

PAUL PRESTON



*Doves  
of War*  
Four Women of Spain

**'A magnificent achievement. Preston combines the skills of the professional historian with a profound understanding of women. Eminently readable, this is narrative history at it's best'**

*Literary Review*

# DOVES OF WAR

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*Four Women of Spain*

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## *Fears and Fantasies*

**I**N LATE SEPTEMBER 1937, two English women arrived in Paris. One, a penniless housewife and Communist Party militant from London, had travelled on the crowded boat train from Calais. Despite being exhausted after her trip, she left her luggage at the station and got a bus straight to the recently inaugurated Great Exhibition. The other, the daughter of one of the richest aristocrats in England accompanied by a princess, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria, arrived in a gleaming limousine. After checking in at their luxurious hotel in the Rue de la Paix, she dined out. The next day, after a little shopping, she too visited the exhibition. So great was the bewildering cornucopia spilling out from the two hundred and forty pavilions jostling along the banks of the Seine that only a small part of the wonders could be seen in a few hours. The two women had to make choices. What they decided to see revealed much about where they had come from and about where they were going.

The Communist made a beeline for the pavilion of the Spanish Republican Government and ‘stood spellbound at Picasso’s *Guernica*’. She was repelled by ‘the competitive vulgarity’ of the German and Soviet pavilions which glared aggressively at each other at the end of the Pont d’Iéna on the Riv Droite of the Seine. In contrast, the society girl was captivated by the great German cubist construction, designed by Albert Speer, over which flew a huge eagle bearing a swastika in its claws. Although, like her poorer compatriot, she was en route to the Civil War raging to the south, she did not bother to visit the pavilion of the Spanish Republic. They did both share utter contempt for the British display. The Communist ‘snorted in disdain at the British contribution – mostly tweeds, pipe smoking walking sticks and sports gear’. The aristocrat considered the British pavilion’s displays of golf balls, marmalade and bowler hats to be ‘very bad’.

The two English women never knew that they had coincided at the Paris exhibition any more than that their paths had crossed before. Three and a half months earlier, the aristocrat had emerged from a cinema in Leicester Square and watched a Communist demonstration protesting about the German navy’s artillery bombardment of Almería in South Eastern Spain. Amongst those chanting ‘Stop Hitler’s War on Children!’ was the left-wing housewife. For both women, Paris was just one stop on a longer journey to Spain. Their preparations in August 1937 could hardly have been more different. The Communist had thought long and hard about leaving England and her son and daughter to volunteer for the Spanish Republic. With trepidation, she sold what she could of her books and household chattels and deposited the rest in a theatrical skip. At Liverpool Street Station in London she bade a painful farewell to her two children and then put them on a train to a boarding school paid for by a wealthy Party comrade. A month before her thirty-third birthday, the petite brunette left with little by way of possessions. She had hardly any packing to do for herself, just a few clothes – her two battered suitcases were crammed with medical supplies for the Spanish Republican hospital unit that she hoped to join. Clutching her burdens, she took a bus to Waterloo Station to catch the train to Dover.

Her counterpart’s preparations were altogether more elaborate. For more than six months, she had

dreamed of nothing else. She was in love and hoped that by going to Spain she would win the attention of her beloved, a Spanish prince serving with the German Condor Legion. During the summer of 1936, in the intervals between riding, playing tennis and learning golf, she took Spanish lessons with a private tutor. In London's West End, her punishing schedule of shopping was interspersed with inoculations, and visits to persons likely to be useful for her time in Spain. These included one of the four men with principal responsibility for British policy on Spanish affairs at the Foreign Office and the ex-Queen Victoria Eugenia of Spain. Not yet twenty-one, the blonde socialite, rather gawky and deeply self-conscious about her weight, desperately haunted the beauty salons in preparation for her Spanish adventure. She left England in the chauffeur-driven limousine belonging to Victoria Eugenia's cousin, Princess Beatrice of Saxe-Coburg. The car was overloaded with trunks and hatboxes containing the trophies of the previous four weeks' shopping safaris. After being ushered by the station master at Dover into a private compartment on the boat train, they crossed the channel then motored on to Paris – to their hotel, more shopping and the visit to the Great Exhibition. On the following morning, she set off on the remainder of her journey south to the Spanish border, enjoying an extremely pleasant tour through the peaceful French countryside.

After seeing the Picasso, her left-wing compatriot hastened to collect her heavy cases and catch the night train to Spain. Crushed into a third-class carriage, she was able to reflect on the horrors that awaited her on the other side of the Pyrenees. She was an avid reader of the left-wing press and had received painfully eloquent letters from her husband. He was already in Spain, serving as an ambulance driver with the International Brigades. By contrast, the young occupant of the limousine bowling along the long, straight, tree-lined French roads was blithely insouciant. Her knowledge of the Spanish Civil War was based on her reading of a couple of right-wing accounts which portrayed the conflict in terms of 'Red atrocities' and the knightly exploits of Franco's officers. She sped toward Biarritz like a tourist, in a spirit of anticipation of wonders and curiosities to come. Her mind was of the object of her romantic aspirations, and she was thinking hardly at all of the terrors that might lie before her.

Both women were sustained by their fantasy of what their participation in the Spanish war might mean. For the aristocrat, it was about love and a chivalric notion of helping to crush the dragon of Communism. The Communist's hopes were more prosaic. She wanted to help the Spanish people stop the rise of fascism and, deep down, vaguely hoped that doing so might be the first step to world revolution. Neither the aristocrat setting out to join the forces of General Franco nor the Communist could have anticipated the suffering that awaited them. Even the gruesome picture of the bloodshed at the front provided by the graphic letters from her husband had not fully prepared the left-winger on her route to serve the Spanish Republic for the reality of war. By that late summer of 1937, however, the women of Spain had already been coming to terms with the horrors of war for over a year. For most of them, there had been no question of volunteering to serve. They had little choice – the war enveloped them and their families in a bloody struggle for survival. For two Spanish mothers, in particular, the war would have the most wildly unexpected consequences in terms of both their personal lives and the way in which they were dragged into the public sphere. Both were of widely differing social origins and political inclinations and had different hopes for what victory for their side might mean for them and their families. Their lives – and their fantasies – would be irrevocably changed by the war.

In the first days of the military uprising of 18 July 1936, one, a young mother of three, who had just turned twenty-five, had every reason to expect dramatic disruption in her life as a consequence of the war. She lived in Valladolid in Old Castile, at the heart of the insurgent Nationalist zone, and her husband was a prominent leader of the ultra-rightist Falange. Already, as a result of his political

beliefs, she had experienced exile and political persecution. She knew what it was like to be on the run and to keep a family with a husband in jail. Because of his political activities, she had endured an early childbirth completely alone and, in exile, had undergone a forceps delivery without anaesthesia. Nevertheless, she had stifled whatever resentment she might have felt as a result of her husband's political adventures and supported him unreservedly. Now four months pregnant, the outbreak of war had brought all kinds of possibilities and dangers. She rejoiced at his release from prison as a result of the military uprising and shared his conviction that everything for which they had both made so many sacrifices might come to fruition within a matter of weeks, if not days. Not without anxiety about the final outcome, she could now hope that her husband's days as a political outlaw were over, that they could build a home together and that they and their children would be able to live in the kind of Nationalist Spain to which he had devoted his political career.

Within less than a week of their passionate reunion, both her husband and her unborn child would be dead. The reality of the war had smashed its way into her world and shattered her every hope and expectation. In an atmosphere charged with hatred, calls for revenge for her husband's death intensified the savage repression being carried out in Valladolid. Confined to bed, she found little consolation in the bloodthirsty assurances of his comrades. She faced a bleak future as a widow with three children. Her own parents were long since dead and the best that her in-laws could suggest was that she earn a comfortable living by getting a licence to run an outlet for the state tobacco monopoly (*un estanco*). To their astonishment, after a relatively short period of mourning, she renounced both thoughts of vengeance and of a quiet life in widow's weeds. She dug deep into her remarkable reserve of energy and embarked on a massive task of relief work among the many children and women whose lives had been shattered by the loss of fathers and husbands through death at the front, political execution or imprisonment. By the time that the two English women were packing their cases for Spain, she had fifty thousand women at her orders and was being feted in Nazi Germany by, among others, Hermann Göring and Dr Robert Ley, the head of the German Workers' Front. By the end of the war, she would be – albeit briefly – one of the most powerful women in Franco's Spain. Such triumphs, at best poor consolation for her personal losses, would see her embroiled in an unwanted rivalry with the leader of the Francoist women's organisation, Pilar Primo de Rivera, and in the ruthless power struggles that bedevilled both sides in the Civil War.

