



Krisztián Greccsó:
I Am Going Where You Are

Novel, 312 pages

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Forgotten, hidden paths criss-cross over the soil of the sultry village in the plain where Daru, nearly a teenager, is fighting for his position as gang leader, for his self-respect and his love: in other words, for his life. If he did not tread these paths to the end they would fade away, melting into the horizon, something enormously important would cease to be, and memory would be irredeemably damaged. Just like Daru's life, his fate: he plods steadily through the maze of emotional trails, past and future, while in every relationship he loses something of himself, and dies a little. This way, he comes of age. The wounds, cicatrices and scabs multiply, his heart may become thick-skinned, but in the final wise, mature relationship the same passion glows as in the very first.

How better to tell someone's life story, than through the story of their loves? As we explore Daru's story, this is what comes to mind, as well as our own bitter-sweet moments and years. He's coming where we are – he won't let up.

Krisztián Greccsó

Krisztián Greccsó was born in 1977. He now lives in Budapest. He is a writer, a dramatist and an editor; his unique voice and storytelling has made him one of the most successful authors of the new generation of Hungarian literature. His works often relate the seemingly irreconcilable differences between life in Budapest, the Hungarian capital and the countryside with its little towns and isolated village communities.



He works as an editor for *Élet és Irodalom*, the foremost literary magazine of the country. Greccsó has written poems, a theatrical play, screenplays, a collection of short stories and four novels and has won some of the most important literary prizes – the latest in date being one of the most prestigious, the **Aegon Award, for best literary performance of the year**, which Greccsó received in 2012, for his novel *'Room for You Next to Me'* (*Mellettem elférsz*).

‘Man and woman ... how are they supposed to ever understand each other? They both want something different. The man wants the woman. The woman wants the man.’ (*Frigyes Karinthy, famous Hungarian writer from an earlier period*)

Previous novels on the international scene:

- *Dance School (Tánciskola – a novel)* sold to the **Czech Republic**,
- The novel *Long Time No See (Isten hozott)* was published in **German** (2007), in **Czech** (2008), in **Slovenian** (2009), in **Turkish** (2011), and in **Croatian**.
- Rights for the author's previous novel, *Room for You Next to Me (Mellettem elférsz)* recently sold to **Croatia**.

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excerpt

Back then it was the little Bálint kid who cut the grass on the football pitch in front of the playground, for free: his family got the hay, that was his wages. One of them suggested messing up the fresh, spring haycock. A spring haycock, not even a real one, just one that the little Bálint kid mounded together the freshly mowed grass. Messing it up would be child's play. If it were an autumn haycock, of burnt, dry hay, that would be easily messed up. Anyway the little Bálint was still a kid, a mere lad, he couldn't pack the hay tightly, or pile it up high. It was small and loose. They'd messed up much bigger haycocks than this before. *Come on, Lili!* You go too Daru!

They went and messed it up. Mess is good. Not because of the ecstasy of destruction, but because you can wallow obliviously in the remains of the haycock, in the sofa of hay. A thick, soft bed, a chunky duvet, out in the open. God's broad sky all around. The blue sky over the cemetery was looking at them. The blue sky behind the sumach forest was looking at them. Down by the canals. Above old Árpád's orchard there's that curled blue sky that was pleased with them. And above the gardens of the houses on the factory estate, and behind Comrade Gyurka's alfalfa field.

Daru got up on his knees, stretched out his arm, and keeled over like a scarecrow. Or like a crucifix with dry rot. He couldn't see, but he smelt that all round the acacia was blossoming. Clusters of white flowers swayed in the breeze, and there came that honeyed, ticklish perfume. Lili laughed. Daru laughed too. If they'd known what a picnic is, and what love is, perhaps they wouldn't have been so happy. They would have been sad. That it would never be like this again. This way though, they didn't know, and they didn't wonder whether this would or could happen again, so they were happy. They messed up the haycock completely. The bed of hay grew thin. It was good for running in now, running round. The fresh hay became a seaside, it lapped under their feet, bubbled, swelled, and they went round and round as if they were dancing some ritual. Lili in front, and Daru in front;

nobody behind.

