

# FORGED BY LIGHTNING

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A NOVEL OF HANNIBAL AND SCIPIO

*Angela Render*

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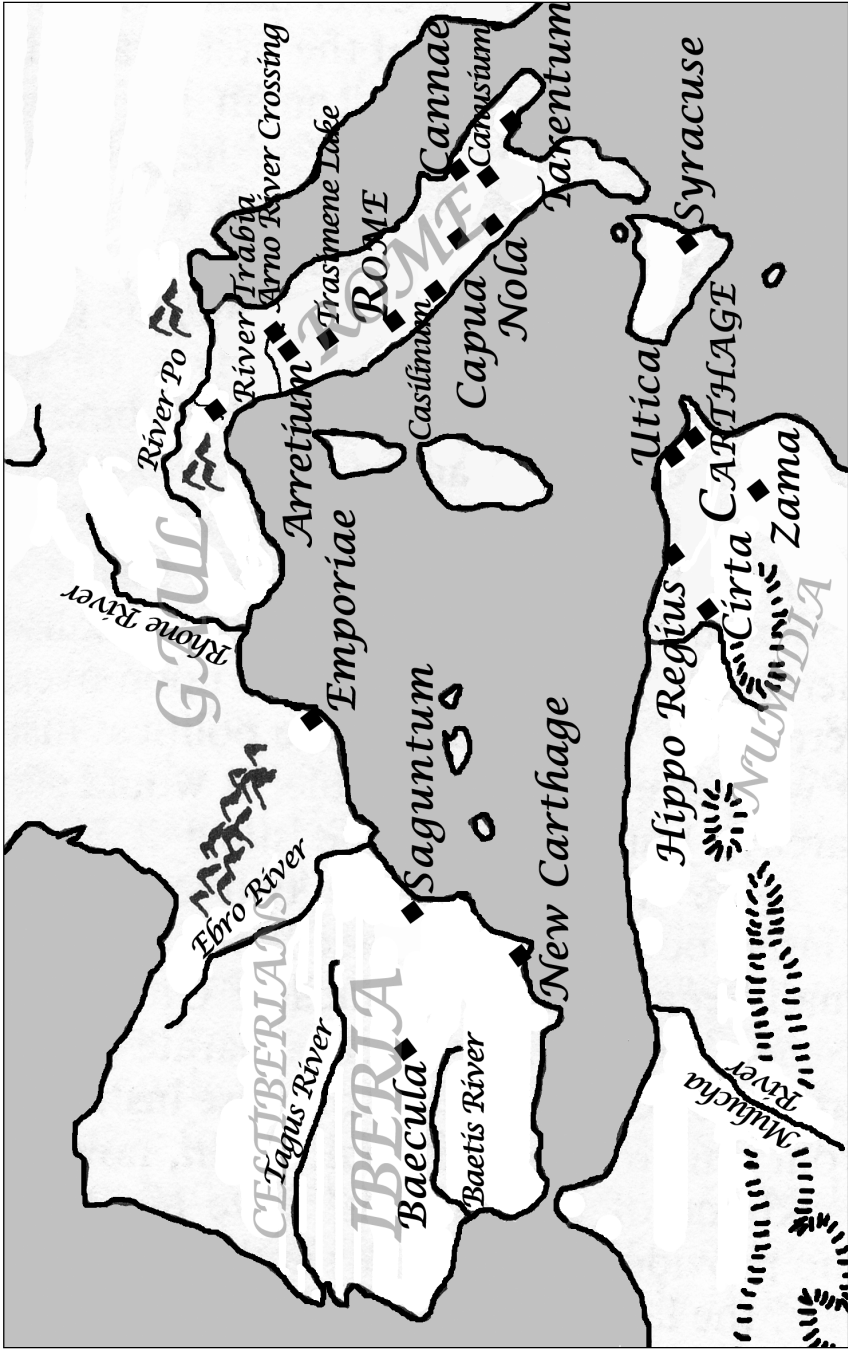
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## *Prologue*

Iberia - 235 BCE

**T**he fading pinks and oranges of the sunset back-lit the fire that blazed on the hilltop altar. The full moon was just rising. Hannibal watched the light play across his father's lined face as the old man slit the throat of the squirming sacrificial goat and placed the carcass on the altar fire. The flickering light cast unflattering shadows on the celebrated warrior's refined features. The general had removed his helmet in reverence to the Goddess and his sweat-soaked hair lay plastered to his head. Flecks of mica glinted in his finely trimmed beard where the relentless wind had blown them. His bleached leather armor glowed with eerie luminescence in the silvery moonlight and its red inlayed ancient symbols stood out in black contrast.