In Republican Madrid, another mother, a distinguished Jewish writer and art critic, and a Socialist member of parliament for a southern agrarian province, was beset by a tumultuous kaleidoscope of feelings as a result of the outbreak of war. On the one hand, she hoped that the military uprising would be defeated and that a revolution would alleviate the crippling poverty of the rural labourers that she represented. On the other, she felt both pride and paralysing anxiety as a result of the wartime activities of her children. As soon as the military rebellion had been launched, militiamen had raced to the sierras to the North of Madrid to repel the insurgent forces of General Mola. Among them was the woman's fifteen-year-old son. Despite her desperate pleas, he lied about his age and enlisted in the Republican Army. After three months training, he received a commission as the Republic's youngest lieutenant. She tried to use her influence to keep him out of danger, but he successfully insisted on being posted in the firing line and took part in the most ferocious battles of the war. Her twenty-two-year-old daughter was a nurse at the front. Conquering her worries, their mother threw herself into war work, collecting clothes and food for the front, giving morale-raising speeches, organising the evacuation of children, and welfare work behind the lines. Like her Nationalist counterpart, she too would travel to raise support for her side in the war. And she too would find herself in an inadvertent rivalry – in her case, with the most charismatic woman of the Republican zone, Dolores Ibárruri

Pasionaria. Unlike the mother from Valladolid, for her there would be no victory, even a tainted one. The defeat of the Republic meant, for her, as for the many thousands who trudged across the Pyrenees into exile, incalculable personal loss and the crushing of the hopes which had underpinned her political labours. With the end of the war, her troubles were just beginning.

These four women, despite their different nationalities, social origins and ideologies, had much in common. They were brave, determined, intelligent, independent and compassionate. To differing degrees, all were damaged by the Spanish Civil War and its immediate and long-term consequences. As a direct result of the war, two would be widowed, two would lose children. Two would be deeply traumatised by their experiences in the front line. The shadow of the Spanish Civil War would hang over the rest of all their lives.

This book has no theoretical pretensions. Its objective is quite simple – to tell the unknown stories of four remarkable women whose lives were starkly altered by their experiences in the Spanish Civil War. All of them are relatively unknown. Neither of the two English women who served in the medical services of each zone had any political prominence at all. The two Spanish women who do have a notable public presence, the one in the Republican zone, the other in Nationalist Spain, were involved in tasks at some remove from the decision-making of the great war leaders of the two sides in conflict. Moreover, both at the time and subsequently, they functioned in the shadow of more famous rivals. None the less, for the purposes of this book, that is an advantage. Political detail takes back seat, or is at least considered in the context of other personal relationships – with lovers, husbands and children. In that sense, this is a work of emotional history. It follows them from birth to death, in an attempt to show how, as women, wives and mothers, their lives were altered forever by the political conflicts of the 1930s, how their lives were altered for ever by the political conflicts of the 1930s, by the Spanish Civil War and by its consequences. It is hoped thereby to cast light into some unfamiliar corners of the conflict.

Writing the book has been a singularly emotional experience as well as a major effort of detective work. It is not the first time that I have written biography but my previous efforts have focused on more politically important figures. National prominence provided a chronological framework lacking from the material left behind by the four women whose lives are reconstructed here. The diaries and letters written by women tend to be much more intimate than those left by men. Accordingly, in the lives of all four of the women portrayed in this book, the personal has considerable priority over the public. Deeply aware of the problems of being a man writing about women, in the course of writing them, I asked many friends to read drafts of the different chapters. One of these readers is well-versed in both feminist and postmodernist theory. I was much heartened when she remarked encouragingly about one of my chapters that ‘even the theoretically illiterate can occasionally arrive at important insights by the use of antiquated empirical methods’. The implication is that it could all have been worked out by theory without all the messy biographical details. Even had I known how to do so, I feel that I would have thereby missed out on a moving experience and the reader would have missed the opportunity to know about four remarkable lives.

*All for Love*

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR has given rise to a gigantic bibliography running into more than fifteen thousand books. In 1995, a remarkably original addition to the literary legacy of the conflict passed almost unnoticed. Its importance was obscured by the fact that it appeared on the list of a small English publishing house in Norfolk. *The Chances of Death* consisted of an edited selection from a voluminous diary written between the autumn of 1937 and the end of the war by Priscilla Scott-Ellis. The author, who had died twelve years earlier, was one of only two British women volunteers who served with Franco's Nationalist forces during the war. Her vibrantly written and transparently honest account of her experiences is a mine of original insights into life behind the lines of the Francoist zone. Gut-wrenching descriptions of the front-line medical services alternate with accounts of the luxury still enjoyed in the rearguard by the Spanish aristocracy. Although highly readable, and deserving of a wider audience, there was every chance that this remarkable book would be a reference only for scholars.

However, an appreciative article published in the Madrid daily *El País* by the British historian Hugh Thomas provoked an astonishing polemic which in turn guaranteed that the book would be translated and published in Spain. Once at the centre of the ensuing scandal, the book, taken up by one of the country's most prestigious publishers, achieved considerable popular success. Hugh Thomas's glowing review, entitled 'Sangre y agallas' (blood and guts), gave an entirely accurate picture of the book's merits. He praised its vivid portrayal of life in an emergency medical unit and its equally fascinating account of high society behind the lines. He also commented rightly that the diary presented an image of a brave, self-sacrificing but fun-loving girl, tirelessly driven by curiosity and enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup> Nine days later, a disputatious reply was published in the pages of *El País*'s Barcelona rival, *La Vanguardia*. Entitled 'Un enigma', its author was José Luis de Vilallonga y Cabeza de Vacas, the Marqués de Castellvell, a playboy and journalist, known for his appearance in several Spanish and French films, for several successful novels published in France and for a semi-official biography of the King of Spain, Juan Carlos, with whom he claimed friendship.<sup>3</sup>

Vilallonga attacked the editor of Priscilla Scott-Ellis's diary, Raymond Carr, claiming that it was a forgery 'written by God knows who and with what sinister intentions'. Accordingly, he dismissed Hugh Thomas's remarks as the fruit of ignorance. Vilallonga justified these assertions by the fact that he had been married to Priscilla Scott-Ellis for seventeen years, from 1945 to 1961. He found it incredible that she had never mentioned such a diary to him. He now demanded to know the identities of 'the real author of this diary' and of the beneficiary of the book's profits. Along the way, he presented a cruelly dismissive account of Priscilla Scott-Ellis and her family. He asserted that the author was incapable of writing a diary, claiming that her prose was 'infantile'. He described her father, the Lord Howard de Walden, as a whisky-sodden alcoholic. He alleged that Priscilla Scott-Ellis was in fact illegitimate and really the fruit of an adulterous affair between her mother and Prince Alfonso de Orléans Borbón, a cousin of Alfonso XIII and a close friend of her parents. He further



insinuated that the great love of her life, Ataúlfo de Orléans Borbón, who was in some way inadvertently responsible for her decision to go to Spain, was a homosexual. His own marriage to her was thus presented as a way out of an embarrassing situation for Prince Alfonso. He stated that his own parents never approved of the marriage 'to a foreigner through whose veins there coursed Jewish blood'.

Some weeks later, Vilallonga's diatribe brought forth a dignified reply from Sir Raymond Carr.<sup>4</sup> He pointed out that Vilallonga's questions about the authorship and the royalties constituted an accusation that, for money, he had knowingly undertaken to prepare an edition of a forgery. Carr gave an account of the genesis of the diary and an explanation of the circumstances whereby it had lain unpublished for half a century. In fact, it had been on the point of publication in the autumn of 1933 but the project was aborted because of the outbreak of the Second World War. Carr also published in facsimile a section of the diary. He then went on to underline some of the inaccuracies of Vilallonga's account of Priscilla Scott-Ellis's experiences during the Spanish Civil War. Finally, in a spirit more of sadness than of anger, he expressed his surprise that 'a Spanish gentleman should assert in a newspaper that his wife, deceased and unable to defend herself, was a bastard and her father a drunkard'. He found it tragic that Vilallonga's article should thus 'defame the memory of a valiant and indomitable woman'.

