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achievement.**

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**KRISZTIÁN GRECSÓ - ROOM FOR YOU NEXT
TO ME (Mellettem elférsz), 2011, 292 pages**
Magvető Publishing, Hungary

ENGLISH and GERMAN EXCERPTS AVAILABLE!

**100 YEARS OF FAMILY HISTORY, MYSTERY AND LONG-
CONCEALED SECRETS UNFOLD FROM A SINGLE
PHOTOGRAPH AND AN OLD JOURNAL.**

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CAN THE PAST REDEEM THE PRESENT?

A haunting family story of desire and loneliness spanning 100 years. When the protagonist and narrator of the novel is asked by a local newspaper to write an incidental article about an old family photograph, this seemingly harmless task entangles him in a web of mysteries and elusive family mythology.

*Past and present mingle as **tribal secrets and mysteries, stories of adultery, jealousy, homosexuality, friendship and betrayal** unravel before the eyes of the reader and more and more of the truth is revealed about a long-forgotten – and sometimes long-concealed – family history...*

Krisztián Grencsó

Krisztián Grencsó 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. Grencsó has written poems, a theatrical play, screenplays, a collection of short stories and four novels and has won the most prestigious Hungarian literary prizes – the latest in date being the **Aegon Award** which Grencsó received in 2012, for his novel *'Room for You Next to Me'*

Since its publication, the **7th printing** of this novel is now available, an outstanding **18,000** copies have been sold, and the novel is still a strong seller.

**A Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung quote from 2013 FBF
German Book Prize Winner Terézia Mora:**

**FAZ: "Which novels from world literature did you not read to the end?"
Terézia Mora: "Only those which I had not begun to read in the first place."**

FAZ:: "Which one would you like to have written yourself?"

TM: "Ulysses."

FAZ: "What are you reading right now?"

TM: "Krisztián Grencsó's *Mellettem elférsz (Room for you Next to Me)*."

<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buchmesse/autoren/terezia-mora-lichterloh-12615086.html>

Previous novels on the international scene:

Publishing rights for his novel *Dance School (Tánciskola)* have been sold to the **Czech Republic, while his novel *Long Time No See (Isten hozott)* was published in **German** (2007), in **Czech** (2008), in **Slovenian** (2009), in **Turkish** (2011), and further publishing rights have been sold for the **Croatian** language.**

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EXCERPT FROM THE NOVEL

The way Imre spoke about my Uncle Márton, you just had to feel sorry for him. Imre gave him the role of the unfortunate, cheated man and it suited his character. His face held a form of born humbleness, his futures remained fine even when he drank or shouted. He was a sensitive, touchy-feely type and you could see it on his face, behind his beard, behind his glasses, behind his inebriated eyes.

He'd somehow managed to inherit his father's care and attention, the family's excruciating neuroses, and a kind of unmanly joy from somewhere. Finding herself in a conflict such as this, any woman would categorise them thus: Imre's to be desired, Márton's to be pitied. A couple of palinkas and the now aged childhood friend was happy to tell a tale or two. He never intended to insult my uncle, he just wanted to recapture belief in his own glory passed. He also had his doubts as to whether such a past had ever actually existed. I bore witness to the fact the world he described was real as were the figures, families, stories, desires and disputes he described. So was the sports field that now forms part of the village. And the factory, that closed down, and the endless stacks of bails, and the donkey train that have all long since gone. Gone along with my grandparents, his parents and all the others, who I thought of as old men who had fought on the Russian front, but were just real and had lived just like the rest of them. Then I thought for a minute, *Who could he tell this to there?* We stood in the outer room of the new pub, there was a disco inside, thickly made-up boys and girls were strutting their stuff, ordering sweet drinks, staring at us with suspicion. Death cut through all comparisons, the competition was no longer valid. Celebrating himself as the victor, Imre provided a pretty pathetic spectacle as we gave Márton a dignified send off.