## *Forged by Lightning*

But all of these details were peripheral to Hannibal. At this moment it was his father's eyes that captured his attention. The celebrated Carthaginian general who had earned the title Barca, or lightning, was still a young man, but those soft brown eyes that had gazed on Hannibal with pride-filled love were now cold with war-won wisdom and bitter disappointment. Hannibal hardly recognized his father now, though he'd been at his side every day for the last three years, the war with Rome had taken so much out of the regal Carthaginian noble.

The "Lightning General of Carthage" had struck terror in the hearts of the Romans. Those backwater farmers fancied themselves worldly traders and masters of the sea. We would have won, Hannibal thought bitterly. We were winning until that ill-fated storm off the coast of Sicily brought an intact Carthaginian warship into the Romans hands. With unbelievable speed, the Romans copied that ship and built a navy that had turned the war in their favor. The Romans even found a way to bring their superior land forces into a sea battle. They used long planks and grappling hooks to couple their ships to those of the enemy and bring their trained land troops across. Hannibal swore he would not forget that lesson. Even a cur could surprise you with a clever trick now and then. Carthage had lost Sicily and Sardinia, the reasons they'd gone to war in the first place. They'd also conceded a limit to their empire in Iberia, making the Ebro river the northern border.

The concessions had been an insult as had the forced tribute, though Carthage was rich enough to afford it. The uneasy peace treaty was even more unpalatable to the undefeated Hamilcar, who raged on more than one occasion that Carthage had given in too soon. Hannibal understood all this even though he was nine years old. He'd fought at his father's side since he

was six and had eagerly trained to accept the legacy of Hamilcar Barca, the greatest general in Carthage's great, long history.

The lightning general placed his hand on the smoldering corpse and prayed, "Oh, Great Tanit, lovely Goddess of the sky and protector of men, I, Hamilcar Barca swear to you that I will avenge this insult to You and restore Your great city to its rightful place in the world. If not I, then my son. This I swear." The weathered face of his father turned to him and whispered, "Swear it, Hannibal. Swear it my son."

Hannibal stepped forward boldly and placed his hand on the sacrifice, ignoring the heat that scorched his palm. "I swear it."

# *Book 1*

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## *Chapter 1*

Iberia - Fall 219 BCE

“**I** swear it,” Hannibal whispered, placing his hand on the burning corpse. The rising moon shown brightly on his face and he fancied the Goddess to whom that orb was sacred smiled on him. This hilltop overlooked the city of Saguntum and the port that had made it rich, but Hannibal's mind kept superimposing the image of another hilltop from another time. He wondered at the temporal vertigo and then embraced it, deciding that Tanit remembered his childhood promise and approved his method of keeping it.

He stepped back from the make-shift altar and watched the flames dance over his offering. He dedicated the victory to Tanit, his patron Goddess, as was just and proper. The Goddess had blessed his family and he would soon make good on his father's promise to put the Romans back in their place. This was a small start, but a start nonetheless. Tanit's consort, Baal

Hammon, the other great protector of Carthage, would be equally pleased with a war. His thirst for blood and death would be well quenched. Hannibal was careful to honor Melquart as well. The ancient God was the patron of Tyre, Carthage's mother land, and therefore a patron of the Barca family who were direct descendants of the founding queen, Dido.

Hannibal's only regret was that his father hadn't been there to do it himself. The brisk autumn wind blew the acrid smoke back into his face, making his eyes squint and water. He inhaled the sweetly pungent mixture of herbs and flesh that was sacred to Tanit.

Saguntum had been difficult to take. Hannibal still nursed a puncture wound in his thigh from a ballista bolt and took to heart the lessons learned from the siege. The enemy had sent emissaries to Rome for help, forcing Hannibal to take the city by storm. Had he not, the Roman delegation dispatched to Carthage to protest Hannibal's movements might have forced the Carthaginian Senate into a treaty that would have bound Hannibal's hands. Hannibal's allies in Carthage had stalled the Roman audience to the Carthaginian Senate and pre-disposed all but Hannibal's family's most staunch enemy, the elder Hanno, against the Roman-backed Saguntum delegation. The elder Hanno's words hadn't effected the decision of the Carthaginian Senate or of the ratifying popular assembly, but they were a concern to him.