Who then was this remarkable woman? Esyllt Priscilla Scott-Ellis – known as 'Pip' – was the daughter of two remarkably creative and eccentric parents, Margherita (Margot) van Raalte and Thomas Evelyn Scott-Ellis, the eighth Lord Howard de Walden and fourth Lord Seaford. Margot was born in 1890, the daughter of an extremely wealthy banker of Dutch origins, Charles van Raalte, and Florence Clow, an English woman with some talent as an amateur painter. Florence van Raalte was such a snob that she was known in the family as Mrs van Royalty. From her parents, Margot had inherited money and both musical and artistic talent. She was a good painter and an accomplished musician. Her singing voice was good enough for her to be trained for the opera with Olga Lynn and she often gave concerts, even being conducted – in Debussy's *La Demoiselle Éluë* – by Sir Thomas Beecham. These interests would provide a formative influence in Pip's childhood. Margot's family lived at Aldenham Abbey near Watford in Hertfordshire, where they were often joined by members of the Spanish royal family. The Infanta Eulalia, Alfonso XIII's aunt and a woman of scandalous reputation, was a friend of Margot's parents. Princess Eulalia's two sons, Prince Alfonso and Prince Luis de Orléans Borbón, were being educated at English boarding schools and often spent summer holidays with the family. In the late 1890s, the Van Raalte family bought the paradisaical Brownsea Island in Poole harbour. With its medieval castle, two fresh-water lakes and dykes and streams, it was a wonderful place for children. Margot spent many idyllic summers there with other children including Prince Ali and Prince Luis. It was on Brownsea Island that Lieutenant-General Baden Powell, a friend of Margot's father, launched his Boy Scout Movement in 1907.<sup>5</sup>

Tommy Scott-Ellis was born in 1880. A soldier and a great sportsman, he was educated at Eton and Sandhurst. He was commissioned into the 10th Hussars in 1899 and fought in the Boer War. The man presented by Vilallonga as a helpless sot was actually a good cricketer and boxer and was the English amateur fencing champion. In 1901, he became an immensely rich man at the age of twenty-one when he inherited his father's title and the fortune of his grandmother, Lady Lucy Cavendish-Bentinck. He then bought a racing motorboat and competed in highly perilous cross-Channel races. He also bought a yacht and was a member of the British Olympic Team in 1906. He then acquired racing stables. In his childhood, he too had spent happy summers at Brownsea Island which was then owned by the Cavendish-Bentinck family. Having had a bitterly miserable time at various boarding schools

Brownsea became a haven for him. He now tried unsuccessfully to buy it. Deeply disappointed, he was consoled when the new owners, Charles and Florence van Raalte, turned out to be friends of his mother, Blanche. He was thus invited to Brownsea to sail in summer and to shoot in winter.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly after marrying Margot van Raalte, Tommy, anxious to keep a link with the Army, joined the Westminster Dragoons. Their first children, twin sister and brother, Bronwen and John Osmael, were born on 27 November 1912. When the First World War broke out, Tommy left for Egypt as second-in-command of his regiment. At the time Margot was pregnant with their third child, Elizabeth, who was born on 5 December 1914. At the first opportunity, however, she arranged to join Tommy in Egypt. As was commonplace among the upper classes at the time, Margot thought it normal to leave her three children with a nurse. At Chirk Castle, the family's country seat near Llangollen in North Wales, the children were neglected to the extent of contracting rickets.<sup>7</sup> At first Margot was rather bored in Egypt but after Tommy volunteered to go with the British invasion forces to Gallipoli, and casualties began to arrive from Turkey, she joined a friend, Mary Herbert, the wife of Aubrey Herbert, a contemporary of Tommy's at Eton, in setting up a hospital. One of the Herberts' daughters, Gabriel, was also to work with Franco's medical services during the Spanish Civil War; the other, Laura, was to be the second wife of the novelist Evelyn Waugh. At the end of 1915, Tommy was posted back to Egypt and Margot was able to live with him there until in May 1916, they returned to England. She was by then pregnant once more. In November 1916, Tommy got himself transferred to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in order to serve in France. Two days after he left, Priscilla was born in London on 15 November 1916. The real sequence of events undermines Vilallonga's accusation that her father was Prince Alfonso of Orléans Borbón.<sup>8</sup> Margot and Tommy would have two further daughters, Gaenor, born on 2 June 1917 and Rosemary on 28 October 1922.

In later life, when she had become addicted to drama and excitement, Pip would attribute her taste for adventure to having been born during an air raid; more likely it was inherited from her parents. According to her brother, when she was a toddler, the family called her 'Chatterbox'. Ensnared in her high chair, she would chatter away irrespective of anyone listening or understanding. As a child, she used her Welsh name of Epyllt (the equivalent of Iseult or Isolde). However, she quickly became irritated when people twisted this to Ethel, so she switched to Priscilla, which in turn became reduced to Pip. Her mother remembered how useful she always made herself with her younger sister. Rosemary was a rascal, 'Pip alone could manage her with loving ease.' Pip was an affectionate child, always desperate to please and to be liked – and thus hurt by the coldness of her parents. Gaenor recalled that Pip was 'a very pretty girl with golden curls and blue eyes, and bitterly resented the disappearance of the curls and her entry into the comparative drabness of schoolroom life'. She was brought up in the splendour of Seaford House in Belgrave Square until she was nine, attending a London day school – Queen's College in Harley Street. While still a child in London, she suffered a distressing riding accident in Rotten Row in Hyde Park. She was thrown from her horse and when her foot was caught in a stirrup she was dragged some distance. She was nervous about riding for a while but, according to her sister, 'she grew up to become an extremely brave horsewoman, and to show courage in all sorts of difficult and dangerous situations'.<sup>9</sup>

Withal, it was a privileged existence. Margot was concerned that her children be independent and resourceful which was difficult given the legions of servants whose job it was to make life easy for the family. With a great imaginative leap, considering her own station in life, Margot supposed that 'some, if not all, of the girls might have to cope and "manage" in later life'. To create a contrast with the world of housemaids who cleared up books and toys and grooms who saddled and rubbed down horses and ponies, a little house was built at Chirk called the Lake Hut. There, the girls made do

their own, cooking, washing-up, and looking after themselves. Pip took to this very well. When the parents took the children on trips on their sixty-foot motor launch, *Etheldreda*, Pip and Gaenor would do the cooking. In her mother's recollection, 'when it was rough it was Pip who managed to produce food for us all. She was gallant and highly efficient at ten and twelve years old.' Holidays at Brownsea were enlivened by days camping at nearby Furzy Island. Indeed, Chirk, Brownsea and Furzy provided the basis of blissful fun for the children. They had considerable independence to wander the fields, the woods and streams. When they were required for meals, if Margot was present, she would unleash the power of her soprano in Brünnhilde's call from *Die Walküre* and they would come scampering home.<sup>10</sup>

All in all, there were idyllic elements but there remains a question mark about the impact on the children of the lengthy separations from both Margot and Tommy. The Scott-Ellis girls saw relatively little of their parents, particularly of their father. When they did, emotional warmth was in short supply. Tommy and Margot were, according to their son, incapable of showing emotion. They both seemed totally remote, capable of impersonal kindness but not of understanding. Pip's cousin Charmian van Raalte, who was brought up with the Scott-Ellis girls, having been abandoned by her own mother, recalled that 'neither Tommy nor Margot ever showed a grain of affection to any of the children'. Indeed, when Thomas Howard de Walden returned from France, where he had fought in the mass slaughter of Passchendaele, he was dourly taciturn, in shock from the shelling and the butchery. In his own description, part of him had died in the war and the part that survived was 'no more than a husk, living out a life that he finds infinitely wearisome'.<sup>11</sup> However, on the rare occasions when the parents did acknowledge the existence of the children, they seemed, fleetingly, to have fun together. Lord Howard de Walden had a burning interest in the theatre as well as being a musician of some talent. At Chirk, he would often delight guests with his playing in the music room. He wrote the libretto for three operas by Joseph Holbrooke. He ran the Haymarket Theatre for several years. He often organised theatrical events involving his children and their friends, writing six plays for them. With professionally produced costumes and scenery, these were exciting enterprises. In one, a part was taken by Brian Johnston, later famous as a broadcaster. Moreover, baskets of costumes from other productions at the Haymarket, with armour and helmets, ended up in the family home, swelled the dressing-up basket and transformed many childhood games.

