such as Anna Calhoun and her best friend, Maria Edgeworth Simkins, lived in a distinctly female environment of confinement in a patriarchal society of sexually segregated individuals. These women lived in a world where the formal and often stiff interaction between men and women was offset by the mutual affection expressed by women who, like themselves, were emotionally dependent upon one another. The spontaneous and playful nature of relations between young women contrasted sharply with their distant contacts with young men. While heterosexual desires were inhibited, a close relationship among females was not considered taboo in nineteenth-century American society, which recognized such intimacy as socially acceptable. A strongly felt same-sex association represented one facet of the female experience that was regarded as a basic feature of American life from the late 1700s through the mid-1800s. Although a life-long friendship like Anna’s and Maria’s can perhaps best be understood as something simple and universal, it can also be considered from a theoretical perspective. The work of historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, for example, proposes that such lasting and intense relationships between women can be studied from the standpoint of “rigid gender-role differentiation,” in the context of general relations between women, and in terms of the characteristically loving language of correspondence sent to and from friends.<sup>1</sup>

Anna’s friendship with her “dearest Maria” Simkins not only enriched her life’s journey, but cherished memories of their love were etched in her mind and lay hidden in her heart. Our considering the happy times of their youth in light of Maria’s tragic death in childbirth at the age of twenty-seven adds another dimension to our portrait of Anna as a sensitive human being.



*“... [M]y heart will always be the same, towards the friend of my youth.”*

With the above words, Anna Calhoun meant to reassure her “beloved friend,” Maria Simkins, despite appearances to the contrary, that she could at all times be counted on for sympathy and affection. Blessed with Maria’s friendship since their “extraordinarily rich and wondrous time” in girlhood, Anna was surely as close to Maria as to any of her six siblings, and she was deeply grieved by her friend’s seeming doubts about her commitment to their friendship. Writing from the nation’s capital in June 1838, Anna attempted to convince Maria, who was home in Edgefield, that Maria’s thoughts and feelings were of interest and concern to her, as one whose love prevailed over unjust accusations. Anna attributed her delay in responding to Maria’s letters to her courtship by Thomas Clemson and to work copying some very important papers for her father. Evidently, Anna’s relative silence in response to Maria’s religious sentiments—a subject that she seemed very enthusiastic about—was another source of friction between the two friends who, as Anna affirmed, loved each other too well to argue about trivialities.<sup>2</sup>

The close friendship between Anna Calhoun and Maria Simkins began in the fall of 1826. At that time, nine-year-old Anna enrolled at a newly established female academy in Edgefield, the county seat of a rural district composed of thirty-eight families. Residing in the home of John C. Calhoun’s longtime friend, Eldred Simkins, Maria lived near the courthouse square in a household that included several other children. Christened Maria Edgeworth, apparently as the namesake of the popular Anglo-Irish novelist of the day, Maria was the third daughter in one of Edgefield’s “oldest, wealthiest, most illustrious, and

most influential families,” as the Simkins are described in Orville Vernon Burton’s study of family and community there. Maria’s grandfather Arthur Simkins, who exchanged land from his Cedar Fields plantation for the Edgefield Court House in 1785, was considered to be the town’s founder. Her father, Eldred, established a prosperous law practice and had served as South Carolina’s lieutenant governor, as a United States congressman, and as a state senator. Her mother, Eliza, according to family



*Law offices of Eldred Simkins, George McDuffie, Francis W. Pickens, Francis H. Wardlaw, John C. Sheppard, and James O. Sheppard*

scrapbook narratives about life in “Old Edgefield,” exemplified a gracious hospitality sustained, in part, by faithful slaves as she might welcome her many guests with traditional fruit cake, preserves, brandied peaches, homemade pickles, and a browned turkey.<sup>3</sup>

Beauty, breeding, and charm notwithstanding, the southern lady’s legendary hospitality in the antebellum era was enabled by the enslavement of an African-American labor force. In a study of southern women, historian Margaret Ripley Wolfe found that in the seventeenth century, a “triad of racism, classism, and sexism” developed that prevailed until well into the twentieth century. Obviously, women carried the burden of this dis-

crimination, especially toward Native Americans and African Americans.<sup>4</sup>

