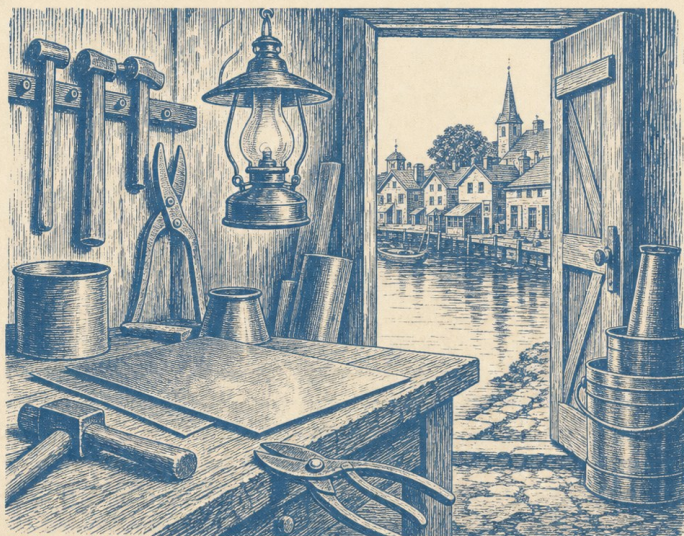


COLDWATER HOUSE

The Tinsmith's Daughter

Perla Nguyen



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THE TINSMITH'S DAUGHTER.

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BY
PERLA NGUYEN

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For anyone who inherited a toolbox.

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1 The shop

THE shop smelled the way it always had, of flux and cold metal and the dust that gathers on things nobody moves. Mara stood in the doorway for a while before she went in. She had told herself, on the drive up, that it would be smaller than she remembered. It was not smaller. It was exactly the size of her childhood, which is to say it was the whole world.

Because she kept the shop key on the same ring as her car, getting in was not a decision she had to make twice. The lock still stuck. She had to lift the door a little on its hinges, the way her father had, the way he had shown her once without saying he was showing her anything.

Inside, the light came gray through the high windows. His bench was as he had left it. A seam half finished. A pot of solder gone hard. Tools laid out in the order of a hand that expected to come back.

Mara did not touch anything. She stood in the middle of the room and let it be quiet. Somewhere a pipe ticked as the building warmed. She had come to sell the place, to sign what needed signing and drive home by dark. She understood, standing there, that this was not going to be that kind of trip.

2 Solder

HER father had a way of explaining things that made them sound like advice about living. He would hold the iron the way another man might hold a pen, and he would say that solder is just two metals agreeing to hold, and you could not force the agreement, you could only make the conditions right and wait.

Mara had not believed him then. She had been sixteen and certain that everything worth knowing was elsewhere. Now she stood at his bench with his iron cold in her hand, trying to remember the order of it. Clean the joint. Warm both sides evenly. Let the metal want the seam before you fed it anything.

The first try beaded up and rolled off, useless, a little silver ball that skittered under the vise. The second held for a moment and then let go. She was patient in a way that surprised her. She had not been patient with him, at the end, when patience was the only thing he needed from her.

On the fourth try the seam took. She watched it draw down bright and then dull as it cooled, the two edges gone quietly to one. It was a small repair. It held. She set the iron down and did not trust herself to look at it too long.

Also by Perla Nguyen

The Weight of Salt (2019). A widowed lighthouse keeper measures out her grief in the small rituals of a coast that is slowly being sold.

Low Green Country (2022). Two estranged sisters spend a wet spring clearing their mother's flooded farmhouse and the silences inside it.

What the River Keeps (2024). A linked collection following one mill town across a century, told in the objects its people leave behind.

About the author

Perla Nguyen writes quiet fiction about people who work with their hands. She trained as a metalworker before she trained as a writer, and both trades, she says, are mostly about knowing when to stop. She lives in a river town not unlike the one in these pages.