Corones —Pre-Pyrenees: Same age, Same hell…

Sílvia Aymerich-Lemos, writer and translation

The laundry creaks in her hands, the light whittles her cheekbones.
A chill runs down her skinny back.
She sniffs the clean shirts and forces herself
to remember how he smelled back then, before the war.
Iryna Tsilyk
In Ukrainian – In German – In English – in Polish – In Catalan
https://www.lyrikline.org/en/poems/vona-znimaye-suhu-biliznu-i-shos-potriskuye-13502

"...the author of 10 novels, but he's a soldier now. My whole family stayed in Kyiv. And most of all I want to go back. But I should be responsible for my 12-y.o. son... [...]No one knows what is ahead of us. But I try to believe... "

Iryna's bittersweet vowels –if you click on the link above you'll be able to ascertain– resound anew as if an old tam-tam was bringing them back, tearing out again one's heart, one's guts. Dazed minds attempt to get away to a golden past... to no avail. You're still so present in my mind…You were also twelve during that frosted January 1939. Same age, same hell.

You, too, were fleeing with your mum, leaving your home behind. From above, the fascists were bombarding the retreating Republican Army and the unarmed civilians fleeing to France. Overland, whenever they encountered a village of women, children and elderly residents, sexual assault and massacre was too tangible to risk it. Like most locals, you took refuge in the mountains, forced to live for weeks in a cave at Corona's hill, Ogassa, the Pyrenees foothills. Same age, same hell.

Like Iryna's, your war was also lost from the outset. Your youngest uncle had just died in the front line and your father… your father —who knew if he was still alive at that time. He was a committed antifascist and although he was about to turn forty, he had been conscripted with the last call-up, together with the poor 17 year-old lads… All the stuff needed had to be carried uphill on the shoulders, in one's arms. Your mum carried a mattress, your auntie a big box with the heartiest food and warmest clothes you could gather up… You, at twelve, had been assigned a grown-up task and you felt righteously proud of yourself. You were to take care of two precious things: your little sister and the milk can which was to feed her for a whole week. Nobody else would drink it, for milk was only for little babies her age who still sucked their thumbs like her. In the middle of January, inside the can tightly covered, it would last for seven days. Afterwards, either your mum or your aunt would go to the nearest farmhouse for more.

And like Iryna's son you did your best to make the razor's edge on which history had set you, the best of refuges, carrying the milk can and putting it on a safe flat rock first, going back to where your sister waited for you, further downhill, then taking her on your shoulders and walking up again to where the milk was. You did that over and over. You don't know how many times but you do remember that you had almost reached the cave entrance when it happened. Your mother and your aunt were waving at you. Your little sister was waiting for you further down, with her arms stretched out. You were climbing slowly checking the can's swinging, while heading for the next flat rock you had already chosen with your eyes. Suddenly, you slipped off with the frosted leaf litter and you both –yourself and the milk can– fell and slid a

little downwards, not much. But the can had already slipped out of your hands, and it started to tumble tinkling noisily, spilling all the milk down the mountain slope…

Your mother ran to pick you up and hugged you. And like Iryna, she didn’t know what was ahead of you. But she tried "to believe"…