A year after Anna's enrollment at school with Maria, the Simkins' eldest daughter, Eliza, married Francis Pickens, grandson of famed Revolutionary War General Andrew Pickens and son of former South Carolina governor Andrew Pickens, Jr.. Being a Calhoun cousin by way of his grandmother, Rebecca Calhoun Pickens, Francis had spent a number of his childhood years at the family's Hopewell Plantation in the upcountry Pendleton District, before moving to Edgefield during his father's term as governor, from 1816 to 1818. The site of the still-standing Hopewell mansion is noted at the approach to Cherry Crossing over Lake Hartwell. An historical marker, erected in 1966 by the Foundation for Historic Restoration in The Pendleton Area, documents the nearby location of the Pickens' Hopewell home. The affectionate relationship that developed between Francis, Eliza, Anna, and Maria began with his marriage to Eliza in October 1827.<sup>5</sup>

The Edgewood plantation house that Francis's father began building for him in 1829, which was Anna's last year at school in Edgefield, was partially constructed from timber taken from the Cedar Fields homestead of Maria's grandfather, Arthur Simkins. The layout of the completed structure, built in stages, was of a rambling one-story design bolstered by nine-foot pillars. Standing at the end of an avenue of entwined cedars, it was set amidst formal gardens, in English fashion, adorned with statuary and boxwoods and enhanced by the presence of a pond. Inside Edgewood, the family enjoyed the luxury of mahogany furniture and varied works of art. Anna often traveled from the Calhouns' Fort Hill home to stay with Maria and her sister Eliza's family at the Edgewood plantation. Their cousin Francis, having surrounded himself with the riches of a southern gentleman, combined elegant hospitality with rural exuberance. Anna, as another one of his lady friends, besides his sister-in-law Maria, was a subject of some amusement to her cousin, who delighted in laughing at her teenage antics.<sup>6</sup>

The two girls enjoyed visiting one another over the years and, at the end of 1834, made their first long journey together. Traveling with a party that included Anna's designated "favorite cousin" Francis, newly elected to the U. S. House of Representatives, they arrived in Washington, D.C., from Columbia, South Carolina, after a week-long jolting ride in the stages. Maria had been permitted to accompany her brother-in-law, Francis, after Anna pleaded that nothing would give her so much pleasure than sharing the journey with her friend. When looking back on this special time in her youth, Anna wrote in her album: "Dear Maria your love has been one of the greatest of my enjoyments through life may I always deserve & retain it whether absent or present."<sup>7</sup>

During the second of the four winters that Anna spent in Washington working with her father, her separation from Maria, who had accompanied her in 1834, caused her to lament at her lonesomeness. Even in the presence of her father, cousin Francis, and his wife, Eliza, Anna likened her wanderings to those of "a troubled ghost" and urged her friend to come in the spring before she wasted away to nothing. To Anna, Maria was irreplaceable; "I did not imagine *how much* I should miss you," she wrote. Despite the gloom of wintry weather, she was determined to enjoy the warmth in her heart by writing to Maria and sent her a little needle case like her own. Spending all her time at the Congressional debates during much of January, Anna reported some account of them to Maria, whom she knew would have been pleased at the "lashing of the Executive [i.e., Andrew Jackson]." Since Maria's sister Eliza seemed to send all the necessary information

about parties for which Anna herself cared little, Anna felt less inclined to describe to Maria those social events that she found to be dull. Anna was delighted to learn from her cousin Francis that Maria and his father would be starting for Washington at the end of the month. "Do dear creature," she wrote, "*make haste and make me happy*—indeed, you dont know how much I want to see you."<sup>8</sup>

With Maria's return to South Carolina by mid-summer of 1836, Anna again felt very lonely as she prepared to go on a trip north, at her father's request, with Senator William Preston, and his wife, Louisa. In spite of the kindness of the Prestons, the nineteen-year-old Anna, who did not really care about going, would have so much more enjoyed everything she saw if Maria had been with her. Though enjoying her journey, she longed, upon her return to New York at the end of August, to "fly to dear old Pendleton" and, before many hours, to alight at Maria's door. Indeed, the absence from Maria had only shown her how much more necessary this friend from childhood was to her happiness. Eager to share what she had seen with Maria, she gave her friend fair warning of the danger of being "*talked to death*" for at least a week when she came home to the South.<sup>9</sup>