Although he seemed always to have more of a bond with Pip, Tommy did not, in general, have much time for girls. He once wrote of his granddaughters: 'The girls are alright but they are girls and there is no more to be said about that.' He rarely spoke to his daughters and Pip was the only one not to regard him as a complete stranger. His conversation was too erudite and dismissive, his interests too varied. When in England, Tommy and Margot had an astonishing array of friends and acquaintances that included G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, George Bernard Shaw, Diaghilev, Augustus John, Jacob Epstein, Thomas Beecham, Rudyard Kipling, Cole Porter, Ivor Novello, Alicia Markova, Arturo Toscanini, Richard Tauber, James Barrie, P. G. Wodehouse, Arthur Rubinstein and Somerset Maugham. He was President of the London Symphony Orchestra. In Wales, he was an especially generous patron of the arts and was made a Bard at the Eisteddfod. With his wife, he shared a passion for opera and they had their own box at Covent Garden.<sup>12</sup>

Tommy was a major expert in medieval weaponry and heraldry about which he wrote a number of important reference works. He even had his own suit of armour made in order to assess the difficulties of swordplay. On one occasion, the painter Augustus John, while staying at Chirk Castle, was quite taken aback to find his host reading *The Times*, dressed in a suit of armour. The reason for this eccentricity was that Lord Howard de Walden wished to ascertain how easily an armour-clad man

could get up from a prostrate position. To avoid spending hours helplessly trapped on the floor, he was awaiting a companion before beginning the experiment. Tommy was deeply interested in falconry and regularly went hawking. He had farming interests in East Africa including a coffee farm in Kenya and he was often away for long periods on safari. In 1926, however, he took Pip with him for several months. Her bravery during brushes with wild animals in Kenya reinforced his pride in her. She would later describe to Gaenor her terror on the walk in the dark to the outside lavatory. On another occasion he took her on a lengthy sailing trip to the north of Scotland. In contrast, Margot got on less well with Pip because, as her sister recalled, they were so alike in their energy, practicality and impetuosity that they irritated each other.<sup>13</sup>

While Margot and Tommy enjoyed the London season or were travelling abroad, Pip, Bronwen, Elizabeth and Gaenor spent much of their childhood in the grandeur of Chirk Castle. Chirk had been an old border castle on Offa's Dyke. There, they were educated by a series of governesses, usually two at a time. The life in the castle fed Pip's taste for adventure. An ancient castle full of armour and swords and shields inspired games of make-believe involving knights and dragons, fairies and damsels in distress. The fact of having ponies and vast tracts of Welsh hillside on which to roam also encouraged her imagination. The governesses were easily typecast as ogres and giants. These different women each had to stand in for the girls' frequently absent mother whose social commitments were extraordinarily time-consuming. Moreover, their regular replacement added an element of insecurity into Pip's early life. At least she had avoided the worst childhood wounds of the repeated separations of boarding school. Only in early 1932 when she was fifteen, and Gaenor twelve, was Pip – to her delight – sent away to Benenden.<sup>14</sup> Pip was a sensitive girl and the consequence of this upbringing was that, for all the protection provided by money and class, not to mention her indisputable bravery, she was always rather insecure and eager to please. She could be easily humiliated by the verbal cruelty or simple thoughtlessness, of others. Nevertheless, as her voluminous diaries show, she was an indefatigable optimist. Her brother remembered her as always 'of a cheerful and jolly disposition'.<sup>15</sup>

The patrician atmosphere in which Pip was brought up was characterised by a degree of paternalism towards the less privileged. Both Tommy and Margot were active patrons of hospitals. Tommy, however, was, outside the arts, a considerable snob. He once reprimanded Margot after a visit by the Prime Minister, the Conservative Stanley Baldwin, and his wife. Tommy commented to Margot: 'You really should not ask those sort of people.' That was an indication of his snobbery rather than of his political orientation which was inevitably very right-wing. In early May 1926, during the nine days of the General Strike, the ballroom of Seaford House was home to about two hundred undergraduates from Oxford and Cambridge who had volunteered to join a special police force. Effectively, they were engaged in strikebreaking. From 4 to 12 May, for twenty-four hours every day, they were on call. Telephoned news of a demonstration or clashes with pickets would see lorry engines roar to life. The enthusiastic scions of middle-class families, armed with truncheons and well fed by Margot's caterers, would set off for some sport.<sup>16</sup> Similar attitudes underlay Pip's later involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

In 1932, during holidays from Benenden, Pip had learned to fly in a Gypsy Moth bought by her mother. Nervous because Pip was already showing signs of the wanderlust that would characterise her later life, Margot prevented her taking her pilot's certificate.<sup>17</sup> She remained at Benenden for a year and two terms before going on to a finishing school in Paris in the autumn of 1933. When Pip left Paris in early 1934, her already good French was much improved. After skiing at Mürren in Switzerland, she spent time with an Austrian aristocratic – and anti-Nazi – family, the Harrachs, in Munich. In 1931, before going up to Oxford, John had gone to Munich to learn German. On his first

day, driving his car, he ran over a man who turned out to be Adolf Hitler. The future Führer was unfortunately, unhurt. Shortly afterwards John met, and fell in love with Irene ‘Nucci’ Harrach and in 1934, they were married. Elizabeth, Pip, Gaenor and Rosemary were all bridesmaids at the wedding. Pip’s first interest in boys was focused on a handsome young flyer called William Rhodes Moorhouse. They went out together a few times but her adolescent crush on him was not reciprocated. In any case Pip was about to become involved in a relationship with the Orléans Borbón family that would erase all thoughts of William and dramatically affect the remainder of her life.

Alfonso de Orléans, who had established a friendship with Margot van Raalte during the summer that they spent at Brownsea, was married to a beautiful German princess, Beatrice Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Prince Ali, as he was known in the family, was an intrepid aviator and also a cousin of the King of Spain, Alfonso XIII. His wife was a cousin of Alfonso XIII’s consort, Queen Victoria Eugenia. Prince Ali was a fitness fanatic and an enthusiastic military man who was determined to prove that being of royal blood imposed an iron duty to be useful to his country.<sup>19</sup> From 1909 until 1914, and then again from 1917, he and Princess Bea – as the family knew her – spent their summers at Brownsea Island with the Van Raalte family. After Margot married Tommy Scott-Ellis, the children of the Orléans and the Scott-Ellis families spent summers together at Brownsea.<sup>20</sup> Prince Ali and Princess Bea had three sons, Álvaro (b. Coburg, 1910), Alfonso (b. Madrid, 28 May 1912) – known always as Alonso to distinguish him from the several other Alfonsos in the Royal Family, and Ataúlfo (b. Madrid, 1913). When in Spain in 1924, they lived in their palace at Sanlúcar de Barrameda, in the province of Cádiz. The Palacio de Montpensier consisted of three different buildings combined in the mid-nineteenth century into a pseudo-Moorish palace. About half a mile away, the family also had a huge English garden called ‘El Botánico’ within which there were two houses.<sup>21</sup> Alfredo Kindelán, the head of the Spanish air force and a close friend of Alfonso de Orléans, was a frequent visitor.

After the flight of Alfonso XIII on 14 April 1931, Alfonso de Orléans Borbón regarded it as his duty to resign his commission and accompany the King on his painful journey from Madrid, via Cartagena, into exile in France.<sup>22</sup> Prince Ali’s properties having been confiscated by the Republican Government, his family settled in Switzerland. He reconciled himself to living on his wits – and his not inconsiderable talents as an aeronautical engineer and a linguist (he spoke fluent English, French, German and Italian as well as Spanish). For Alfonso de Orléans, it was always a matter of principle to demonstrate that royal personages were not all effete and useless. Energetic and resourceful, remembering that he had once met Henry Ford, he wrote and asked him for a job. While awaiting a reply, he worked sweeping up in bars. The American magnate replied quickly and instructed him to report for work at the Ford factory at Asnières, outside Paris. He did so first as a cleaner, then as a salesman. Then he was soon transferred to the Ford headquarters at Dagenham in England where he worked variously, under the pseudonym Mr Dorleans, in stock control, accountancy and public relations. Within four years, his dynamism and initiative saw him made director of the company’s European operations. Princess Bea had moved from Zurich to London and kept in close touch with the Howard de Walden family. During this time, the Howard de Waldens commissioned Augustus John, who had set himself up as a kind of artist-in-residence at Chirk – to paint a portrait of Princess Bea.<sup>23</sup>

Pip had inherited from her mother a passion for the opera although her own violin studies had not borne great fruit. Wherever she went, she was always accompanied by a gramophone and a box of records. That Pip was a cultured and witty girl is amply illustrated by her diary. The extant part dates back to August 1934. She describes a stay in Salzburg with her mother and her sisters Gaenor and Elizabeth who, at the time, was being wooed by the great cellist Grigor Piatigorski. There Pip revelled

in a performance of *Don Giovanni* conducted by Bruno Walter in which the Don was sung in Italian by Ezio Pinza. She was also entranced by the playing of Piatigorski when he serenaded Elizabeth. The family was en route to Munich for the wedding of Pip's brother John to Nucci Harrach.<sup>24</sup> In 1933 Princess Bea and her son Prince Ataúlfo stayed at Seaford House when they came over for the marriage of the Duke of Kent to Princess Marina. Pip also made her début in 1934. It was probably at this time that she began to notice Ataúlfo – or Touffles as he was known in the family, seeing him not as the child with whom she had played at Brownsea but as a charming young man. Both Gaenor and Pip's cousin Charmian van Raalte recalled Ataúlfo as 'definitely not goodlooking'. He had a round and podgy face but women liked him for his gentle manner and his amusing conversation. He played the piano and danced with extraordinary delicacy. If to some this denoted effeminacy, Pip did not notice.<sup>25</sup> At this time, Pip was gawky and unattractive. She was worried about her weight – nearing thirteen stones (83 kilos). A photograph of her at a ball in May 1935 shows her looking frumpy, nervous and ill-at-ease.

