

# Hephaestus

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# A Rough Day

"Home Gramp." Dani called as she opened the door. A decade of practice had her through as it swung to a stop just short of the dent in the wall, unclipping her keys for their hook on the wall, battered canvas jacket on top of it.

"You eat?" She stopped in the door that lead to the den. There was a gentle snore in response, so she moved on. Her haven awaited her.

The light buzzed awake as she entered her forge. Her pre-work checklist came first - scanning her tools for damage, cracked handles, missed spots from their last oiling, anything spilled. The propane bottle was secure and full, her welding equipment was still hung, the bottles closed and lines emptied. A quick pass with a magnet sweeper caught shavings she had missed. Finally, all her duties taken care of, she donned her apron, opened the fuel line and lit it. As the first, cooler flames lit with a dull echo she took another breath. She could feel the rage curling in her gut, where she had held it fast since work. *Soon* she told it. The blower flicked on, the flames began to jet properly for the temperatures she needed. She picked up a blank from her scrap pile and put it in to heat. There were projects half finished, but they all needed more planning. There were a few commissions, but they were all pretty, delicate work. That wasn't what she needed.

She turned, surveying her hammers. She didn't need to think, really. Her first hammer, the first that was hers, that she forged herself in a back alley from a railroad spike in the sketchiest forge that should never have existed, supervised only by the local drunk and using a sledge hammer stolen from the biggest hardware store nearby at the time. It had been reworked over the years, and was still less well shaped than her more recent work. But it felt warm in her hand, the worn wrapping on its most recent handle fit her fingers like they had been molded in. And this didn't need perfection. She took her tongs back up and pulled out the bar, now a dull cherry color.

She inhaled deeply, placed it on the anvil and loosened her hold on her emotions at last.

Her hammer slammed down, rage flowing from her gut down her arm as she squashed it, the long heated bar compressing from bar stock into something closer to a square. The clanging of the hammer against the metal echoed against the walls, mixing with her heavier breathing, until the first step was done and the metal returned to the furnace to heat.

It hadn't been a terrible day. Not really. She liked fab work, as long as she was actually machining and it wasn't just going into the CNC and watching the computer do all the fun parts. Turning out custom work, a small batch of bolts with an oddly profiled thread today, was almost calming. Leaving though... She liked Bill. He was usually at the first intersection she passed on her walk home and it had been cold the last few days. He didn't have it all together, but he was friendly.

She didn't expect the black eye, or the rip in his jacket. He didn't tell her what had happened when she asked. Didn't look her in the eye as she handed him the five. He was too busy scanning behind her, looking at people's faces as he shifted nervously.

She pulled the piece back out and got to work drawing the tip out, keeping the sides distinct. This part was trickier, getting the angle right freehand. But the shape was in her mind, and it was important. This wouldn't be graceful or slim. Not today. It went back in.

She thought it was some of the shithead kids, until his face went pale. She had been turning to go, so she saw where he was looking. Two uniforms were walking over, and he was gone before she could even ask.

"Was he bothering you... sir?" The pause was blatantly intentional. It was never pleasant but from these pigs it stabbed and twisted. "We had reports the last few days of someone loitering and bothering local citizens. We had a talk with him a few days ago, but it seems like he doesn't want to change or get the help we tried to get him to."

Dani's voice stayed level, her face stayed as flat as always. "No officer, I've seen him around a few times and he's always been respectful and friendly. No bother." The invective stayed in her throat, burning. Her hands stayed in her pockets where her fists could squeeze her knuckles white and not be seen.

"Well, give us a call if you see him again. He needs help, and the people deserve peace on their commute."

She nodded, not sure she could stop herself from martyring the soldier of the state in front of her if she did any more.

Returning to the present, she brought the spike out of the furnace. The shape was obvious now as she placed it on the rounded dye on the anvil. She probably could have done this at least as effectively with a fuller. One sat happily on her hammer rack. But *her* hammer sang in her hand, the weight of it satisfying and happy. She'd made grips on the metal before, even though it usually made more sense to do a separate handle from wood. This needed it. It allowed for no softness, no give. Four indents later, it went back in for the final heat.

Two sharp blows against the cutting dye separated it from the remaining stock. Her mind was full of scared eyes and a fleeing back as the water hissed and bubbled, quenching the ugly implement. While it cooled she stopped the blower, closed the fuel valve. Wiped off the anvil, put her apron back. Finally she fished out the finished spike, deliberately crude but with a wicked point and clear handhold. It went next to her other works as she flipped off the light and went to make dinner for Gramps. The fire in her heart never truly died, but the sweat on her arms and forehead banked it somewhat. Until the next time.