Dimitris Hatzis, The last bear of Pindos

...That sudden little rain made everything, from it everything was born. It took the downhill to the ravine again, it took the uphill to the forest. There it caught him. He stood as long as he could pass - he passed quickly. He took the uphill again slowly to the clearing. The sun shone again, the place remained wet, the whole little meadow. He sat down in his usual place-he was very sad today, he had not opened his tablet; he sat there sadly. All alone - all right. Persecuted, persecuted - by whom? Why?

And all of a sudden, he's got nothing in front of him. He stood up, looked at them, looked again - he couldn't be fooled, he knew. It was them. Her bear tracks, her big feet. It was her. Smalika's bear, Papigo's bear, Poliana's bear - Maro of Pindos. And she was still alive. She was alive too. His sorrow scattered unanimously-his heart beat loudly, the pulse of his mountain breed, his own land. As if he had only just arrived there, only just returned. Those footsteps were becoming now, becoming again, his lost certainty that he had arrived in a place that was not nonexistent, that was not only of his nostalgia, of his imagination-the certainty he had lost among these crazy, half-unconquered, unconquered, defeated people he found on his way back. He went to the other side of the clearing, smudged the place a little with his palms, emptied his tablet there. The next day he started from the morning - the bread, the cheese, that he left her, was not there. He brought her again - and sugar. And the other days - every day. -"Well," said old man Goat. You're going on a big job. Timber? I thought so. Sure, he said without any difficulty. -I'll write to my children in Larissa right away. That's why you didn't want the cleaners. -"Of course," said Skorogiannis again, "big business. -That's what you're studying up there? That's it. Good for you. I knew it. And he was studying it. Very much so. Day after day, the food he left her in the same place. Until he saw her. She emerged from the trees. She stood for a moment - then pulled away to the place where he left her food. She saw him, got scared, made to go back - she stayed there. He stared at her, unblinking. She must have been small, female, she wouldn't have been two years old yet. They stayed like that - looking at each other. The last man of Dobrinovo and the last little bear of Pindos stood there in that clearing of the forest, on either side of it, and looked at each other. ∆Hesitant, hesitant and suspicious - unable to leave - they had nowhere to go. The next day he began his great game: he filled his turban and took the big double-edged knife with him. He sat down in his seat and waited. At the same time yesterday, the animal came out of the trees again. They stood for a moment and looked at each other again. He opened his tray, threw him a piece of bread. The animal took it, went closer now. And third - still closer. He was so close that he had to hold the handle of his knife. He then threw him a bag of sugar - all went well for the day. And it went well the other days too. And the animal came closer each time, three meters, two meters, one meter, half a meter.

-And how are we doing? Goat asked. -"It's getting late," he said, "Autumn is coming. And it's really over. He reached out his hand - a handful of sugar. The bear went and licked it. And the next day - and the day after that - she stayed by his side, waiting. And then he reached out his arms and put his arms around her head. The animal trusted him and left it in his arms. Overflowing with his own sorrow, his loneliness, his despair-he clasped the beloved head in his hands. The teddy bear twitched - she felt in his hands the seed of the uncoupled female. As it was he bent down and kissed it on the forehead, the animal moaned, in his own eyes the tears, so long held back, rose. -"We are done," said he to Traca. -"I have written to the children," he said. Autumn always arrives quickly in Pindos - in October it is already cloudy and cold. Skorogiannis understood - his bear's time for her winter sleep was approaching. He could see her eyes and they half-closed once, her head was heavy. She would sit beside him, lick his hand once, but her food grew less and less every day. She took him to her winter hole-a big hollow and three pine trees around. He carried sugar, put it in a bowl for her - to find her when she woke up in the spring. She laid the animal down, he stroked its head on the forehead, as dogs are stroked. He half-opened his eyes once more-all the while he was getting heavy; he tilted his head. He bent down, stroked it a couple of times-he was asleep. It was over. He got up to leave. He stood again for a moment at the edge of the hollow: -You sleep, my poor bird, sleep now. Will we meet again in the spring? We two have left this place - no one else - there is nothing left here. And he went down to the deserted village, where he had nothing to do, four feet orphaned.