After the failure in the bar, Imre started to set out later to collect grass and flowers. He tried to head for the centre to coincide with Róza getting off the bus. He folded his cleanest stripy plastic bag under his arm, slipped his hat off, spat in his palm, flattened his hair and strode out, stepping hard on his heels as if he were approaching a drawing board rather than setting off to pick chamomile and snails. Róza knew full well that he was off to gather chamomile but she smiled at the sharp-stepping, charming man when he appeared from behind the notice board on the corner. Imre's heart beat hard, they only ever passed one another and exchanged greetings, that's all, but in Imre's eyes, every quick hello was a step closer. It was still an achievement that he dare show that all he ever desired was Róza. Walk, hellos, walk, this is how the days and weeks passed, then towards the end of the summer, he eventually spoke to her. He had no idea what to say so he asked if he could walk her home. He crossed the road, he slowed down, Róza didn't notice him stop, she said hello, she carried on, Imre called after her in a croaky tone. My uncle's wife turned around and, for a second, nothing showed on



her face. They crossed the square that had a figure of Christ chopped out of a single block of stone. Imre adjusted his step to hers, Róza laughed, it was hard to decide whether she chuckled with glee or her laughter described a naive and aimless situation mixed with a hint of sarcasm. This was the same square where Benedek and Sadi had met and it was the one where the windmill had stood guard on the corner for a hundred and fifty years, with the hemp bails behind it, with the old donkey train and with the vast soaking ponds choked with reeds and crisscrossed by a maze of rickety bridges. This was where Benedek and Sadi had touched for the first time. Worlds began and worlds ended here, this is where the circus pitched its tent where my father saw the East German artiste, the girl he abandoned the priesthood for. The horse market square. Five roads met at this grassy, muddy meadow shaped something like a star, and young Márton appeared from the least likely route, lined with acacia trees running from the cemetery. He stood by the house, the one where Sadi had grown up and where Benedek had touched his shoulder under the eiderdown before the Pannonhalma Fair. My uncle stood at attention there like some sort of guard, with his bicycle beside him, as if he were waiting, should he be forced, to pursue and expose Imre and Róza. They'd been walking side by side for a minute but Imre couldn't bring himself to speak for excitement, he felt stifled by his own ineptitude. He wanted everything too soon just like Márton. But Márton wanted to be married now while Imre imagined that Róza also knew: he had a claim on her. After Irina, he thought it was the least she could do and he considered any unnecessary romantic gestures as an insult. Imre didn't even want to say hello, just get under Róza's skirt and have her. This had happened so many times before in his head, why did he have to make such a fuss? Márton stood on the other side of the road in the cover of a side street. He seemed to nod. Róza didn't look ruffled, she remained perfectly natural. She took her leave of Imre, crossed to the other side, and kissed her husband. Imre thought they appeared to be laughing.

I didn't dare speak when Imre told me this. I could clearly see that he hadn't thought through for many years what had happened that summer and into the autumn. He surprised himself that he wasn't the one in the victor's role. He was stunned by his own recollections and he felt slighted because Márton had even humiliated him in death. I ordered two palinkas to soften the situation. We didn't speak for the longest while. It was then I understood that my uncle could have profited from this struggle. If he'd had more strength, and if he'd loved Róza that little bit more, the woman would have found her peace beside him. I thought it through and it shocked me. Then why had Róza moved out? I took a look at Imre who was clutching his palinka. I felt sad because it was obvious that if I was ever going to find out, it wasn't going to be from him.

