

BIOGRAPHY



KONSTANTINOS KANARIS



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KOSTANTINOS

CHARACTER: KONSTANTINOS KANARIS

DATES: Psara, 1793 / Athene, 2 september 1877

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: GREECE

HISTORICAL PERIOD: 19th century

SUMMARY: Konstantinos Kanaris was born in Psara around 1793. Orphaned, he decides to work on a merchant ship as a sailor; thanks to his efforts, he becomes its captain. In 1821, Greece is dominated by the Ottoman Empire. After a serious attack, Konstantinos decides to avenge his nation and takes part in the revolution. With a small boat he attacks and destroys the opposing ship.

KEY WORDS: SHIP, COURAGE, HERO

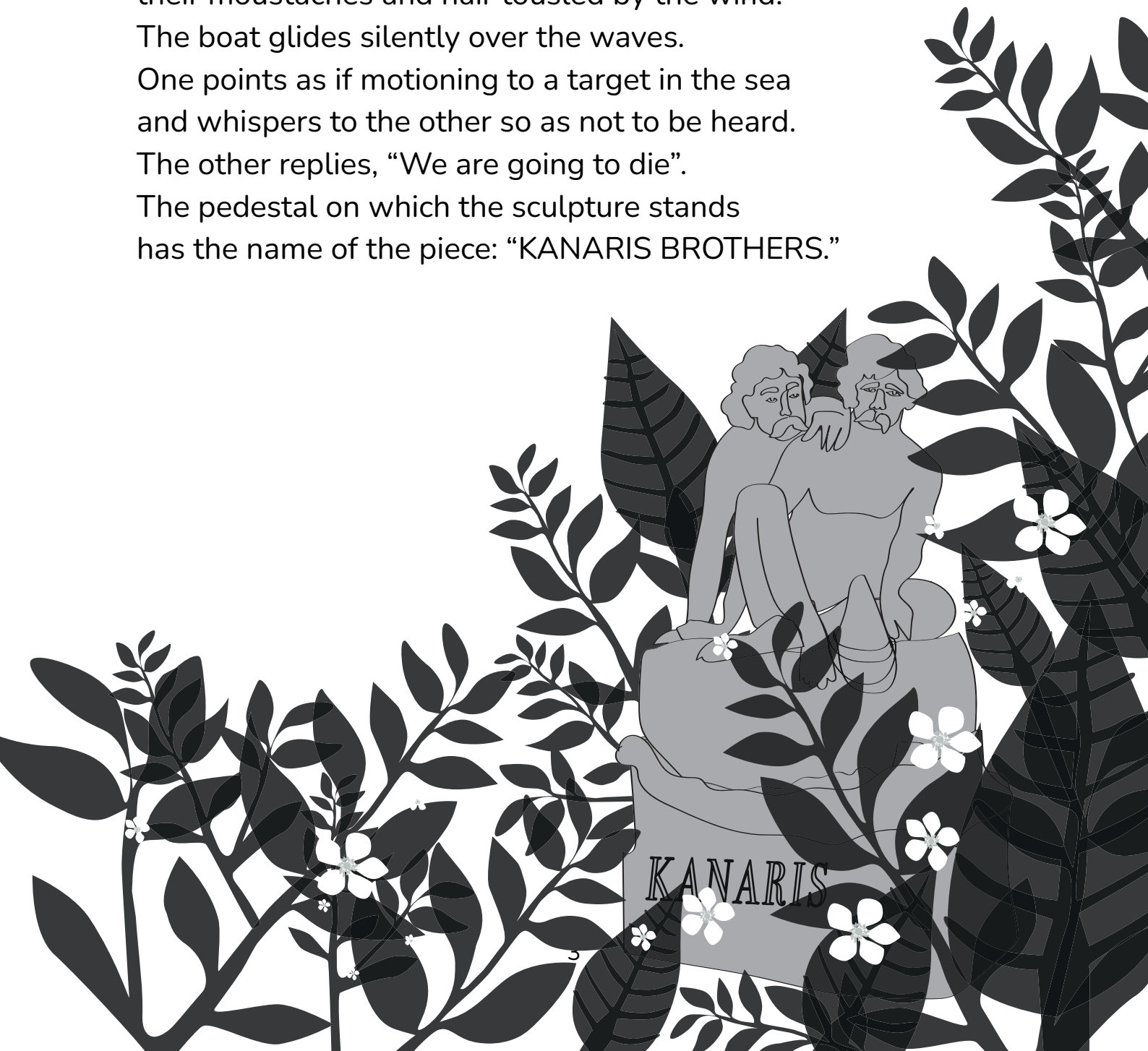
GENRE: BIOGRAPHY

AGE: 5 - 6 YEARS

AUTHOR: Barbara Lachi

KOSTANTINOS

On an island that once belonged to Magna Graecia, in the luxurious English garden in the heart of Palermo, in the shade of palm trees towering from rolling green hills, stands a small temple, which shelters a marble sculpture inside. The sculpture represents two men sitting on a small boat, with one man close behind the other, their moustaches and hair tousled by the wind. The boat glides silently over the waves. One points as if motioning to a target in the sea and whispers to the other so as not to be heard. The other replies, “We are going to die”. The pedestal on which the sculpture stands has the name of the piece: “KANARIS BROTHERS.”



They were not really brothers, but friends, although one could say they were brothers in purpose and courage.

Their story begins long ago on a distant and very small island called Psara.

Konstantinos was born in the late 1700s. Psara was a quiet island. Its rocky and barren landscape was home to the cicadas who sang continuously and to the lizards who basked in the sun. Waves chased each other slowly marking time.