Wonderful though it was, this infinite, instinctive happiness, suddenly things turned sour. They didn't know why, and they didn't know how quickly. Suddenly Daru's leg froze. He looked at the trampled haycock. He'd done this loads of times, torn apart hundreds of haystacks, 'you're such a good boy, good at school, what do you do this for?' asked his mother. And it was impossible to explain why. Because even Daru didn't know, he just felt that he would die of boredom if he didn't cause all this pain. Countless times, he'd been chased by angry farmers. And not like in some funny film, where the farmers chase the cowherd.

Somehow this haycock was different. First, he didn't need to run, and second, they knew whose haycock it was. This haycock had been stacked by a lad, they'd ruined the work of a big boy, not some unknown man, who'd stack it up again, cursing perhaps but he'd soon get it done. The little Bálint kid stacked the haycock slowly, it took ages, because his father didn't help. *'Cause then you'll never learn*, that's what Old Bálint said to him. Daru sensed this wasn't true. He accepted, as always, what grown-ups said, but some evil pointer swung out under his heart, and his mouth turned bitter. He tasted the bitterness. The little Bálint kid was clumsy, and he'd taken trouble over his stupid haycock. And they had churned it up. They stopped dead. Lili said, first suggesting then commanding, they tell the little Bálint that it was them. *We must help him stack it back up!* That's why they went to the well. That's why they stood by the well. Because the well was diagonally opposite the Bálints' place.

The little Bálint kid came home. He looked at them long and hard. He didn't say a word. Lili spoke, clumsily saying sorry in every other sentence. There was something annoying in her remorse. This was when Daru first felt there was going to be trouble. Lili was cheeky, like a sergeant in a story, her ponytail came loose, the brown locks swung free beside her ears, you could feel that actually she wasn't sorry for anything. She thought the same as Daru, that with this heroic confession things would be sorted, and the little Bálint should actually be grateful that fate had put such honourable kids in his path. The little Bálint kid was silent. He seemed not to be angry. There was a kind of pleasure in his face, a terrible glee. There was a hungry smile in his eyes. He kept blinking over at the garden. First at them, then

over at the back, as if he were scared that someone would rush out, his father, and take the haycock matter into his own hands. What was going to happen? For a few seconds there was silence. The cruel delight had gone from little Bálint's face. The seconds rolled emptily by. Little Kid Bálint looked over his shoulder, almost out of routine, there was nothing there, just the stupid motionless garden.

He went in for a pitchfork. He was a big lad, almost fat and sluggish, and hairy even as a teenager. He had a vest on, you could see. He stayed silent as he went out, and just stood next to the haycock. Daru thought they could set to work, they could help him stack it up, and exactly how to restore it, well, they'd find out as they did it. But the boy said they didn't have to help, they didn't know how anyway, and anyway they shouldn't imagine that would settle things. *What then?* asked Lili. She was upset. *What are you up to, Andor?* The little Bálint kid's name was Andor, but nobody called him by that name. Andor sounded daft. Daru felt that the sentence lurched through the air. It crossed his mind that Lili had got his name wrong, that wasn't the name of large boy, it didn't suit him. But no matter how hard he thought, no other first name came to him.

They had to get down on their knees. Facing the sun, spread out their hands, palms up, like two Christs doing exercises. At first it was amusing. Daru didn't understand why they were doing what Andor said, why they didn't run off. The little Bálint kid was a slow runner, he wouldn't catch them up. They'd already tried that, last year, at Halloween. They'd stolen his pumpkin lamp, and they zig-zagged through the graves, the big sluggish boy got left behind. Daru looked into the sun. He shut his eyes, but it still burnt. He couldn't believe that it was him this was happening to. It was hard to hold his arms. Slowly the two thin pointers of the balance began to sink. That was when Andor first shouted. *Keep your arms up, you squirt!* We really shouldn't have said anything, he thought. He regretted agreeing to confess, so much it almost hurt. His eyes stung with sweat. Now his side was hurting too from holding out his arms straight. The tendons in the side and back of his neck were stiff, like he'd been lying down for too long. The sweat trickled over his balls. It stung. And his thighs too, on the inside. He needed to scratch. *Don't you dare move!* said Andor. Lili and Daru knelt. They were nailed to an invisible cross in the middle of the plain.

