

Palimpsest with Missing Name
by Jonathan X, Liu

I kept the book for years.
Not to read it—
only because it always opened
to the same page.
No matter how I shelved it:
spine-up, face-down,
inside a ziploc bag with salt
and a photograph of a door—
it found the seam in the air
and lay itself flat again.

It wasn't even mine.
No inscription, no colophon,
just the word **remember**
three times on the same leaf,
each in a different hand,
none of which
I recognized as human.

The paper warped slightly
in one corner,
where a sentence bent like a spine
carrying a name
that had been scratched out
with something finer than a needle.
Not erased—
but cinched.
The fibers caved
around the absence
like skin around an exit wound.

I never asked my mother.
She once ironed tulips
between wax paper
until they became language.
Then she buried the sheets

in the freezer.
Said, *some kinds of silence*
need cold to keep.
She meant something.
But she always spoke like that.
Metaphor was her only allergy.

Once, she held my wrist
to the side of her throat
and said: *feel it.*
This is where I keep
the names I never gave you.
I didn't understand,
but the beat was there.
It pulsed
like a moth caught in the mouth
of a taxidermied fox.

I closed the book.
I burned sage.
I buried it under the plum tree
we never planted
but still watered.
I waited for the ground
to forget the shape
of its cover.

It didn't.
Every so often,
a page flaps up from the soil
like a tongue
unsure of the word
it was told not to say.