

## schoolmates

if you've ever spent a year in an american elementary school  
you're probably familiar with this phenomenon.

"my family is german"

"we're polish and irish and slavic"

"I'm hungarian" I would say,  
believing this to be the appropriate  
way to partake.

"no" I would say,  
"but both of my parents were."

furrowed brows.

"you are not hungarian"

the hypocrisy was always so plain to me  
it felt redundant to even point out.

"my mom's side is italian but my dad's is  
german. I'm half-and-half!"

their faces would blink at me.

"were you born there?"

they did not ask each other where they were  
born.

"you're american"

"you are not hungarian"

*italian? can you speak italian? do your mother's fingers drip flour because she's never been taught to  
bake things from boxes? to buy canned and prepped? do you visit your german family and speak  
deustch?*

*"I'm polish and czechoslovakian"  
they'd continue.*

*it's two countries now, I'd think  
do you know your tribe?*

people are very impressed with me now  
first-generation american  
bilingual  
dual-citizen  
huge, curling hair  
darker, hairier skin

it makes me wonder where their assuredness went.  
every friend and half-acquaintance  
across four school districts  
confident in naming who I was.

*I would look and sound the same had I been born over british airspace in a plane on my mom's way  
back home. where are you from? what do these words mean? where does your heart feel happy and  
your skin feel safe?*

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Anna (Ah-na) Bagoly is a Hungarian-American who just completed their MA in Poetry at USM. They are fascinated with recreating memories that immerse in sensation and imagery, blending poetry and creative nonfiction. They've been published in *dead peasant* and *Wingless Dreamer*, won the Memorial Fellowship at *Heavy Feather Review*, and have recorded a piece with the Mississippi Coalition Against Sexual Assault.