When the military rebellion of 18 July 1936 precipitated the Spanish Civil War, Prince Alfonso of Orléans Borbón was in Bucharest on Ford business. He hastened to Burgos where he arrived on 20 August 1936. He offered his own and his sons' services as pilots and was bitterly disappointed to be told that General Mola wished to avoid the uprising having a monarchist character. He was ordered to leave Spain. He then wrote to his friend, General Alfredo Kindelán, who had been named head of the rebel air force, and to Franco himself, pointing out that his two elder sons, Álvaro and Alfonso of Orléans y Coburgo, had earned pilots' licences in England in the Officers' Training Corps. In consequence, at the beginning of November, they were able to join the Nationalist forces. However, Franco considered that Prince Ali himself was more useful to his cause in London. There he was able to facilitate the delivery of Ford trucks to the Nationalists. Moreover, Princess Bea was carrying on effective propaganda on behalf of Franco in establishment circles in Britain. She was also raising significant sums of money for food and hospital supplies for the Nationalist cause. Alfonso of Orléans y Coburgo was killed on 18 November 1936. Flying as observer, his Italian Romeo Ro37bis biplane crashed while flying from Seville to Talavera de la Reina. The aircraft flew into a mountain at Venta de Culebrín near Monesterio in the south of the province of Badajoz. In consequence, his youngest brother Ataúlfo immediately volunteered.<sup>26</sup> Pip was devastated when, at a dance in New York in January 1937, she had been told of Alonso's death.<sup>27</sup>

In November 1936, Pip had sailed with her father for New York to stay with friends, a Mrs Wagner and her daughter Peggy. The trip would expand her horizons considerably. 'I wonder what this year will bring me. I have a feeling lots. I hope so. I do wish Touffles would write.'<sup>28</sup> He was constantly on her mind. 'Last night', she wrote on 3 January 1937, 'I dreamed Touffles was terribly ill and all tied up in bandages and as white as a sheet. Oh dear oh dear. I wish he was not out in Spain in the war. God how foul wars are. Every time I think of Alonso it makes me feel sick and think of the cruel futility of it all. What a mess human nature is.' The 'divine' Tyrone Power in a movie reminded her of Touffles. 'I don't suppose even if Touffles gets back from Spain alright he would ever want to marry an unattractive fool like me so I might as well stop wishing.' Letters from him merely left her miserable and worried.<sup>29</sup> She wrote on 22 January, 'I have put my new photo of Touffles up on my bed table and simply adore it. I am silly to let myself go on pretending he might love me one day because I know he won't but I can't stop myself being nuts over him so I might as well enjoy it as much as I can.' New York was a regular round of cinema, theatre and nightclubs, punctuated by having her fortune told at the Gypsy Tearooms. As always, she maintained her interest in music, attending a concert by the violinist Josef Szigeti. Among several historic performances at the New York Metropolitan, she

attended *Rigoletto* with Lawrence Tibbett in the title role, *Die Walküre* with Kirsten Flagstad and Lauritz Melchior, and Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* with Gertrud Wettergren, as well as a *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Le Coq d'Or*.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, she was restless. 'Life here is so idle and pointless that I am pining to have some work or something to occupy me. We just do nothing.' She managed to persuade the Wagners that she had to leave in case Touffles returned from Spain.<sup>31</sup> While waiting for her passage home, she worried about her weight, and danced and flirted with an eligible young Cuban called Alvaro García.

Her passion for Touffles was boosted by the flirtation with García whom she had met at the Wagners' home in New York. On 26 January 1937, the twenty-year-old Pip wrote in her diary:

I am so shocked at myself by my behaviour tonight and so bewildered by it all that I don't even know if I enjoyed it. I went out with Alvaro to a Cuban place where we danced mambas (*sic*) until 4 o'clock in the morning. He dances divinely and it was grand fun. He made violent love to me the whole time and kissed me and I kissed him in the taxi home. But then he saw me up to the apartment and made such passionate love to me I was scared stiff. He even pulled down my dress and kissed my bosom which horrified me but I could not stop him. He did everything under the sun and I let him. I am certainly gaining experience but I don't know if I like it.

By the next day, reflecting on the incident, she wrote: 'The trouble with my flirtation is that all it has done is to wake me up and make me want Touffles to make love to me even more than I did before. Oh hell and damnation.'<sup>32</sup> 'Make love', of course, meant rather less then, as this passage illustrates, than it does now.

Day after day, she wrote of missing Touffles. On 2 February, she wrote perceptively: 'I think the trouble with all of us is our age and suppressed sex. I would like to have a hectic affair with someone but of course never will.' The next night, however, she came very near. After a cocktail party and dancing into the early hours, 'Alvaro took me home and came into the apartment where he made love to me on the sofa too divinely for words. It was heaven and again I behaved outrageously and let him do even worse things than before.' She refused to have sex with him and was amused by the fact that he clearly believed her to be much more experienced than was actually the case.<sup>33</sup>

On her return passage on the *SS Paris*, she wrote: 'I hate to be all alone, I feel scared and depressed.' Her essential insecurity was revealed in other diary entries. 'Everyone on board is sweet to me and they all seem to like me so much. It is so lovely to know people like you. If only I had changed enough to make Touffles like me too.' The round of cocktail parties and dancing terminated on the last night on board in a dramatic encounter with a French diplomat. 'God knows why but this evening I went off the rails and was mildly raped. I can't think why I let Mr Brugere do such a thing but I must have been crazy.' Having been assaulted by the man on deck, she later went to his cabin, 'so no one I don't know whether I am still a virgin or not. I think not. It was heavenly but frightening.' She left his cabin 'feeling very ashamed and yet all excited and happy in a way'. The event seemed to unleash a hitherto repressed passion. After a 'hot' encounter in a taxi with a film director 'Frenche' whom she had met on the ship from New York, she wrote: 'I seem to have become so damn oversexed that I just can't stop myself. I don't know whether it is suppressed sex bursting forth or my thyroid pills or what but the effect is incredible for the erstwhile priggish me.' On returning to Chirk, she took up riding with a vengeance. She started to dream about Touffles again. Life in London was an endless kaleidoscopic social round in which she occasionally bumped into 'that filthy fucking Frenche'. She took singing and piano lessons, fenced most days, regularly went to the theatre and the cinema, often

visited the hairdresser and fashion shows and consulted more fortune-tellers. Despite her sexual progress, she was still young enough to sit with friends and be scared by talk of ghosts.<sup>34</sup>

In early March, Prince Ali appeared in London. Revealingly, Pip refused his dinner invitation to spend time with her father. 'Papa and I get on so well. We talk for hours every evening. He knows so much about every subject. I wish I had his brains.' When she did go to see Princess Bea, she found her heartbroken by the death of her son Alonso. Pip got news of her beloved Touffles who, as befitted the son of a German princess, had joined Hitler's Condor Legion and was now flying as an observer on German bombers. As always, being reminded of Touffles provoked her into a flirtation. At a society hostess's dance, she 'spent most of the evening dancing with crazy Francis Cochrane to whom I got engaged just for fun. He is great fun and dances quite well. So now I have a fiancé for a change. I shall break it off again soon.' Nothing more was heard of him thereafter. Her social life was more of a whirlwind than a roundabout. When she was not in the country, at the races or at Brooklands, she took every advantage of what London had to offer. A typical day would see her rise late, and after breakfast, practise fencing or do some work in relation to the small stud farm at Chirk. She would then have lunch at the Ritz or the Savoy with friends. Lunch would be followed by shopping, a dress fitting, the hairdresser and then tea with some family friend. In the evening, she would attend one or more cocktail parties, a dance in the home of some society hostess or the theatre, the ballet or the opera, then dinner, perhaps at Quaglino's or the Savoy Grill, then on to the Café de Paris or a nightclub. She attended a number of legendary operatic occasions, including Eva Turner and Giovanni Martinelli singing Puccini's *Turandot* at Covent Garden. Dancing until the early hours of most mornings, she met lots of attractive men but nothing came of her flirtations with them.<sup>35</sup> When, on 24 March, she finally got a letter from Touffles requesting her photograph, she pranced down the passage 'singing to the top of my voice'. Already thinking of going to Spain, she started Spanish lessons.<sup>36</sup>