Imre began his next story as if that would finally give him his glory. We went to sit in one of the inner rooms, the music wasn't beating out there, it was friendlier. A poster of a naked woman pinned to the wall was spotted with grease. Imre made out as if he knew everything, and I let him. I didn't ask him where he got his information from for fear that he'd stop. The kids of rich farming families sat at

the next table showing each other their wristwatches. They spoke with such relish about these expensive instruments that it made my mouth water. Imre claimed that the Steiner boy summoned up the courage that same day and asked “Auntie Róza” – whose face started to twitch at being addressed as “Auntie” – to come and help blow up the leather footballs in the club changing rooms. Imre was sick with desire and staggered like a half-starved wild animal up by the factory. By the time he got to the sports field, he could barely walk his knees were knocking so hard. He realised that he hadn’t eaten for a day and a half and he hadn’t had a drink in an age, his throat burned with thirst. He walked onto the field and there was Róza’s bicycle lying in the grass, he went to the tap, took a long drink, the cool force filled his body, he could even feel it in the soles of his feet, he felt better. He hoped he’d be capable of fucking the woman if the opportunity arose. He couldn’t see Róza anywhere, only Vali Steiner the caretaker who smiled at him. *She must live here*, Imre thought, and he didn’t understand what the woman wanted and why she was grinning at him like that. He walked towards the stage, past the changing rooms and the function room, and in the latter, among the cups and medals, under the signed and framed football strips along with masses of team photographs from the glory days, stood Róza. And the Steiner boy. No more than an unfortunate, lanky lad in Imre’s head, he didn’t look such a snotty-nosed kid as he stood there. He was holding a trophy of some sort, Imre recognised it, it was the Agrotrade Cup, he’d been in that factory team, but not in this one. He was half an hour late and all for nothing, the Steiner boy got the gold. He’d just told Róza that he’d easily be able to fill the comely cup if “Auntie” lent him a hand. “Auntie, my eye!” said Róza but the undertaking appealed to her. Imre didn’t want to watch the whole thing to see quite how Márton’s wife helped the boy, just for a short while. The woman’s wonderment set him thinking. Róza crouched down in front of the kid, she didn’t touch, just stared in awe, *no dick looks that good*.

Imre started back, his bones twinged with desire, he could hardly put one foot in front of the other. He got as far as the caretaker’s room, Vali Steiner stepped out and now he understood what the woman wanted. Vali’s shrivelled body, worn face and droopy tits hadn’t been touched for a long time, in fact, the last time she’d had her flesh clenched had been at that infamous class reunion where her son was conceived. Vali had waited in the caretaker’s room listening to hear when Imre turned to go back. She’d thought that the situation spoke for itself, and she was speaking for herself, she prayed, now or never. If not now, she’d never see mercy from a man’s body again. Imre stopped in front of the woman, he felt insulted, he was much too good a man to have to satisfy himself with an old bag like her. His whole body filled with paralysing tension, he didn’t smile back, he wanted to walk away but he looked at Vali one more time. The desire had gone from the woman’s eyes that now showed terror, she pulled the pleading thin as if she were squinting, her lip trembled and slowly, as the fat drops plopped out, tears streamed down her face. Imre walked off, and when even he wouldn’t have thought it, he turned back around. He changed his mind, took hold of the woman’s hand and pulled her into the room. Áron Steiner lost his virginity the burden of

which he'd carried for so long at the exact same moment that his much younger sister was conceived.

Vali Steiner and her boy set off home with lofty lightness, they laughed happily down the street, the dogs barked at them. Márton pedalled back from the shop. He watched the two laughing people, mother and son, especially the growing man. His stomach tightened. Áron leaned over to his mother, they both laughed like drinking companions. The boy kissed the air, the mother laughed and cuffed the son. Márton knew that Róza had stopped pedalling at the pitch. He sensed she'd still be there. An egg cracked in his bag. He stared at the greening lilac bushes. Pain shot through him, the bitterness of a cuckolded man, but it soon passed. He saw Imre coming up from the sports field, his old friend looked at him, he didn't avoid his glance, but neither did he slow down, his back bent as he cycled crookedly on. He appeared neither happy nor unhappy, just like someone whose shirt cut him under the arms, was tired or needed shit rather than a man pressured by his usual problems and who found himself unusually pressured by them to the point of breaking today. Imre nodded, Márton took the greeting. The Steiner boy's laugh could he heard far from the square, they both looked that way. Márton smiled. He'd never wanted to be crippled by jealousy but the fact that it had passed so quickly, that was a surprise.

Translated by Ralph Berkin