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I've only ever visited Romania in the summer.

I get the feeling that I'm missing out on something important. Which, probably, I am. I've never seen the country during three quarters of the year. What does Iasi look like during those three quarters of the year? I could never tell you. I could tell you of the omnipresent heat that hangs heavy in every corner of the city in June, but that's an awful thing to talk about. I leave Austin to escape the heat, only to find it again in Romania.

The funny thing is, I don't think I would want to visit Romania in any other season except summer. My mother once showed me a picture of Gura Humorului in December. It looked like my grandmother's street, all the houses and telephone posts exactly where they should've been, but it wasn't quite right. There was ice and snow everywhere, how you would imagine the world to look like if Ragnarok suddenly hit, and it wasn't quite right.

Even my favorite place in the world - a fat stretch of land in Bucovina, before the border with Ukraine - is only my favorite place in the world when it's in the summer. Take a car to anywhere vaguely North, step off the side of the road, and all you see for miles are rolling hills. In some places it's green, particularly after the rain, and you can see a shepherd a bit in the distance. In other's it's yellow because of the crops. Sometimes at dusk, the light hits the grass just right and I don't know what it is but there's something almost magical in the air. But that magic exists only in the summer. Or at least to me it exists only in the summer. I don't know if the hills would be my favorite place anymore in winter. I don't think the magic would still be there.

And here's the truth: my Romania, the one in my head, is something I've clobbered together with bits and pieces from my life and made for myself. I've only visited in the summer. Everything I know about the culture, the language, I learned from my parents and their parents, but can you imagine how many important, minute details got caught on the wayside? I've never seen the full picture of what Romania truly is, and sadly, I don't think I ever will.

Romania is something with a bit of substance that I can latch onto and say, look, here's my heritage. I can point at a map and show how my mother is from all over Bucovina. My father grew up in Iasi. My grandmother is from some tiny cluster of houses in the middle of a field right there under the pad of my finger and the name of a town 30 km away from it sounds oddly like the word for frog. I can't even begin to talk about how proud I am of those little facts. I love talking about Romania. It's my heritage, it's *mine*, and it makes me so happy to have something I can almost feel between my fingers.

But Romania - Romania the country and society of today - that isn't mine. When I go to visit, I feel a bit like an imposter. People want me to melt right in, to fly thousands of miles over from America and act as if I was from there all along, but I can't do that. When I'm there, I smile but it doesn't reach my eyes. I have the urge to tap my fingers to let out the uneasiness I feel. I don't like walking down the streets because I'm a beacon that practically screams foreigner. There's a distance between me and everything, everyone, else and I can't breach it.

I'm asked of Romania and I think of Bucovina, and the summer heat, and the stories my parents have told me, and the food I eat almost everyday at home, and I think of that distance - that awful feeling that I can't quite reach what I'm supposed to be. I wish I could speak to somebody about how uncomfortable it is, to not be of the same nationality as what you've been told of your family since the day you were born. I used to be so jealous of kids who grew up in the same country their parents were from because their parents were German, Canadian, Chinese, and

they were German, Canadian, Chinese, too. But I don't have that privilege. I only have one quarter of the year in Romania and what my family can give me.

But even though I was raised in America, even though I'm not really Romanian, my heritage is so intricately twisted into my identity that I can't cut it out. Thirty years from now, I'll still be eating zacusca on my bread at breakfast, and when my parents are gone and no one for me to speak with in Romanian, I'll still be able to read it. My favorite place in the world will continue to be that Northern strip of Bucovina in the summer and I won't lose any of my memories of my grandparent's homes.

I'm not truly Romanian, at least I don't consider myself to be, not in the same way somebody born and raised there would. But Romania, whatever it is, is a part of me. It's my family, the food I eat, a language I can understand, childhood memories, it's even the distance I feel to the culture - it's a part of my life that I can't separate from everything else. I can't tell you what Romania represents to me because there's too much. Romania is not just a symbol. It's so much more. It's in every aspect of my life. It's what I am and what I will be. It's what makes me me. It's who I am.