The ceaseless round of fun was beginning to pall when her life was changed by a chance conversation with her mother – 'so nice the way she leaves me to myself, no advice, no orders, just perfectly sweet'. On Easter Sunday, 28 March 1937, she wrote: 'This evening after dinner we began to talk about Spain and Mama suddenly said that Gabriel Herbert was out there doing nursing and smuggling medicines etc. I said, "God I wish I was" so Moke (Monica FitzClarence, a friend of Margot's) said "Why don't you?" I explained I would have long ago if I had thought for a moment Mama would let me.' To her astonishment, her mother said that she would give Pip permission if she produced proper plans mapped out and aimed to do important work out there – 'but I must find out and arrange it myself and she can't help me. So now I must see Mrs Herbert and Princess Bea and see what I can do to help. My chance at last I hope!' Margot had not expected such a burst of focused energy and was horrified. She regarded Pip as 'both frivolous and pretty. She loved hairdressers, young men and cream buns. She would go to several cinemas in one afternoon and I deplored that she would not face up to anything serious.' The Spanish Civil War was rather too serious even for Margot. Pip herself was enthused by the idea of going to Spain and determined to overcome all obstacles. She was desperate to be of some use. 'It is a bore to look so young and silly, it will be very difficult to make anyone think I really mean it and am capable of doing it.' She now asked her mother to let her take first-aid classes as well as Spanish lessons. She also spoke to Mrs Herbert and her daughter Laura, who was soon to be married to Evelyn Waugh. Presumably on the basis of communication with her sister, Gabriel, Laura told Pip that 'it was awfully difficult to get in now.'<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps she was inspired by her mother's earlier example running a hospital in Egypt. It is an extraordinary coincidence that the mother of the only other British woman to volunteer to work for Franco, Gabriel Herbert, had also worked in that Egyptian hospital. Gabriel Herbert herself was



competent and energetic young woman. In September 1936, she had gone to Burgos and returned London with a list of medical supplies requested by the Junta. She then returned to Spain with an ambulance. With a second vehicle sent in November, it became the Equipo Anglo-Español Móvil of Servicio al Frente. Gabriel Herbert herself acted as an intermediary between the medical team in Spain and the London committee of the Catholic Bishops' Fund for the Relief of Spanish Distress. Pip's reference to her 'nursing and smuggling medicines' was a misunderstanding of Gabriel's activities in taking supplies into Spain.<sup>38</sup>

Pip's Spanish progressed quickly. Nevertheless, while she tried, in a desultory fashion, to find out more about going to Spain, she began to see a lot of 'the most gorgeous tall hero called John Geddes a fashionable young man-about-town. They danced together, got drunk together and talked about their respective broken hearts, she about Touffles and he about a girl named Ann Hamilton Grace who had ditched him. They walked their dogs and within a couple of weeks of knowing him, she could write: 'I do love you and dote on him and hope I will see him again soon.'<sup>39</sup> By 13 April, they were lovers. She found the experience physically painful 'but it was fun'. 'I still don't feel even a twinge of conscience or remorse. And oddly I don't like him any more or less.' After sleeping with him a second time, she wrote: 'He is an absolute darling although definitely rather a cad.' She was taken entirely by surprise at the end of April, when he asked her to marry him. She was emboldened to refuse after being told by her cousin, Charmian van Raalte, that she had had a letter from Touffles 'who is livid because I have not written for ages'.<sup>40</sup> She was also distracted by Gaenor's coming-out dance at Seaford House which was to be attended by 650 people including the Duke and Duchess of Kent. At dinner beforehand, she was delegated to look after the then seventeen-year-old King Faroukh of Egypt whom she thought 'dear and we got on like billyoh'. Rather alone in London, he was taken by Pip to Regent's Park Zoo, the Tower of London, St Paul's Cathedral and several theatres.<sup>41</sup>

The big event was the coronation of George VI on 12 May. Pip was as bedazzled by its magnificent pageantry as the rest of the world. She attended the first court ball of the new reign which she found 'heaven'. On returning home 'I put on Mama's tiara and earrings and looked too regal for words. How I wish I had one.'<sup>42</sup> She had started writing to Touffles again and, on the strength of hearing that he might come to London on leave, had begun to diet. Her diary at this time began to have increasing references to her hating 'that filthy smelly town London' and even 'I hate social life.'<sup>43</sup> Frantically hopeful of seeing Touffles, Pip was further reminded of the ongoing Civil War on 1 June. Two days before, the German navy had mounted a large-scale artillery bombardment of the Mediterranean city of Almería in southeastern Spain. Coming out of a newsreel with some friends, Pip ran into a Communist demonstration chanting 'Stop Hitler's War on Children!' Nan Green was among the demonstrators. However, she was discouraged when, accompanying her mother to lunch at the Herberts', she met Gabriel who 'was very interesting but convinced me more that there is no point in my going out there as a nurse or anything else. Damn it.'<sup>44</sup>

Just when she was on the verge of abandoning thoughts of Spain, Touffles turned up unexpectedly in London. On Wednesday 23 June, she wrote: 'He rang me up this morning and we lunched on together at San Marco and spent the afternoon buying records and talking. He is exactly the same as I always was and I like him as much as I always did.' The next day he broke a date to take her to an art show. She now admitted to herself what had been obvious for some time. 'I can't pretend to myself any longer. I know I am just as much in love with him as I always have been for the last three years. Oh God what hell it is, all so pointless, just lack of control.' On 29 June, he flew back to Spain from Croydon. After seeing him off, Pip was desperately miserable.<sup>45</sup>

However, for all her distress at seeing him go back to the war, his visit had reawakened her interest

in Spain. Her notions of what was going on there derived almost entirely from Princess Bea 'who really knows what she is talking about. I simply adore her and admire her enormously for her courage about everything.' Her new-found determination to go to Spain roused her from her misery. Her hopes were raised on 6 July when she heard that she had passed her first aid and nursing exams with high grades. Nevertheless, bored with her social life in London and still unsure how to get to Spain, she fell into a limbo. 'I am in a very odd sort of numb way. I don't mind much what I do or where I go as long as it is more or less peaceful.' She was concentrating on her Spanish lessons with some dedication. On 22 July, without much expectation of a helpful reply, she wrote a long letter to Touffles asking him how to go about getting a posting in Spain.<sup>46</sup> Her interest in Spain was further fired by a book by an aviation journalist, Nigel Tangye, *Red, White and Spain*. Tangye had got into Nationalist Spain on the basis of letters attesting to his pro-Nazi sympathies. His entirely pro-Nationalist account probably confirmed for her things that she had already been told by Princess Bea. After lurid tales of Republican atrocities, it related that, if the 'Reds' won, there would be a 'Communist State, complete suppression of the Church, mass-murder of landowners and employers, officers and priests, and abolition of all personal freedom'. Tangye asserted that 'The Government, or Red, forces are entirely controlled and supplied by Russia.' Coincidentally, Tangye travelled for part of his time in Spain with a cavalry officer, the Barón de Segur, whose son was that same José Luis de Vilallonga who would later denigrate Pip's diaries.<sup>47</sup>

Things began to move a little faster when Prince Ali returned briefly to London. At dinner, Pip told Princess Bea of her firm intention to go to Spain and asked for her help. Pip's new-found determination and recently acquired nursing qualifications impressed the Infanta that she was serious. Accordingly, she concluded that Pip could be useful and undertook to find out where she should go as well as getting someone with whom to practise her Spanish. Pip was so heartened that she determined once more to 'get thin and fit and learn more Spanish'. She went up to Chirk in her Super Swallow Jaguar. She found her mother was making plans for her twenty-first birthday party on 16 November. Accordingly, Pip reminded her of her Spanish project and Margot van Raalte was far less insouciant than she had been three months earlier. Now, she was concerned about her daughter's safety in the midst of so many men and decided to write to Princess Bea. Pip, confident that she could bring her mother around, had begun to read another blood-curdling account of Nationalist heroism, Major McNeill-Moss's *The Epic of the Alcazar*, which she found 'very interesting and exciting'. McNeill-Moss's book consisted of a romantically heroic account of the Republican siege of the Nationalist garrison in the Alcázar of Toledo from July to September and a notoriously mendacious whitewash of the Nationalist massacre of the civilian defenders of the town of Badajoz on 14 August 1936.<sup>48</sup>

The big leap forward in Pip's plans came when Princess Bea replied to Margot Howard de Walden's letter. Her enquiries had revealed that the level of confusion in Nationalist Spain was such that nothing for Pip could be organised from London. However, a change in her own circumstances opened the way for Pip. Prince Ali had been bombarding Franco with pleas for an active role in the fighting. Through the intercession of General Kindelán, the head of the Nationalist air force and the most prominent monarchist among the Nationalist generals, his wish had finally been granted. Accordingly, Princess Bea was going to return to Spain in the autumn to be near her husband's air base in the south. To Pip's intense delight, the Infanta proposed that she accompany her, assuring Margot that she would look after Pip 'as if she were her own daughter'. Under these circumstances, her parents did not object. Half a century later, her brother was still perplexed by their lack of anxiety.<sup>49</sup>