Back in Washington with her father at the time of her twentieth birthday, on February 13, 1837, Anna again felt gloomy away from Maria and was upset by the latter's indication that she would be unable to come again in the spring. Without Maria there, Anna might complain, "Oh if Maria was here, how much I should enjoy myself." Complimenting her friend on the style of her letters, Anna declared Maria's accomplishment in letter-writing to be "*quite equal*" to that of "Walpole's Private Correspondence," which she had just finished reading. Like her father, Anna apparently considered letter-writing to be an achievement for her sex to cultivate. She enjoyed reading the reviews of Shakespeare's plays and explanations of the Greek drama in "Schelegel's [*sic*] Dramatic Literature." Not wanting Maria to think that she had given up reading novels, Anna assured Maria that she had finished reading several and was then engaged in *Rienzi, The Last of the Roman Tribunes*, the latest novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton that she thought by far the least of all his works.<sup>10</sup>

The two young women did not see each other until July when Maria, accompanied by her sister Eliza and brother-in-law Francis, arrived at Fort Hill for a visit. Their return to Edgefield after only a few weeks' stay was too soon for Anna, who missed Maria all the more after her departure. She felt wretched that day "and wandered about the house like the ghost of departed joys." Even at home, Anna felt unsettled without Maria there.

Anna agreed to be a bridesmaid in the September wedding of Catherine Campbell, who lived in the "Friendville" home of her aunt Mary Martha Campbell Stuart, in Pendleton. But Anna said that only for Maria would she be a bridesmaid again. However, what Anna thought would be a dull time turned out to be a pleasurable occasion as Maria was there for the festivities. Both of them apparently enjoyed the gala event. Also present were Anna's uncle John Ewing Colhoun, Jr., and cousin "Cuddy" (Martha Maria), who came from their nearby Keowee plantation.<sup>11</sup>

Encouraging Maria to write more often, Anna promised to do the same as she compared their friendship to the fictional one between Clarissa Harlowe and her friend Miss Anna Howe in the epistolary novel *Clarissa*. Both girls, who wrote at least three letters a day to one another, "really shame our indolence," Anna said humorously, as she told Maria to read this invaluable book and model herself on Clarissa Harlowe. Conversely,

Anna fancied herself better suited to emulate Miss Anna Howe. "We know nothing of true politeness," she wrote Maria, with amusement, as these two friends, though intimate, "always addressed each other as *Miss*."<sup>12</sup>

With the coming of the new year in 1838, Anna did not leave South Carolina to join her father in Washington until March, staying on in Edgefield after the death of Maria's mother there, on New Year's Day. Accompanied by Maria's brother Arthur, Anna returned to the nation's capital for a few months, during which time, she apparently became engaged to Thomas Clemson.

Maria's brother, Arthur Augustus Simkins, in his late teens at the time he accompanied Anna to Washington, later became editor of the Edgefield *Advertiser*, the South's oldest newspaper "published continuously under the same name." Orville Vernon Burton's social history of Edgefield shows that Arthur's Simkins surname signifies kinship ties in the community between blacks and whites because Arthur fathered the first child of his slave Charlotte in 1849 before his cousin fathered the second. Charlotte later married a fellow slave, George Simkins, and her two sons, Paris and Andrew, "fathered by the whites," were made a part of the black Simkins family.<sup>13</sup>

Within a week of Anna's arrival back home at Fort Hill in mid-July, she wrote Maria about the wedding to take place in the fall and reminded Maria that she would need a "*white dress*" to stand by her side in at the ceremony. Already nervous at the thought of it, Anna did not know how to write about the thousand things that she could so "easily *talk*" over with Maria, whom she had never wanted to see so badly in her life. Anna beseeched Maria to come quickly, confident that Maria would comply with her wishes when convenient. If only Maria knew how much Anna needed her advice and company, Maria "would fly on the wings of the wind" to be with her.<sup>14</sup>

Unable in her own mind to think that she was going to be married, Anna did not wonder that Maria could scarcely realize it. Although Anna would not be guilty of the affectation of saying "I regret what I have done," she wrote to Maria confidentially that she did at times feel very melancholy when thinking of the future. About to enter into new scenes and duties, she did not know how well she would be able to perform her part. She often thought long and sadly on the separation that to some degree must necessarily take place between herself and Maria, although their hearts, she knew, would never change towards one another. On the eve of her marriage, Anna did not regret that she was a different being from what she had been the year before. "My character is essentially changing," she said, as the commitment she was about to make made her more thoughtful because she had more to consider. She described herself to Maria as "*graver*, without being *sadder*," an improvement for one who, she said, had always been "*too rattle brained*" for her own taste.<sup>15</sup>