Hannibal allowed himself a grin as he imagined the fat, old spice trader, richly dressed in his blue and indigo silk robes, addressing the Carthaginian Senate from his velvet lounge. He could almost see the flushed cheeks and dark glittering eyes as his family's enemy pounded his beringed fist on the edge of his Senatorial box to emphasize each point. Hannibal's smile faded. Saguntum was not the end of his ambitions and the elder

Hanno would prove to be a problem in a drawn out engagement.

So the war would have to be short. It would be nice if the audacity of his plan would frighten the spineless Roman bumpkins into submission, but he was too experienced to count on it. The Roman's opinion of themselves was too high for that, at any rate. One good battle fought on Roman soil should do the trick, though. If not, King Philip of Macedon had promised support.

Taking Saguntum had been risky, but it had also been critical. Besides being the enemy of several tribes who would now support him with warriors, Saguntum was a rich port city from which he could re-supply his troops once they were in Roman territory. It was also a chance for him to blood his troops and get a feel for how they'd react in battle. He massaged the wound in his thigh as he remembered the near disaster. An ill-timed visit to his siege engines had provided the opportunity and his men faltered when they saw him fall, the mantall, barbed spike pinning him to his dying horse. He'd been lucky that it had punctured flesh and muscle alone and that treatment had come quickly. Thousands had been needlessly lost in the counter-attack launched by the Saguntumites when they thought his men would desert. They hadn't though, and not only repulsed the attack, but took the city as well. He was confident of them now. As confident of them as they were of him, who they swore was his father come back to them. Hamilcar Barca was undefeated and his men loved him.

Saguntum was still within Carthage's treaty borders, but Hannibal knew the delegation they sent to the Romans would complicate matters. It was a calculated risk, but technically he hadn't yet broken the treaty. That would come in the spring, when Rome would feel the full force of his army and the indignity of this treaty would be erased forever.

He turned to descend the hill and nearly ran into his wife. He groaned inwardly. She was not the person he wanted to see just then. Glaring at his bodyguards for not challenging her or at least alerting him when they knew he wanted solitude, he took a deep breath in an effort to still his mind. He had to be in complete control with her. He did wonder how long she'd been standing there and how, even six months pregnant, she could move so quietly. She wore the simple leggings, shirt and tunic of her people, dyed a dark sorrel green. The pale marigold embroidery of her father's crest stood out in stark contrast at the neckline. Her skin was creamy and exuded a healthy radiance that enhanced her beauty. Her long, thick red-gold hair was elegantly styled, framing her heart shaped face. She gazed at him with impassive pale blue eyes, her full lips set in an appraising frown.

He squelched his irritation and asked, "You wanted something?"

"I want to understand you," her rich, low voice intoned quietly.

"It is my fate. The fate of my father that I choose as my own." Hannibal could feel no emotion behind that still mask, but the intensity in her gaze was draining. He immediately regretted his flippant answer. She was too smart to be manipulated and too straight-forward to respond to flattery, though she religiously wore the several pieces of carved ivory jewelry he'd given her. Incredibly, she'd somehow guessed that he wanted to invade Rome and had instantly opposed the idea, though he knew she'd kept the knowledge to herself. They'd already had several arguments over the matter and he did not relish another. "I made a promise," he admitted. He'd never told anyone about the promise he and his father had made all those years ago.

"To who?"

"Tanit Herself."

“What did you promise?”

“That I would set right the treaty with Rome.”

The conversation should have broken down into a terse, controlled contest of wills by now. These bouts never turned into shouting matches. He'd learned quickly that Imilce thought a raised voice indicated a weak point. It had infuriated him even more to realize that she was right. He did shout when his position was weak. He'd schooled himself against shouting at her, so their arguments were very quiet and very intense, and actually far more psychologically and emotionally draining than any shouting match had ever been.

“Do you hate the Romans so much?”

“Of course I don't hate them,” the question surprised him. The Romans had treacherously attacked a Carthaginian colony, sparking a twenty-year war, then continued to twist and manipulate the resulting treaty. Their efforts to provoke Carthage into another war had only intensified after Carthage had offered to pay off the last of the indemnity five years early, demonstrating her prosperity in the face of the victor who was still struggling to recover from the war. The Romans were not honorable people and needed an object lesson badly, but Hannibal didn't hate them and couldn't afford to. Emotions were for the common soldier. Righteous indignation got them into the field. Inspirational words lifted their morale and gave them hope. Fear of death or defeat made them fight harder. A good leader put his own emotions aside so he could see things objectively, while inspiring his men. “You can't hate an enemy and expect to defeat him.”

