

“Fall!” I heard.

Somebody pushed me in the back, and I started falling from a great height. Then, as I was about to crash down, I woke from a short nap. My body twitched in an unconscious reaction to stop a fall which was as real as if it were about to take place in reality, yet existed only in my dream. When I was dreaming though, I didn't know that. I was entirely convinced that I was about to die.

At that same moment, I heard a loud thump on the window, just above my head. Maybe that's what woke me up. There were two seagulls fighting over something so fiercely in mid-air that they didn't see the window. [...]

They'd left a mark on the window, an impression of widespread wings. The impact must have been very hard for them to have crushed in this way. Luckily, the window didn't crack.

“Angels!” I recalled mother's words. “Come on, boys, look at the angels!”

Years ago, when we were still children, mother showed me and my brother marks like those on the window. When was it I last visited her? About six months ago, perhaps a bit longer. Mother, sometimes mum, never mummy. I only called her “mum” when I wanted to make her happy, but to me, or when I talked to others about her, I called her “mother”. Mother not mum. We kissed each other on the cheek to say hello and sometimes hugged when saying goodbye. Ever since I remember, we've kept our distance.

She liked watching television series and nature films, playing patience and placing tarot cards, drinking black coffee, smoking one cigarette after another, and sometimes swigging a drop of herbal or fruit spirit. She's worked at the Marriage Registry all her life, was quickly promoted to manager, and has officiated over several thousand wedding ceremonies. She didn't want to retire because she'd miss the weddings which she kept on talking about with her colleagues:

“Beautiful! So handsome! Youth is always beautiful. It speaks for itself.”

“But did you see that other one? Old cow, pretending to be a spring chicken. What husband is that, her fifth?”

“Every blight's someone's delight.”

“They look as if they're in love. Do you think they'll spend their whole lives together?”

“He suits her like a hunchback suits a straight wall.”

“Look at that, practically still a child with such an old boar. I bet it's the money.”

Commenting on the appearance and choice of newly-weds never bored her. She also went to the country to see her sister, whom my brother and I had known since we were children because mother took us there. She never found herself another guy after my father, although many milled around her because she was shapely and attractive.

I think she'd have preferred her older son's fate to have been mine. I was always second-best because not only had I been born second, but I also proved a disappointment.

Excerpt translated by Danusia Stok

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	<p>© Iwona Lompart</p> <p>DANIEL ODIJA Born 1974</p>
<p><i>Pusty przelot [Empty Flight]</i></p> <p>Publisher: Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2021 ISBN 9788381913249, 192 pages</p> <p>Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl</p>	
<p>Selected books</p> <p><i>Przezroczyście głowy</i>, 2018 <i>Kronika umarłych</i>, 2010 <i>Niech to nie będzie sen</i>, 2008 <i>Szklana huta</i>, 2005 <i>Tartak</i>, 2003 <i>Ulica</i>, 2001 <i>Podróże w miejscu</i>, 2000</p> <p>Daniel Odija is also a comic book writer.</p>	
<p>Foreign language translations</p> <p>Daniel Odija's works have been published in France, Germany, Macedonia, Ukraine.</p>	
<p>Selected awards</p> <p>Nike Literary Award (2011) – nomination European Union Prize for Literature (2009) – nomination Kościelski Foundation Award (2003) – nomination Józef Mackiewicz Literary Award (2003) – nomination</p>	