

## **Half-Life**

A Novel

by Karl Meade

### Synopsis

Half-Life tells the story of an ordinary couple who find themselves in the middle of an ordinary life: they're fundamentally unhappy, and afraid to admit it.

Moses and Yolanda insist that life looks pretty good: they live as expatriates in old Europe, she's an attractive, budding artist, and he works in a challenging job damming Holland from the waters that threaten it. So what if they haven't had a real conversation in a year, or that it's been raining for two. So what if his work is not exactly buoyant, or if her painting has turned to mud, or their marriage—it's just a phase. And his body—the muscle twitches and garbled speech, the migraines and skin rashes, not to mention his somewhat disconcerting habit of walking around while he's still sleeping—it's all just part of life's precious balance.

All seems manageable until Yolanda is seriously injured by a speeding cyclist. Their "happy" life unravels, as a journalist bent on preserving the culture of "Old Holland" uses the accident to incite public outrage against the invasion of foreign technology (such as speeding mountain-bikes), and Moses convinces himself that Yolanda is having an affair, perhaps even with the cyclist who ran her over. Desperate to keep their life together—or maybe to destroy it?—Moses stalks the cyclist, badgers Yolanda, and one night wakes to find himself in the cyclist's backyard. When the cyclist—who works in Human Resources at Moses's company—falls victim to a series of mysterious and violent acts, and is forced to flee with his family, no one knows, including Moses or Yolanda or the police, whether it's the work of angry activists, or a vengeful Moses. In the fallout, Moses's publicity-shy employer assigns him to "stress leave" in a local psychiatric clinic.

Moses and Yolanda are thus launched on two seemingly divergent personal journies, trying to discover what might make their own lives real again, and who might help them get there.

Yolanda, with her wounded hand and scarred face, struggles to re-create her life and painting in the smug milieu of an expatriate community. When the cyclist, Prijs, suddenly returns—having lost his house, his job, and now his family—and befriends a lonely Yolanda, she finds inspiration in his articulate passion to re-create his own life. Yolanda cannot help but compare Prijs to Moses, who seems unwilling, or unable, to save their marriage. When Prijs’s affections turn romantic, Yolanda never suspects—until too late—how much Prijs may be driven by bitterness and revenge against the man he holds responsible for his pain: Moses.

Meanwhile, Moses finds himself cast amongst society's exiles: those who ask the simple questions—what is a real life?—and who are not afraid to give their simple, unsettling answers. A reluctant Moses is roomed with the infamous Aaron van de Toren, the brilliant “gadget-maniac,” whose comic antics and visionary theories belie his grand schemes. When Moses is suddenly named in an office harassment suit—a suit driven by Prijs’s department—Yolanda finally leaves Moses for Prijs. Moses’s world seems utterly lost.

But Aaron has a plan. A plan he cannot tell Moses about, but that will solve Aaron’s own escalating troubles, and just might heal Moses’s fractured world: a dramatic collision between Aaron and Prijs and Moses and Yolanda.