Accompanied by her brother Arthur, Maria came up to Fort Hill in the stage around the middle of August and remained there with Anna until the first fall frost in October. After only a few weeks' stay back in Edgefield, Maria returned to Fort Hill for Anna's wedding on November 13, and she stood beside her friend at the ceremony in the parlor. Four days later, Anna, "*still devotedly*" Maria's friend, wrote that she and her husband would soon be visiting at Edgewood before traveling to Philadelphia to stay with his family. Fort Hill had been so quiet after all the guests departed that she found it almost impossible to realize the "*exciting events*" of the wedding day.<sup>16</sup>

A month after her marriage to Thomas Clemson, Anna was ecstatic at Maria's plans to wed Anna's very own uncle, James Edward Calhoun. Surprised that the two, who had known one another for so long, should suddenly make such a match, Anna found her uncle James, a forty-year-old bachelor, to be quite smitten with Maria's perfections and "more altered, *by love*," than anyone she had ever seen. To her brother Patrick, who was at West Point, she asked in confidence: "What do *you* think, of *your aunt Maria*"? Such sentiments as those Anna attributed to her uncle James were seen typically among nineteenth-century youth but not restricted to them alone. Historian Orville Vernon Burton cites James Edward Calhoun's feelings for "Anna Clemson's best friend, Maria Simkins of Edgefield," as not unlike those of younger men who under familial and societal pressure to excel discovered security in love in "what could otherwise be a very unsure world."<sup>17</sup>

Anna's Uncle James, a prominent planter and slave-owner along an upper stretch of the Savannah River, had initially inherited both land and slaves from his father, United States Senator John Ewing Colhoun. James apparently changed, on his own, the spelling of his surname, reverting to that of his immigrant ancestor, James Patrick Calhoun, possibly the first of the Clan Colquhoun to "Americanize," as such, the family name. On the other hand, James's brother, John Ewing Colhoun, Anna's uncle, who resided with his family at Keowee, retained the spelling change that their father himself had made at the time of the American Revolution. With the marriage of their sister Floride Bonneau Colhoun (Anna's mother) to their father's cousin, John C. Calhoun, Floride's name, therefore, changed to his. Anna's parents were, in fact, only first cousins once removed.

Ending eleven years of service in the navy in 1829, the thirty-one-year-old James returned to South Carolina to take over the management of his land, applying the most advanced agricultural and mechanical innovations. From his first plantation, called Midway, he soon shifted his operations to another area, called Millwood. By 1834, he began building his home there on acreage that he had bought and combined with land he had inherited. As the master of Millwood, he, like other large landowners and less affluent farmers, as well, depended on slave labor for his work force. These field hands included men, women and children who usually worked in labor gangs subject to their owners' temperaments. Tyrannical treatment of those in bondage was common, and, in a letter written soon after he moved to Millwood, James Calhoun ordered a runaway slave, if caught, to be whipped one hundred times. He even maintained the option to administer the punishment himself to make an example.<sup>18</sup>

James Calhoun and Maria Simkins were married in Washington, D.C. on February 4, 1839, with Anna, then in the first trimester of pregnancy, at her friend's side. The newlyweds went on to New York, taking with them Maria's younger sister, Emma who was returning there to school. Anna continued to travel with her husband in the following months and announced to her "dear auntie" Maria, now the mistress of Millwood, their intention to return to the South and stop first at the home of James and Maria Calhoun. Glad to shortly embrace Maria once more, Anna declared, "*I did not know I cared so much for all of you*, as I find I do."<sup>19</sup>

Back at Fort Hill for the birth of her firstborn, in August, and suffering there the loss of her child at three weeks, Anna found the infant's death difficult to bear. She was much gratified at Clemson's decision to spend the winter in the South and very pleased to stay for a time with her uncle James and with Maria at Millwood. When her uncle and her

husband agreed to crop together for at least a year or more, she and Maria were so very happy at the thought of being together.<sup>20</sup>

However, seriously weakened by sickness from the fever epidemic that had taken the life of her infant child, Anna continued in a state of ill-health while at Millwood. There, her uncle added an extra room to accommodate her and her husband, who was going to manage the nearby Midway plantation. Unfortunately for both Anna and Maria, the arrangement between the men did not work out because Clemson, after several months, found James to be completely ineffectual in everything about farming and concluded that he could do neither James nor himself justice.