She regarded him, her expression unreadable. Hannibal's uneasiness returned. He was convinced that the fiery warrior in her could leap out at him at any given moment and he doubted that he would survive

such an assault. She sighed before commenting, “I still think it’s a bad idea. We’ll leave in spring?”

Hannibal laughed, a short bark that he instantly regretted. “We,” he stressed the word, “no. You are staying here. War is no place for a girl.”

“Really?” her eyebrow twitched in a manner that he was beginning to recognize as amusement. “So you’ll reject the third of my father’s warriors who are women?”

He’d forgotten that. He would have thought growing up in Iberia, among the native tribes there, would have conditioned his thinking otherwise, but he was still of a mind that women should be protected. Certainly a princess and the mother of a respected noble family’s heirs should not be put in danger. Most of all, she was a distraction. He couldn’t deny his physical attraction to her, he was stiffening in anticipation even as they argued. But he also couldn’t ignore the fact that she unsettled him as no armed warrior on the battlefield ever had, constantly making him feel defensive and unbalanced. He didn’t need to be arguing with her when his concentration should be focused on war. “No,” he said. “I’ll accept any warriors your father is kind enough to supply. It’s you I want to leave behind.” The admission was a calculated risk, much as the sack of Saguntum had been. When she didn’t immediately contradict him, he went on, “You’re pregnant. You’re a liability to me on the field and more so if you’re captured.”

Her even, white teeth glinted in the moonlight, but her smile was feral not friendly. “Clever of you to omit your primary reason.”

Hannibal shrugged, “Stated or unstated it is a concern. I can’t afford to be distracted.”

“Or stabbed in the back.” She folded her arms across her full, firm breasts as she gazed at him, weight

balanced solidly over her feet. “You are the most brilliant general since Alexander of Macedon. I think you’re better than your father.” Her candid words further unbalanced him. She’d never once voiced a compliment of any kind to him and he was forced to wonder if this wasn’t her way of using flattery against him. He listened to her next words warily. “But...” Now that was more like it. “While you are a formidable warrior, you must divide your attention during battle. Your ability to concentrate on problems and make contingency plans while not letting other things distract you is also your greatest weakness. You can’t lead and plan and fight at the same time. Have you forgotten the near disaster that caused?” She motioned toward his bandaged thigh. “Who will watch your back?”

She’d been furious with him for getting hurt. Her blistering harangue had burned his ears even as Synbalus, his Alexandrian trained *Iatrós*, bandaged the wound with deft fingers after washing it well with wine and smearing it with honey and olive oil. He wasn’t certain what had hurt more, the wound, her ridicule of him for taking such a risk, or the fact that she was right. It had been a stupid mistake and only added weight to her current argument. She was a warrior, not the wife of a warrior who would have been concerned, sympathetic and nurturing. He’d gritted his teeth through the experience, wishing that his injury had been bad enough to visit the physicians in his medical division. He swore never to get wounded again if only to be spared her sharp tongue.

“Hanno, Maharbal. You can’t argue with their competence. And do you think all these men here will be playing a game of dice during the battle?” He indicated his bodyguards with a wave of his hand.

The Hanno he spoke of was an estranged nephew to Hannibal’s enemy in Carthage. They’d both fought at

his father's side in the last war with Rome and had gotten along well, but it had been Hanno's recent marriage that had shifted his allegiances from the powerful Hanno clan to that of an allied family of Hannibal's. Hannibal stifled his pang of regret. Hanno had married for love, a thing Hannibal could not afford to do. Not that Hannibal had ever allowed himself the luxury of finding a love. There was too much to do to prepare for this war.

Maharbal was nephew to King Syphax of Numidia and the most skilled leader the Numidians had seen in generations. Hannibal silently thanked his father yet again for having the foresight to bind Syphax to the Barca family and to Carthage by marrying Hannibal's sister to the King. That little bit of politics had brought Hannibal Maharbal and a full division of Numidians, the finest horsemen in the world.

"I can."

"How?"

"Maharbal is reckless and bold. He and Hanno will be too busy leading divisions of their own to watch out for your personal safety."

"Those traits make Maharbal a perfect cavalry officer, and Hanno is a commander, not a bodyguard."

"My point exactly." Imilce took a deep breath and let it out. She visibly calmed and stepped toward him, taking his hand in both hers. "My place is with you."

For a moment, he actually thought her concern might be for him personally, not for him as general of the army that protected her homelands. He immediately dismissed the notion as ridiculous. "You won't go. I forbid it."

She dropped his hand with an exasperated snort, "You men. Forbidding things to get your way in the face of reality."