Matter, or What They Name You

J.D. Isip

Ho-zay was too brown. Whore-hay, too. Keep the José losing the zay, dishwasher safe, Joe, nodding his head for each word he can’t say that he’s not even Mexican, but Spanish is close enough to Tagalog and nobody cares José—What the f is “a Philippines” anyway?

Tell you what, I’ll call you George
Which stuck, but he kept the Jay so José lives on in one letter and the lesser son of Jorge, the gay one he split with his first wife, not an even split there was always more of her which made him that way

Margaret was Mexican but I didn’t know that until she died and suddenly I wasn’t Italian, or any more special than every other wetback praying to Mother Mary, crossing myself, head bent low before every other ass asking Do you speak English?

Tell you what, it doesn’t matter, José
Or whatever you call yourself. It’s not José or Margie—dancing to Disco Italiano, teaching me each move and stories about my family that never existed, descendants of a noble Roman lieutenant who fought for some war, there are so many, besides, we’re dancing

Joe was a bartender at Don the Beachcomber, Margie ordered sweet Seagram’s 7 on ice, they named me for their union, which lasted eight years—leaving me to explain that the Jay is not silent, that the Oh is long, that it’s not ethnic—Tell you what, call me J.D. It doesn’t matter.