Advised by his father-in-law, John C. Calhoun, to remain no longer at Millwood and to depart on civil terms, Clemson and Anna moved back to Fort Hill in the fall of 1840. Describing the whole situation to her brother Patrick as an embarrassing subject, especially to herself and her husband, Anna maintained that they were on the best terms with her uncle James and did not want him to know the true reason for their leaving.<sup>21</sup>

Ever interested in planting, Clemson decided to stay the winter at Fort Hill and, much for Anna's sake, to look about for suitable lands in South Carolina. Even though at home again, Anna longed to see Maria and found their separation difficult. Still sickly, she felt herself to have so few enjoyments independent of the society of friends as she awaited the birth of her second child. Sewing and making shirts for "Mr C." occupied her time. She apologized to Maria for a delay in writing as having the stitching and everything ready for Daphne, her personal slave, had taken all her time and strength.<sup>22</sup>

After her confinement and recuperation in July of 1841, she wanted to show off her fine baby boy to Maria. Though "*no beauty*," she described young Calhoun at two-months of age as an alert, bouncing fellow and a great plaything with his father. Because of her painfully swollen breast, Clemson had strongly urged her to wean the child as the only certain means of cure. Having agreed to act as a geological consultant for a private concern in Cuba, he left for Havana from Charleston on October 26 and planned to come back for Anna and the baby if he had to remain longer than expected.<sup>23</sup>

Early in 1842 Patrick Calhoun, who on leave from the army had gone with his brother-in-law to Cuba, returned from Havana to accompany Anna and her six-month-old son to join Clemson. After a delightful but dusty trip down, Anna stayed for a week in Charleston at Stewarts Hotel, a small inn close to a slave mart on Chalmers Street in the French Quarter between Meeting and State streets. Anna and little "Buddy" (John Calhoun Clemson), were comfortably settled at Stewarts, she wrote Maria. The picturesque place with its wide piazzas next to a garden provided them with a pretty respite before sailing on the *Hayne*. The proximity of the slave mart to Stewarts, where Anna was settled safely with her baby boy, was probably of little significance to one who accepted without question the buying and selling of people as property. Discovering to her sorrow that she could not take with her her own female slave, Daphne, Anna was pleased to find a suitable young English woman who would make the trip for ten dollars a day. Ten months after Anna left "Stewarts," Emily Wharton Sinkler from Philadelphia, the nineteen-year-old bride of Charles Sinkler, from Eutaw Plantation in lowcountry South Carolina, arrived in Charleston for her own stay on Chalmers Street. The cobblestone street remains unique today, with the Fireproof Building at its corner on Meeting Street, home to The South Carolina Historical Society.<sup>24</sup>

Writing to Maria from Havana, Anna hoped that her wonderful appetite and sleeping abilities were a sign of returning health, as she felt her dear friend would surely not know her to be so much improved. She was pleased that her form was fast recovering its “*sylph like* proportions,” as she supposed that exercise was bringing her to her natural size. “El ciudad del Havana,” she described as a queer town where magnificently dressed ladies, adorned with splendid lace mantillas, paraded the streets almost dangerously crowded with two-wheeled horse-drawn carriages (volantes). Anna attended several of the best churches but found Catholicism the “most ridiculous affair” she had ever seen, with seemingly absurd rituals by practitioners who observed Sunday with greater gaiety than usual throughout the town. Havana, in her eyes, was a place of little beauty despite its abundant wealth. The native gentlemen took pride in silver-plated volantes while their wives flaunted formal dress.<sup>25</sup>

The Clemsons returned to Fort Hill at the end of May 1842, and Anna anxiously awaited a visit from Maria. Clemson soon left for Dahlonega, at the request of his father-in-law, to examine the operation of the O’Bar gold mine, in North Georgia, that Calhoun had owned since 1833. Anna urged Maria to come, if she had a chance, even without her uncle James, who seemed reluctant to visit. “You see,” she said, in a challenge to the male dominance that prevailed in southern society, “I incite you to rebellion against the lawful authorities.” According to historian Orville Vernon Burton, Anna was writing “in a humorous manner to Maria” about what to do if her husband refused to come to Fort Hill. Nevertheless, the “legal basis of the husband’s ‘rule’” in South Carolina at that time, was the cause of her comment about inciting rebellion “against the lawful authorities.”

