

# “Only the very toughest of people should ever go back to places where they’ve been happy.”

by Jimmy Yang

Gaius Aemilius Scaurus looked over the plain of Cannae and grimaced. The plain hadn't changed much. The grass was still a dull brown with a tinge of green, just over ankle height. As the wind blew over it, the grass rippled like the waves of the sea. The few trees that stood in the field were still small and unimportant. But the scene was beautiful, and it brought back fond memories from Gaius' childhood...

He was five again, and living in the village of Cannae. Running through the grass, it was almost up to his waist. Gaius laughed as he chased after his elder brother and sister. He leaped forward and clung to his brother's tunic and was dragged forward, still giggling until his brother tripped, and they fell to the ground in heap, chuckling. Marcus would pretend to fight with Gaius and they would throw light punches at each other while their sister watched over them quietly.

His memory then drifted to the age of seven. He had played hide and seek in these fields, lying flat in the grass, hoping that his brother and sister wouldn't see him there. He had also learnt how to ride. His first pony was chestnut-coloured with a white patch above each eye. He had felt tall, strong and proud as he sat atop the saddle, and had ridden in a dignified way around the plain until his father had taught him to gallop, to rein in and how to charge. From that day on, Gaius had enjoyed riding, both in leisure and in war.

Then he was ten. Holding his father's hand, Gaius had been led by him around the field. As a ex-legionary, and now a biologist or sorts, Quintus Aemilius went around the plain, finding insects like ants and grasshoppers, beetles and bugs, and showed them to his enthusiastic young son, who cradled them in his small hands, and asked curiously, “Tata<sup>1</sup> what's this?” and Quintus would tell him. Gaius learnt quickly and was soon able to identify almost all the creatures in the plain.

At thirteen, Gaius remembered being in the field, holding a long wooden sword and a round wooden shield with padded leather. He was also wearing a leather breastplate, leather greaves and an old tin helmet. Marcus, dressed roughly the same, and been training him, and dueling him with the wooden swords. A faint smile twitched at the side of Gaius' mouth as he remembered the feeling of success he had felt at first blow he'd ever landed on his brother. But it was wiped off his face immediately, as it was a similar blow to the shoulder which had ended Marcus' life in the army three years earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> A way for Ancient Roman children to say “dad”

Next Gaius recalls being on the field at the entrance to the village of Cannae. The magistrate comes towards him, holding a large white piece of cloth basically semi-circular in shape. His *toga virilis*. The crimson childhood toga slipped of his arms and shoulders and fell to the ground in a symbolic way as his boyhood dropped away and, as the *toga virilis* was placed on his body, he almost felt the burdens and troubles of adulthood being placed on him.

Now at twenty two, Gaius was here again. Not at his will though. Ever since his parents had died on the same plain two years before, killed by bandits, Gaius had vowed never to return there, and had gone to Rome to seek a new home. He had even joined the army in the hope that the training, fighting and hard work would expel the sadness of their death. But it hadn't, and he was back, and memories were flooding into his head, making it hard for him to concentrate. Suddenly, a legionary tapped him on the shoulder and he shook himself out of his thoughts.

"The consul's order is to advance, sir," the legionary said to Gaius the centurion, and saluted.

"Thank you," Gaius said quietly, and turned to see the Carthaginian forces of Hannibal gathered on the other side of the plain. He looked back over his own maniple of men, and saw faces that he'd known for years, knew their names, and their personalities. Gaius swallowed, did a last minute check of his unit and his own equipment, then raised his arm. As he brought it down to point at the army facing them, trumpets blared out the advance. Gaius marched with his men, breathing heavily, feeling elated, but still haunted by his memories.

At fifty metres away, Gaius ordered his legionaries to throw their spears, their *pila*. Then with a roar, they charged into the ranks of the enemy. As Gaius killed his first Carthaginian of the day, his thoughts returned to his mind, as he shuddered at the thought of this wonderful plain of his childhood, now about to turn into a lake of blood and bodies. He was sure that he should never have come here, he just wasn't brave enough to face the memories of his past. But to beat the enemy and survive was now the key, and so Gaius put his whole heart and energy into killing the Carthaginians in front of him.

But little did he know that by the end of the day, he would be dead, his whole unit and army would be destroyed, and Hannibal's victory at Cannae would be the finest battle against the Romans that he ever fought.