

Nicholas Grapsias

STO EVEREDI

All day, Eleni hardly looks up
as she stands pushing carbon rods into batteries,
the fine black dust over her face,
over her blue tie-back uniform,
over her swollen veined wrists—
today she had them strapped, today, she was coughing.

She wears her mother's scarf in her hair
as the grey sweat falls from the tip of her nose,
the Yugoslav women across from her
stare with their narrow-blue gypsy eyes,
sometimes they would whisper—Eleni was seventeen.

And she did the work of two men,
lifting box after box onto the production line,
batteries on
batteries off
faster and faster—they paid her bonus money.

Sometimes the Australian boss who smelt of alcohol
would turn up the speed of the conveyor belt,
sometimes he would shout—“*Faster Dagos, Faster!*”

Sometimes he would touch the women,
once he touched Eleni—“*No, No, No!!*” she yells
shaking her head and slapping her own shoulder hard,
his glazed grinning eyes ...

Sometimes Eleni would think of her father,
“*Babaka mou, where have I come?*”
Swallowing her tears, she peels off her sooty gloves—
the sweat and blister water of her shrivelled hands
doing all the crying for her.

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