

**My
Father's
Better
Half**

At the beginning, I found it easy to believe. My father's better half is called Claudia. They share an apartment in Brussels. In 1991 Claudia became world champion in a horse championship. A few years ago she gave up her career due to health issues. Now she works as a secretary. I visit my father every month in their apartment in Brussels, but Claudia is never there. I haven't seen her for more than 10 years.

My father is a writer. He writes books on cooking, lobbyism, architecture and even a crime novel. He comes up with a variety of convincing stories about Claudia: He outlines her past and ambitions, what she likes and what she doesn't like and he even adds a few harmless neurotic habits to her character.

Horse figures of all sizes are on display in the living room. My father explains, that Claudia collects them. On a closer look, you see trophies, medals, and documents that testify her successes. The staging of her career as a world champion is elaborated. Claudia is a subscriber of several magazines about Icelandic horses. A few recent issues are piled up on the little coffee table.

Claudia had a cousin with severe skin diseases. This man was bullied throughout his whole life. He didn't get very old. Claudia always took care of him. That's where her caring and social character comes from, my father says. She is a smart and loving woman who looks after him.

Like my mother, Claudia loves everything that is blue. You can find blue objects everywhere in the apartment. There is only one exception: The yellow bathroom. Only yellow objects can be found here. My father often jokes that Claudia confuses "blue" and "nice". "That's nice" she would say, pointing at an object she likes. My father replies "No, this is just blue".

Their bed is a true mystery: The rumpled bed sheets of my father's side show that someone slept there. The other side of the bed is always neatly done. The bed sheets don't have any human odor. But my father changes both bed covers.

He says Claudia can't stand my presence. That's why she leaves the apartment every time I come to visit him. Sometimes she goes on vacation. Sometimes she takes a hotel room somewhere in the city. Like this, she doesn't have to meet me.

Once my father bought a yellow dress for me that I really wanted. It was so beautiful. A few weeks later he got into a huge fight with Claudia. She was jealous and complained, that he had never bought her such a nice dress. I shouldn't expect further expensive gifts in the future, he told me. Later I found out that my father had money issues at that time. It seemed like he could only tell me as "Claudia".

Sometimes Claudia is on my side, my father says. Then she urges him to be less harsh on me. The situation is quite schizophrenic. I once went to see a psychologist. She asked me whether I would be happier if Claudia wouldn't exist. I had no answer to that question.

I wanted a confrontation. Even if I didn't know what I wanted to get out of it. So I tried to trick them into it. We had to leave the house before Claudia was supposed to be back home. I told my father, that I had forgotten something at their place. We went back, but Claudia was not there yet. "She's stuck in traffic", he claimed. I was not convinced. But now that he is with Claudia, my father doesn't seem as lonely as he used to be.