Pip's girlish joy was all too understandable since she was not only going to Spain but proximity to Touffles was virtually guaranteed. 'Princess B really is a saint,' she wrote on 8 August. 'It will be s

nice to go with her.' She had little notion of the horrors that she would encounter. On 26 August, she wrote: 'What an adventure though a gruesome one.' With her Spanish future apparently resolved, she devoted much of the summer at Chirk to riding, playing tennis and learning golf. Princess Bea arranged a Spanish teacher, named Evelina Calvert, and Pip set herself a tough schedule in preparation for the journey. She was ecstatic when she learned that Princess Bea planned to take her to Sanlúcar by car on 22 September, via Paris, San Sebastián, Salamanca and Seville.<sup>50</sup>

Her preparations became frantic – increased efforts to improve her Spanish and some half-hearted dieting which got her weight down to 12 stone 3 pounds. A daily round of shopping, visits to the hairdresser (on one occasion to have her eyelashes dyed), inoculations, arrangements for her passport and visa for Spain. This included a visit to the Foreign Office where she was interviewed by William H. Montagu-Pollock, one of the four men with principal responsibility for British policy on Spanish affairs. That she was received by a functionary of such eminence was an indication of her social, if not her political, importance. On 18 September, she went with Princess Bea to Portsmouth to meet ex-Queen Victoria Eugenia of Spain. As the day for her departure drew near, she began to worry – 'I am almost frightened of going to Spain now' (19th); 'Somehow now the great moment has come, I feel almost scared and rather depressed' (20th); 'I wish I knew exactly what I was going to and where ... still can't really believe that this time next week I shall be in the middle of war. A strange and exciting life.'<sup>51</sup> What a contrast with Nan Green who knew rather more, from her husband's letters about the hell into which she was going.

Pip's reasons for going to Spain had little to do with the real issues being fought out there. She lacked the ideological conviction of either Nan Green or even Gabriel Herbert who was a devoted Catholic and believed that Franco's war effort was a crusade to save Christian civilisation. According to her sister Gaenor, Pip's views were 'a simple expression of support for her friends, and therefore pro-monarchy and anti-Communist'. In the case of one friend, Ataulfo de Orléans Borbón (Touffles) much more than friendship was at stake. There can be no doubting that Pip went to war for love. It helped that her parents had been much taken by Prince Ali's repetition of the canard that the military had rebelled in July 1936 because a Communist takeover in Spain had been imminent. However, her plans would probably have come to nothing if her adored Princess Bea had not taken a hand. Pip's eventual placement as a nurse would owe much to the Infanta's prominent position in the Nationalist organisation known as La Delegación Nacional de Asistencia a Frentes y Hospitales, a patrician welfare operation headed by the Carlist María Rosa Urraca Pastor and largely run by monarchists.<sup>52</sup>

Complete with trunks and hatboxes containing the accumulated fruits of her last months' shopping trips, Pip left England in some style in Princess Bea's chauffeur-driven limousine on 21 September 1937. At Dover, they were met by the station master in his top hat and were swept into a private compartment on the boat train.<sup>53</sup> Then it was on to Paris for some more shopping and a visit to the World's Fair. This was the great exhibition for which Picasso's *Guernica* was commissioned by the Spanish Republican Government.<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, for someone just off to the Spanish Civil War, Pip did not see it, instead spending her time at the German and English pavilions. On one side of the Pont d'Iéna on the Rive Droite of the Seine, the German pavilion, designed by Albert Speer, glaring at its equally pugnacious Soviet rival, was an architectural representation of Nazi aggression. Huge, thirty-three-foot-high statues of muscle-bound Soviet heroes strode triumphantly forward, their way apparently blocked by the naked Teutonic heroes guarding the German design, a huge cubic mass erected on stout pillars, and crowned by a gigantic eagle with the swastika in its claws. For Pip, this was 'the best'. The British pavilion symbolised the tired gentility of appeasement. The British displays were of golf balls, pipes, fishing rods, equestrian equipment and tennis rackets while the

German and the Italian were of military might. Pip thought the British pavilion 'very bad'.<sup>55</sup> She and Princess Bea were then driven on 23 September to Biarritz where Pip was delighted to discover that she could understand most of the Spanish that she began to hear. They were received by Sir Henry Chilton, the British Ambassador to Republican Spain. The pro-Nationalist Chilton had been on holiday in San Sebastián when the Civil War broke out and had refused to return to Madrid. With the aid of the French Ambassador to Spain, they managed to get across the frontier to San Sebastián on the following day. With the beautiful resort bathed in sunshine, it was like being on holiday.

The unwarlike nature of the trip continued when she and Princess Bea were joined for dinner by one of General Alfredo Kindelán's sons, Ultano. Pip went to the cinema with him, then for a long walk and a mild flirtation – 'If it had not been for the fact that he has known Ataúlfo and Alvaro all his life and would certainly have told them I would have had a spot of fun but I would have been ragged for the rest of my life so I refrained and bade him a polite goodbye at the hotel.' Pip saw her first sign of the war when they drove to Santander along the route that the Nationalists had taken on their campaign to the north earlier in 1937. They met Touffles, 'much thinner and very sunburnt ... Madly attractive'. He went out of his way to talk to her and she admitted that 'alas I still like him more than I want to'. He told her about the capture of Santander and took her to the German airbase from which he flew as navigator. 'They fly huge Junkers. His is a beauty with two engines and a retractable undercarriage. This means that he must have been flying in the experimental Junkers Ju 86D-I. It was a curious time for Pip, a mixture of tourism and initiation into the war. They visited the beautiful medieval village of Santillana del Mar and La Magdalena, the great English-style royal country residence on a hill overlooking the bay of Santander. 'It had been ruined inside by the Reds and is still being cleaned up by Red prisoners who are camped in the park. They all looked well and happy.'<sup>56</sup>

Sad to leave Touffles, she continued her journey on 28 September, moving on to Burgos where she toured the great cathedral, then onto Valladolid and to Salamanca. Pip was entranced by Spain, the only drawback being the fleas awaiting her in every hotel bedroom. She and Princess Bea stayed with General Kindelán. Kindelán was a man of great rectitude and austerity. Nevertheless, to Pip's young eyes, oblivious to his moral and political merits, he was just 'rather fat and sloppy'. At the Grand Hotel in Salamanca, she caught a glimpse of the 'stunning looking' Peter Kemp, whom she knew vaguely from London. In a Carlist regiment, he was one of the very few English volunteers on the Nationalist side. On 1 October, the first anniversary of Franco's elevation to the headship of state saw a major display of pageantry. Pip was elated by being able to witness history being made – 'a parade of soldiers led by the Moors in their wonderful coloured cloaks on Arab horses with golden trappings. The leaders rode white Arabs with silver hooves and gold-embroidered medieval trappings which looked beautiful with the men's white and orange cloaks, behind them were men in green cloaks on black horses got up the same but with golden hooves.' Her concern that the Nationalist forces might be antiquated was redressed when Álvaro, Princess Bea's eldest son, took her to inspect the Italian Savoia Marchetti tri-motored bombers at his air base. This was the Base Aéreo de Matabacán, built in October-November 1936. Afterwards Álvaro took her to see the fierce fighting bulls at the estate of Antonio Pérez Taberneró, a bull-breeder friend of the Kindelán family.<sup>57</sup>

On 2 October, she was thrilled when Touffles unexpectedly showed up in Salamanca although her delight was tempered when he spent their brief time together teasing her about her figure. She also wrote to her father and asked him to buy her a Ford 10 and have it sent to Gibraltar. 'I hope you do as I must have a car if I am here alone.' On 4 October, they left Salamanca and, after a spectacular journey south through the harsh and arid hills of Extremadura, they reached Sanlúcar de Barrameda – the family's Palacio de Montpensier having been returned to Prince Alfonso by Franco. Pip found it

crazy mixture of styles hideously ugly but fascinating. Prince Ali, now a lieutenant colonel in the Nationalist airforce, was stationed at Seville and so was often able to visit his home. Inevitably, she imbibed the family's views on the Reds.<sup>58</sup>

By mid-October, everything had been arranged for her to go and stay with the Duquesa of Montemar in Jerez while attending a nursing course at a hospital there. Lord Howard de Walden cabled that her car would be sent to Gibraltar in a few days. When it arrived at the end of the month she thought it 'heaven. Black with green leather inside and a dream of beauty.' At first she found the hospital 'splendid fun' and 'not in the least disgusting'. The bulk of the patients were Moorish mercenaries whom she found 'perfectly sweet but like a lot of children and rather dirty'. When the course proper began, she was shocked by the appalling wounds that had to be treated. 'I did not feel sick at all but afterwards when I left the hospital I kept seeing the wounds all day and hearing the screams of agony.' She was fully aware that she would see far worse sights at the front. 'I understand now why nurses are so often hard and inhuman.' While in Jerez, she got gathered up in the local social whirl. She was mortified when it was suggested to her by her hostess, the Duquesa, among others, that it was obvious that she was in love with Ataúlfo and ought to marry him. This was not because the idea displeased her. Quite the contrary, but she was embarrassed that her infatuation should be so obvious. Despite her emotional preoccupations, she made good progress with her nursing skills. She loved the work and was beginning to be able to witness without distress the most hair-raising wounds being treated.<sup>59</sup>