Despite the fact that she had her heart set on being a lady of leisure after coming home from Cuba, Anna necessarily busied herself in all the dreadful details of shirt-making, an employment that she felt always stupefied her senses. In the midst of sewing, she wrote Maria that she took time to accompany her mother on a number of calls upon neighboring households.<sup>26</sup> Sewing and visiting may well not have suited Anna’s sensibilities, but, as important skills for a southern lady, she needed to develop them.

Meanwhile, after a few weeks at O’Bar, Clemson’s chief concern appears to have been his separation from his wife and son. Determined to join her husband despite her mother’s unease at her going, Anna made her way to Dahlonega by carriage in the care of her nineteen-year-old brother John. Along with little Calhoun and the Negro slave Daphne, Anna came to live in a log cabin that had no doors, windows, shutters or chimney. After having spent only three days at the mines, she was called home to her mother and arrived back at Fort Hill much fatigued to find both Maria and her uncle James already there. Informed by a messenger of Mrs. Calhoun’s extreme illness, they left Millwood only to arrive at Fort Hill to find her better, pronounced by the physicians entirely out of danger.<sup>27</sup>

In early August, the lonely Clemson came unexpectedly to Fort Hill to see how Anna was and to bring her back to the mine himself, now that her mother was recovering so well. After being bruised during a rough road trip by carriage and stage, Anna wrote Maria that she was enjoying all the delights of living in a miner’s camp. Perched in her hilltop “*Miner’s Hut*,” a little improved with some nice doors and windows, she was happy in the wilderness and had even been horseback riding for the first time in three years.<sup>28</sup>

Anna received in a letter from her aunt Martha (the wife of John Ewing Colhoun), the sad news of the death of Maria’s inestimable sister Eliza. The account in the Edgefield

*Advertiser*, kindly sent by cousin Francis, confirmed as fact what Anna had wished was not true. She hoped “that Time the soother & softener of all griefs” would gradually wean the inconsolable Maria’s mind from its first crushing sorrow and leave only the cherished cushion of sweet memories. The additional news of the death of little three-year-old Eldred Pickens by congestive fever, on August 10, 1842, two days before that of his mother, Eliza, compounded Anna’s sorrow and sympathy for the gloomy spectacle of her poor cousin Francis’s household. “How my heart bleeds for him,” she wrote to Maria, because he was left with four daughters and greatly grieved.<sup>29</sup>

Knowing that her sympathy could not alleviate Maria’s misfortune, Anna did not dwell on the subject in her correspondence but, instead, wrote about the life that she herself now led. Her monotonous existence, interspersed only by the arrival of mail, was not at all disagreeable except for the “*dirty*” that was everywhere. As one who did not care much for the formality of society, she was content to lead a simple life; and, although amidst “plenty of *people* to be sure,” she found them to be so boring that her greatest wish was never to see them at all. Unable to leave her thirteenth-month-old son alone for fear of his getting into all the boxes and climbing on top of all the trunks to make mischief, she thought he would break his neck before long. Though misbehaving, he was, she said, becoming very interesting in his imitations of everything around him.<sup>30</sup>

Once back at Fort Hill in October, Anna admitted to Maria that she was not in the best of spirits since her husband’s departure for the North on a trip to visit his family. Not yet accustomed to his absence, which she feared might be for almost two months, she disliked even this unavoidable separation from him. Being far along in her third pregnancy, she did not want to run the risk of traveling the distance alone with little Calhoun.<sup>31</sup>

Returning to Fort Hill earlier than expected, Clemson decided to take up farming again, anticipating greater success than he had two years earlier with Anna’s uncle James at Midway. Clemson negotiated with Maria’s brother Arthur for the purchase of his Canebrake plantation (now located in Saluda County), in the Edgefield District. By the time the Clemsons were ready to make the move to their new home early in 1844, their baby girl Elizabeth Floride, born on December 29, 1842, was just over a year old.<sup>32</sup>

