

The Woman Who Never Lost a Birth

A true story of refugee life,
creation and survival

Kyriakos Kazantzis

Thessaloniki, 2026

© 2026 Kyriakos Kazantzis

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or digital reproduction, without the prior written permission of the author. This work is the intellectual property of the creator and is protected by Greek and international copyright laws.

First Edition 2026 Thessaloniki

DEDICATION

In memory of those who were uprooted,
yet did not break.
To those who lost everything,
yet held on to life.
And to those who continue,
without forgetting.

PROLOGUE

There are people who did not write history. They lived it. They left no books. They left no words. They did not ask for their names to be given to streets and squares. They left only people. Parthena had no degrees. She had no titles. She had no state behind her. She had only her hands. And a heart that never stopped. The Coppersmith did not become wealthy. He did not become a master. He did not become a hero. He became the one who did not leave. The one who stayed. The one who worked. This story was not written to move. It was written to remind. That once, in a place called Kato Scholari, a woman kept a village alive. And a man built it from nothing. This is their story.

Contents

PROLOGUE	iv
Chapter 1 The Coppersmith of Pontus	7
Chapter 2 The Midwife	13
Chapter 3 The Flight	17
Chapter 4 The Ship	25
Chapter 5 Kato Scholari	31
Chapter 6 The Mill	37
Chapter 7 The First Roots	43
Chapter 8 The Births	47
Chapter 9 The Wicked Tongues	53
Chapter 10 Alone	57
Chapter 11 The Working Man	61
Chapter 12 The Children Who Were Born ..	65
Chapter 13 The Years Pass	69
Chapter 14 The War	73
Chapter 15 The Occupation	77
Chapter 16 Years of Work	81
Chapter 17 Over 100 Years	85
Chapter 18 Death	89
Chapter 19 The Statue in Kato Scholari	93
Chapter 20 The Legacy	97
AUTHOR'S NOTE	101

CHAPTER 1

The Coppersmith of Pontus

His father never spoke to him about dreams. He only spoke to him about work. And work, in the small village outside Trabzon, had a smell. Not one. Many together. Damp earth that never dried, not even in August. Smoke that clung to clothes and would not leave, not even in the river. Salt from the sea that reached the alleys like a hidden breath. And above all: hot iron, reddened copper, fire licking the metal as if choosing it.

The coppersmith's workshop was the warmest place in the village. Not from human warmth. From fire. The furnace was lit before dawn. The flame grew inside its dark belly, and the first thing you heard was the blowing. The bellows. A steady, rhythmic "whoof," as if it had a heart. The boy stood beside it, barefoot in the dust, arms stretched out, pulling and pushing until they burned. Each time the fire opened, sparks flew and licked his face.

They bit his cheeks. They filled his eyelids with heat. Sweat dripped from his forehead and fell to the ground. The earth drank it and turned to mud. The boy did not yet know how to put words to all this. He did not know why he had to do it. He only knew the "must." And in their land, that was law. His father, tall and bent from years over the furnace, lifted the hammer and brought it down with precision.

He did not strike to show strength. He struck as if he were speaking to the metal. One strike, one breath. One strike, one change. When the hammer landed true, the

and then faded, leaving behind something straight, something clean, something that did not exist before. "Metal does not forgive mistakes," he would say without looking at him.

"If you rush, it will burn you. If you fear it, it will not speak to you." The boy watched the sparks fly like small stars, born and gone in the same instant. He felt the heat harden his skin, dry his eyes. Fire taught him before the world did. At eight, he knew how to hold the tool properly, how not to let it slip from sweat. At ten, how to straighten the rim of a cauldron without making it ripple.

At twelve, how to tell good copper from tired copper-the kind that had been worked too many times and no longer held character. His father did not caress him. He did not embrace him. He gave him things to hold. Some days, he let him lift the hammer. Not to strike. Only to hold it. "Learn its weight," he would say. And when the boy tightened his fingers, his father would add, quietly: "It is weight that makes a man. Not strength."

At first, his blows were clumsy. The copper bent. The rim became uneven. His father did not shout. He did not laugh. He did not mock him. He took the hammer, corrected it, and handed it back. As if to say: there is no excuse. Only: "Again." And the boy tried again. That is how he learned patience. He learned that nothing worth having is made quickly. He learned that silence can be heavier than a voice-because within it, judgment lives.

The market of Trabzon was another world. Smells of spices, fish, coffee, and sweat. Voices in many languages. Hands that tested, weighed, doubted. There, the boy saw for the first time people looking at a cauldron the way they look at a future: to endure, not to break, to hold. At fifteen, he made his first cauldron on his own. It was not perfect. It had small irregularities, a rim that still needed work.

But it held water. And it did not break in the fire. His father looked at it for a long time. He did not say "well done." He only said: "Now you are a Coppersmith." That was the entire initiation. No witnesses. No grand words. Only furnace and hammer. And a phrase that fell like a stone in the boy's chest: now you belong. Not to a man. To a craft. At night, they sat in the yard. The air was cool, and the breeze carried the sea from afar like a promise.

That is where Parthena was. Parthena did not make noise in his life. She entered the way water enters the hands: silently-and yet changes everything. She would bring a bowl of water and wash his hands. His hands were full of small wounds: burns, cracks, calluses. She did not pity them. She respected them. She cleaned them with a gesture that said: you will live. They did not speak much.

They did not need to. Their life was small-but full. Some nights they heard a lyra in the distance. Someone sang. Someone laughed. And they remained there, in their silence, as if they had already decided that their happiness would be made of little-but strong things. Once, his father spoke more than usual. It was not advice. It was a warning. "The world is not stable," he said. "Remember this. Only your craft is."

The boy did not understand then. Because at fifteen, you think houses stay where you left them. That roads will wait for you. That people will keep saying "good morning" the same way. But the years changed the air. At first, there were whispers. Then, there were glances that did not hold. In the market, conversations stopped when he passed. In the café, some looked away. In the alleys, words were heard that had never been there before.

"Things will change." "They are gathering men." "They are sending lists." No one said names. Names were dangerous. They killed hope. And when people are afraid, they hold on to hope the way they hold on to wood in the

sea. The coppersmith kept working. The furnace burned. The hammer fell. The metal obeyed. Because metal has rules. People do not. And one night, he felt it in his body: fear had its own smell.

Not like smoke. Not like sweat. Something finer. More insidious. Like cold slipping through a crack. On the last night before the departure, he did not sleep. He rose slowly, left the house, and went to the workshop. He lit the furnace one last time. He made nothing. He sat on a stool and watched the flames. Shadows danced on the walls. The wood creaked. The metal breathed. He stretched out his hand and touched the furnace.

The metal had taught him to endure fire. But it had not taught him to endure separation. He extinguished the fire slowly. Not in haste. As if he were extinguishing a person. And then, for the first time, he whispered: "It is not your fault." He returned home before dawn. Parthena was waiting in the yard. She asked him nothing. She did not say, "Are you ready?" She did not say, "Where will we go?"

She simply placed her hand in his. Like a seal. They both knew: they would never see their home again. The coppersmith bent down. He took a handful of soil in his hands. He clenched it in his fist until his fingers hurt. It was a pain he wanted to keep. Because pain was proof that something had existed. He did not know where he would go. He did not know what he would find. He knew only one thing: Wherever he went, his hands would carry the fire.

And fire, if you care for it, does not die.

