

II

MY FAR-BETTER HALF

Grosvenor Square.

I NEVER saw a leech. I have the vaguest idea of what it is like, but I have the most intimate knowledge of what its sensations must be.

With Austen, even when he kisses me most passionately (for him), even when he presses me against him so violently that I give an agonised gasp like a deflated bellows, I never feel near enough to him—it is then I wish I could leech-wise dig my tentacles into him—my being existing by his substance. I wish I could suck not only his blood, but his very soul. But all this I would rather die than tell him, or let him guess. He would not think it “nice.” I believe he is correct even in his conceptions of love. I say “I believe,” because we never discuss love together, at least, not love in its most intimate aspects. He loves me very much as I imagine a faithful Regent might love a young Infanta in respectful awe of her innocence. I would not even be surprised if he often said proudly to himself, “My wife has no senses,” unconsciously parodying that Spanish Minister’s indignant assertion, “The Queen of Spain has no legs!”

Austen is a good husband, an excellent husband, but