Konstantinos felt that that island and the sea were part of him, as if they were an extension of his thoughts and his heart; he seemed to hear the thoughts of the seagulls shouting happily above him, or the secret language of the thyme.

He jumped over the rocks, nimble and sure, and in the water, he felt as light as a fish.

“Shhh, shh, shhh!” he said imitating the voice of the waves, which indeed responded, “Shh, shhh, shhh!” Konstantinos felt happy with his simple and easy life.



However, as usually happens in fairy tales and more often in real life, his parents would soon die, leaving him alone. As much as he loved his island, Konstantinos decided to leave it and one morning, he embarked as a sailor on a merchant ship.

He worked all day, until the ship and the open sea became his new home. Over the years he had become so successful that he became the captain, but he had never stopped talking to the waves that still answered his call, “Shhh, shhh, shhh!”



Greece had been under Ottoman rule for four hundred years. In 1821 the Greeks rose up, to regain independence of their land. Konstantinos was far away in the Odessa Sea in his merchant ship when news of the war reached him and surprised him.

The enemy army commanded by the fierce Kara-Ali Pasha, had been attacking the island of Chios for fifteen long days. The island, not far from his beloved Psara, had been invaded and destroyed. Its inhabitants hadn't been spared. Konstantinos' heart felt a jolt and almost crashed.

"What was that?" A sailor asked.

"It was my heart. We cannot wait any longer."

Konstantinos forgot the cargo and directed his ship to the islands to gather as many ships as he could.



Upon reaching Psara he called friends and sailors whom he trusted, and together they decided to respond to that horrible and cruel act of war. Ali-Pasha and his soldiers were still on the ship moored in the harbour.



Konstantinos had decided on the plan: “We need two brigs. We will fill them with gunpowder and launch them against the flagship Bourlota Saimaz.”