Curious with excitement as to what Maria’s “tremendous secret” could possibly be, Anna wished her friend a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and prepared to leave Fort Hill for Canebrake at the end of 1843. Although surprised by Maria’s pregnancy, already six months advanced, Anna, who had made up her mind that Maria would never have any children, was pleased that a child would add to her friend’s happiness and sense of purpose. Two children would be enough, Anna thought, a “boy the oldest,” followed by a girl, which she then had. That number would be enough, both for the worry and the joy of which Maria would now have her share. “Children are little plagues to be sure,” she said, “especially to one who hates to nurse them & be kept awake at night as I do but they are an infinite source of pleasant anxiety & *do* contrive to wind themselves wonderfully close round our hearts.” Advising Maria to take as much exercise as she possibly could without fatigue and to keep her spirits up, Anna maintained that often times exertion benefited even the weary.<sup>33</sup>

Anna, quite anxious to see Maria “especially *now*,” wanted to go to Edgewood where she was staying with cousin Francis and his family. Maria had been a help to her brother-in-law with his four daughters since the death of her sister Eliza some eighteen-months

before. With Clemson away in Charleston for a week in the middle of February, Anna would have gone down and spent the time with Maria had their newly ordered carriage been available. It had been in Hamburg across the river from Augusta for two weeks, and, with road conditions so wretched, they had decided to let it remain there until Clemson returned from his trip. In response to Anna's predicament, Maria sent her carriage to Canebrake for Anna after the roads improved. She continued in very sickly condition after her husband's return to Millwood, though in good enough shape to take a little ride every evening. With the chance that Clemson would be able to come for Anna in their new carriage, Maria admonished James not to come up until later as she thought the two men should see as little of each other as possible. If they could not be on "*friendly*" terms, she hoped they would not be in the same home. Should Anna still be there when James arrived, Maria wrote, "do meet her affectionately, as I do not wish her to think you are cool to her."<sup>34</sup>

Apparently unaware of Maria's concern about a possible confrontation between their husbands, and ignorant of her uncle James's reserve even towards her, Anna was preoccupied primarily with her friend's pregnancy and was truly delighted that her own mother would be going down to Edgewood to aid Maria, who would spend her confinement at Edgewood. Appreciating how knowledgeable her mother was about pregnancies, Anna would have proposed that her mother assist, had she realized that Floride's health permitted her to travel.<sup>35</sup>

Floride Calhoun was constantly tied down to Maria as Maria approached childbirth, and Floride could not leave her even long enough to come and see Anna at Canebrake. Since her father, recently confirmed as Secretary of State, was making a stop at Francis Pickens's Edgewood plantation, on his way to Washington at the end of March, the Clemsons went the twenty-some-miles' distance to Edgewood. Clemson's decision to accompany his father-in-law, Calhoun, to the capital caused Anna to stay at Edgewood until he came back. While there, she saw Maria spitting blood and, thinking that Maria was consumptive, feared that her friend might suffer the same fate as had her mother and sister. Anna, who did not want Maria to know how she really felt about her condition, left her dearest friend only because she did not believe her to be in any immediate danger. However, a little over a week after the Clemsons returned to Canebrake, Maria Simkins Calhoun, at twenty-seven years of age, died in childbirth, with her baby, on April 17, 1844. The tragedy of this loss so overwhelmed her husband James that he sought sanctuary at Millwood for the rest of his long life.<sup>36</sup> The inscription that he had carved on her monument reads as follows:

TO  
The Memory  
of  
MARIA E. SIMKINS  
Wife of  
JAMES EDWARD  
CALHOUN,

Born May 8, 1816,  
Died April 17, 1844.

She was lovely,  
accomplished, useful,  
and so pure that God  
was satisfied with  
her short probation.



Less than a month after Maria's death, Anna received word from her father in early May that he had named Clemson, who had expressed an interest in a diplomatic appointment abroad, to head the Belgian Mission to the court of King Léopold I. Although she had personal objections and misgivings about going, she welcomed her husband's post as Chargé d'Affaires, for she felt it was something that he wanted to try, having previously lived and studied in Europe. Thus, in the summer of 1844, just a short time after the heartbreaking loss of Maria, Anna prepared to embark on an ocean voyage that would take her away from home for a little over six years. The memories she retained of her beloved Maria would remain in her mind and soul.<sup>37</sup>