Daru had a thought, like some idea or old memory, it simply came into his mind, that the thing to do at times like this was cry. He tried, but nothing came. Even though he was scared. Really scared. His arms were shaking from tiredness, pain and fear. His biceps were twitching. He looked and saw the muscle quivering, but even so fear hadn't gripped his throat. He didn't understand why. Why not. Then he realized. He caught himself: he still didn't believe that all this could be real. This was him. Next to him was Lili. Andor was torturing them. He hadn't forgiven them; he'd made them kneel. He couldn't believe he was actually there. It was happening to *him*; he was the one who didn't know what was coming next. How long would Andor toy with them? And what did he want, anyway? Daru looked round, and the big boy yelled: *Don't you turn, you bastard!* He glowered, shouting with a happy smile. He'd hardly shifted any hay. The haycock was non-existent. He just looked at them, and if they budged an inch, he roared loud enough to scare the pigeons off the cemetery gate.

For ages, nothing happened. Daru's arms hurt, but he could still hold them up. So he did. Sometimes he peeked at Lili, she seemed to be proud, impertinent, like old times, when Lili was the leader, and she didn't wait for Daru to finally come up with his own idea. He didn't often have ideas. He'd got used to her thinking of something. And since Lili had changed, he was left to his own pitiful devices. What most bothered him was that Lili still obviously knew what she wanted, and had loads of ideas. She just didn't say. She expected Daru to think things up himself. And when he confronted her about it, telling it to her straight, saying how could he possibly know what her ladyship wants, she'd say 'It's not me you should be watching. Sure, I've got an idea, and you should have one too. Men should have, and if you're the man...' She left it there. Then Daru would look at himself. He was hardly thirty kilos. He was as short as Lili. He didn't have any body hair yet. Was she serious? Why should he be the man? He was a child, and he knew it. That was better, right?

Andor swiped at Lili's buttocks with a branch from the sumach tree. *I said: don't let up.* Lili didn't budge. Her tears trickled down, and she smiled. Like when it rains and behind the sour clouds the sun is shining. 'Her face is a rainbow' thought Daru, and inside he smiled too, he was calm, at least he thought so.

Nothing stirred in him. As if he'd reached the adult end point of suffering and wisdom.

He was very surprised when he came to. He was dizzy. He lay on his back. Andor was sitting on him, on his waist and belly, pulling the scruff of his neck, slapping him. He could taste something sweet. He had to spit. He didn't even know where he was, or what he was doing. He wasn't angry with Andor, but he didn't know why he was sitting on him. Fluid collected in his mouth, he panicked, gasped for breath, lifted his head, and wanted to spit it all out. He was scared, so he did it with force. The bloody, snotty saliva covered the little Bálint kid's face. *Fuck you!* shouted Andor. Daru understood nothing. How had he got there? Why was the little Bálint kid so angry? The sweet fluid quickly collected in his mouth again. He spat again, straight and true. Bull's-eye, thought Daru. He had to laugh. Andor had just wiped his face, now it was all bloody again. There was a cold flash in his eyes. He jumped up, crawled over to the pitchfork, and picked it up. Daru felt Lili's hand, she pulled him, saying *come on, hero*, and her eyes flashed like old times. *Run!* Daru was giddy, he could hardly put one foot in front of the other, and kept having to look back. Behind, rushing after them with the pitchfork, was Andor.

They ran to the cemetery. Daru smashed into the crosses, knocked down the flowerpots, fell down. Lili kept pulling him up. *Come on*, she shouted, *This is no joke*. They raced through, first up to the strange house, which wasn't the ranger's house, but still was in the cemetery. Daru realized this wasn't a good idea. It was flat; they'd be seen. Andor came into view, not far behind the chubby Jesus, he burst through the graves, out to the meadow, he rushed, holding the fork across his chest, like a soldier charging with his rifle to the enemy. For a moment he forgot to be scared. He looked at the little Bálint kid. Although he was fat, there was a spring in his run. *I'll wipe you out, you fucking squirt*, he shouted.

Somehow this brought back in a flash what had happened. Andor had hit Lili with the branch. He had jumped up, and shouted something similar to the little Bálint kid now, and let rip on him. On the big boy. Lili shook her arms, and they set out to the enclosed part of the cemetery. The folk buried there had died a long time ago, and even their relations were dead, they'd died in the first war, and very small folk, children and babies, when they passed on. They used to know every

nook and cranny of this area. But recently Lili hadn't felt like coming here.