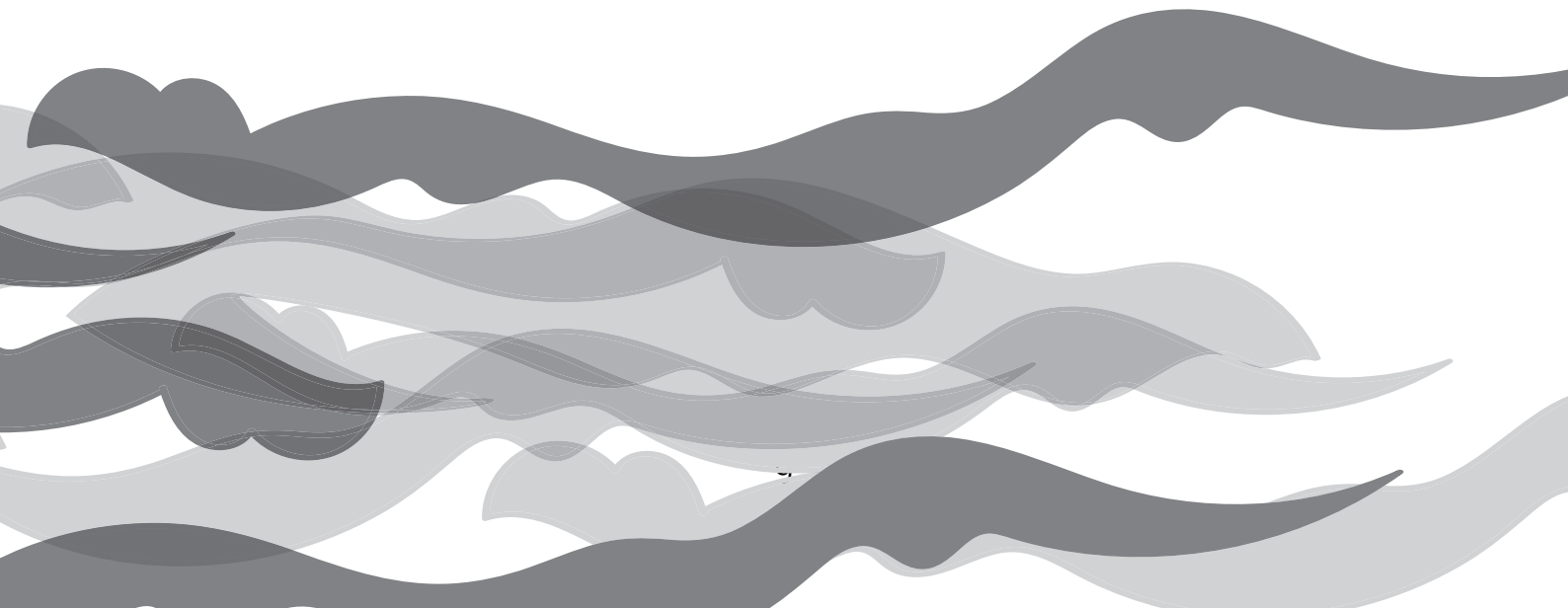
The thirty-six men listened to him in silence, attentive not to miss a single word.

“We will wait until night so we can get closer-I will be on the first brig, the other will be led by Andrea Pipinos.”

The sea of June cradled the ships quietly and calmly. Slowly as the sky tinged black.

The two boats headed silently toward the ship. When Andreas launched his boat, the blast jolted the crew.

Konstantinos proceeded to the opposite side, the waves reassuring him as usual, “shhh, shhh, shhh...”





Sitting in the bow of the ship with lowered sails, he saw the ship getting closer and closer and just before towards it he told himself, “You’re going to die.”

Then he heard a roar and the ship caught fire, with the cannons and the gunpowder inside exploding one after another.

Konstantinos was thrown into the water that protectively closed over him as if to protect him. “Shhh, shhh, shhh...” said the waves as Konstantinos swam away from the roar and fire.



The fire lit up the sky and the sea, which immediately engulfed the enormous ship as if it was the stomach of a giant, dragging it to the bottom with the entire crew. Konstantinos was safe, and incredulously he watched the ship disappear.



It took another eight years before Greece regained its freedom.
Konstantinos set fire to and defeated other ships.
His feats were recounted in the newspapers, moving the world
and inspiring artists such as Delacroix and Victor Hugo...



But they also inspired artist Benedetto Civiletti, who sculpted the two fraternal friends, imagining them together at the precise moment when their ship was about to strike.

“There it is in front of us”, whispered Andreas.

“We are going to die”, replied Konstantinos.



After the war ended Konstantinos continued to help his country, becoming a politician and serving as prime minister several times. He married and had seven children. He died in Athens on 2 September 1877.





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