Still, she remembered the paths much better than he did. The old neglected graves were overgrown with weeds, elder bushes and wild cherry, trails through the acacia and tunnels through the blackthorn led from grave to grave. *We have to get the other side of the old oak*, whispered Lili. *He won't find us in the owl clearing*. Daru was giddy, his head ached, and he staggered dazedly after Lili. Somehow he couldn't figure out the way to the owl clearing. *I'll fuck you, you hear?* shouted Andor. *I'll fuck you when I find you!* Daru looked with fear at Lili. Then they understood what it was all about. Lili was a woman. That's how others see her. She wasn't a little girl to them. So she couldn't be for Daru either, that's why she'd changed, that's why she wanted Daru to work out his life, for him to change too, to be a man. She didn't need a childhood friend any more. Daru was so surprised by this realization that he forgot to run. *What's wrong?* Lili shouted at him, *you want him to hurt you?* *Course not*, replied Daru, startled and sulkily. And he meant it. He shuddered at the idea of Andor touching Lili, he shuddered, hated it, and yet something inside him wanted it. A warm, cruel excitement crept through him.

They hid in the owl clearing. Daru didn't feel safe there, he remembered it as more sheltered, but he didn't dare say. He couldn't have run any further, he was still staggering, his nose was bleeding, he was weak. And sleepy: in the midst of terror he would gladly have fallen asleep. They crouched down, and tried to hold their breath. He looked at Lili's impish hair, it was reddish, faded in the sun, her tangled T-shirt was crumpled on her belly. Above it her small breasts were concise and round. She had thin, worn cotton trousers, between her legs they hugged her mound tight, showing her pussy. It was sweating. Daru didn't get it. Sweat stank. But Lili smelt good. So good that a nerve in his knee started to twitch. *You're beautiful!* he whispered. Lili raised her hand in fear and anger, signalling 'be quiet', but seemed to smile. Andor, like a mother sow protecting her piglets, panted, sniffed and snorted around them. *I know you're here, you scum*, he grunted. Lili was quietly crying, her shoulder trembled. Daru held her hand, signalled things were okay, waving as if the little Bálint kid was some negligible detail. He smiled and for a split-second Lili smiled too, her face was a rainbow again.

Come out, you bastards! For a while, silence, then he suddenly neighed.

Daru knew things were bad, or rather he sensed it. He'd probably found the way, he'd seen the small slit next to the old thuja tree, under the bushes, and behind it was the trail. Now he could hear him closing in. The arteries in his head were throbbing. He heard very close Andor trampling on the grass and branches, moving forward. He looked at the bushes, yep, the thujas were swaying, the Little Bálint kid was coming. Lili was crying out loud now. *I don't want him to hurt me.* Daru's heart thumped. Suddenly everything became clear, like waking up, he felt a cruel, biting fear, he thought of leaving her there, going off, scarpering. Andor could do what he wanted, after all if he got Lili, he wouldn't need Daru. He looked to see where he could run. Lili was looking down at the ground. She wasn't watching him, but somehow he knew she could feel it, she could see through him, that he wanted to leave her. She had rolled up tight, the rainbow feeling had gone, so had the quivering happiness behind the terror, the sense that everything was like the old times. Daru stepped forward, and stopped. The owl clearing only had one exit, the rosehip and blackthorn bushes, weeds, nettle and the pines had grown thick around the small clearing, and only one trail led out. The one that Andor was coming on.

Perhaps that's what gave him the idea. He didn't know, and later couldn't remember, whether he thought anything when he stood in the opening of the tunnel through the foliage. He pushed the sobbing Lili back, she was panic-stricken, and asked *what are you doing?* She was shaking. For a moment Daru relaxed, and wasn't terrified, as if he accepted what was coming, then his eyes went hot again. *He'll spike you!* shouted Lili desperately *he's got the pitchfork.* Then she let out a sustained scream, as if the air in her lungs would never run out. The moment she started, Daru saw Andor's head. His body was still in the path. He was crawling. He didn't have the pitchfork. Daru held up both his arms, as if he were going to curse him, took a run up, and with all his strength kicked in the head the boy lying on the ground.