There were now two parallel strands in her life. One was training to be a nurse at the front and the other was her deepening passion for Touffles. When he returned to Sanlúcar and telephoned to invite her over, she skipped her classes to go and see him, 'hopping with life and merriment'. When she got back to the Orléans household, her happiness knew no bounds. The life of the well-to-do in the Nationalist zone had no equivalent in the Republican ranks. Touffles arrived with nine Luftwaffe pilots for a bout of entertainment and relaxation that included swimming, a flamenco fiesta at one of the Jerez bodegas and a visit to a stud farm for Arab steeds. There was then a trip to Gibraltar to collect Pip's car and to do shopping, during which she bought a white kimono embroidered with golden dragons. She spent a lot of time with Touffles drinking and dancing. After one late night, she wrote: 'I adore Touffles more every day and only wish I could just stay with him for ever.' He bought her a radio in anticipation of her imminent twenty-first birthday. It was to accompany her throughout the Spanish Civil War. Loaded with shopping, including 3,000 cigarettes, she drove her new car back into Spain. Her social position ensured that she had no difficulty getting through the border controls. 'They had been warned to expect us and refused to let us declare anything. So we just sailed through with no trouble at all. It was very nice of them to be so kind as it saved a packet of trouble as my car has no triptyque [a document permitting the transit of a car from one country to another] or insurance and I have no licence.'

Ecstatically happy to be spending time with Touffles, she had no desire to return to the hospital in Jerez. However, her views were somewhat altered when she came face to face with the arrogant and sexist mentality of the Andalusian aristocratic *señorito*. Pip and the family went to Seville to stay at the Hotel Cristina, which was 'crammed full of Germans on leave'. Touffles met up with his Luftwaffe comrades and announced that they were off to a brothel. 'Of course it is damn stupid of me to mind as it won't be the first or last time he sleeps with a tart but if he liked me the weeniest bit the way I want him to, he could not have told me he was going to without a qualm. However, who cares? I'm damned if I'm going to. I knew he was not in the least in love with me before so it does not make any difference. Oh hell and damn.' When he and his German cronies did the same on the following

night, she decided that she would rather be at the front nursing. She did not know, of course, whether he did anything more than play the piano and dance.<sup>60</sup>

Feeling rejected by Ataulfo, she began to get involved in her hospital work. On 10 November, she attended her first operations which she found enthralling. Touffles went back to his unit on the next day, leaving her 'with that grim feeling of emptiness and the awful wartime pessimism of wondering at the back of my mind whether I will ever see him again'. One and all continued to enquire as to when she would marry him. She wrote in her diary: 'But why bother, at this very moment he is almost certainly tootling around Seville with a tart but why should I care. Of course I do but it is very stupid.' She was finding some consolation in nursing. She loved the work although 'I am beginning to loathe the Moors. They are so tiresome always quarrelling and yelling at one. It makes me mad to have a lot of filthy smelly Moors ordering me about.' On the eve of her twenty-first birthday, she wrote: 'I feel awfully small and young tonight. In a new country talking a strange language and only understanding half of what is said to me, doing a new kind of work amongst new people and about to prance off on my own to the middle of the war. Sometimes I feel an awful long way from home but who cares. It is the first adventure I have ever undertaken and so far I love it.' When Princess Bea returned to England on 20 November, Pip went back to Jerez where she waited anxiously for her nursing examination. She was keen to get to the front – 'I am tired of waiting around doing nothing much. I want action.' Every day, her diary recorded her anxiety to be off to war. However, this required the permission of Mercedes Milá, the head of the Nationalist nursing services. The ordeal of the examination on 2 December passed off less traumatically than she had feared. In fact, she was amazed by how much she was left to do in the hospital without supervision.<sup>61</sup>

Her social life was hectic; late nights consisting of cinema, dinner, protracted dancing and drinking. On 6 and 7 December, she was given a tour around the German battleship *Deutschland* which she thought 'a lovely boat'. On 20 December, Touffles and one of his German friends took her for a spin in a Junkers 52 bomber. Despite the distractions, she was becoming deeply impatient with Mercedes Milá's failure to respond to her request to go to the front. She was all the more unsettled because of rumours about major action on the Aragón front – an echo of the Republican offensive against Teruel. As her Spanish improved and she got to know more people, her social life was coming to resemble her life in London albeit on a narrower scale. She had a couple of superficial flirtations, her blonde hair and blue eyes – and probably her plumpness too – making her very attractive to Spanish men. Finally knowing that Princess Bea was in Burgos, she decided to leave the hospital at Jerez and make the hazardous eleven-hour 1000-kilometre car journey to join her for Christmas. It was a courageous – irresponsible – initiative since attractive young women travelling alone in Spain were usually at risk from sexually frustrated soldiers. With typical self-reliance, she coped with running out of petrol on remote roads and the car's sump springing a leak.<sup>62</sup>

When, after driving for two days, she finally arrived at Burgos on 23 December, she could not find Princess Bea and was desperate to have come so far only to be all alone. Princess Bea had moved on to the Palacio de Ventosilla at Aranda de Duero where her family would be staying. This was because the front-line units of the Nationalist air force were being regrouped as the Primera Brigada Aérea Hispana at Aranda, alongside the Italian Aviazione Legionaria in Zaragoza and the German Condor Legion in Almazán, the walled medieval town due south of Soria. General Alfredo Kindelán, with overall command over all three forces, had established his headquarters at Burgos. It was Pip's good fortune to get a room in the hotel where General Kindelán's family were staying. They told her that Mercedes Milá planned to send her to a front-line hospital. There was a terrible scare when word was brought to the hotel that Álvaro de Orléans had crashed. His Italian wife Carla Parodi-Delfino was

hysterical and Pip had to calm her down. She then went on to the Palacio de Ventosilla. To the relief of Álvaro's escape, there was added the dual pleasure of resolving her future as a nurse at the front and of seeing Ataúlfo. Touffles told her that she was much thinner and very beautiful. However, the delight was dampened by Princess Bea, who knew that Pip was in love with him. The Infanta told her the first of a series of slightly conflicting stories by way of breaking to her gently that Ataúlfo would never marry her. She said, rather implausibly, that he would never recover from having his heart broken by the daughter of Alfonso XIII, Beatriz. The romantic in Pip was both intrigued and devastated to be told by Princess Bea that Touffles was so affected by this that she was 'afraid he will never fall in love or get married and will just get more and more the young man about town and his mistresses'.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, the men of the family were flying bombing missions against the Republican forces that were closing in on Teruel. The proximity to the war was beginning to affect Pip. 'It really is an awful life when you know your friends are risking their lives every single day and every time you say goodbye or just goodnight you think you may never see them again.' Her diaries reflected her links with senior officers of the Nationalist air force. She felt an ever closer identification with the cause. 'Today [28 December] we lost one machine and shot down seven reds.' Today [30 December] they brought down eight Reds, four Curtis, two Martin bombers and two others and we did not lose one. Good work!' 'We shot down eleven Reds today [4 January 1938].' 'We shot down eight Reds today. The right spirit. [5 January 1938].' The strain of seeing Touffles only fleetingly as he often popped in between flights was trying her nerves and increased her determination to get to the front line. Her wish was granted, in mid-January, by a telegram instructing her to go to the hospital at Alhama de Aragón, southwest of Zaragoza on the road to Guadalajara. She was reluctant to leave the Orléans family but the move was inevitable because of a reorganisation of the Nationalist air force. Prince Ali's air force unit (escuadra) of Savoia-Marcchetti 79s was moving to Castejón while Ataúlfo's Condor Legion bombing unit was moving to Corella. Both Castejón and Corella were between Alfaro and Tudela in Navarre and Princess Bea was going to Castejón in order to set up a house for her husband and son.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, when the orders came, the entire household was plunged into various forms of colds and influenza. The worst hit was Ataúlfo and Pip decided to stay on and nurse him. However, proximity to her loved one did not bring happiness.

I am in the depths of depression and so nervous that I don't know what to do with myself. I can't sleep and have not done so for three nights which is not surprising when I have to spend my whole day keeping a firm grip on myself not to appear to be in love with Ataúlfo. I don't know whether I am getting less controlled, more frustrated or more alone but it is pure hell whatever it is and leaves me in a state of being unable to sleep, unable to eat and feeling miserable.

The imminent upheaval meant that Pip would have to leave anyway. The malicious gossip about her relationship with him made it impossible for her to stay and nurse Ataúlfo without Princess Bea in the house as chaperone. Pip's misery was dissipated by a meeting with Bella Kindelán, the general's daughter, who was a nurse at Alhama. When Bella told her that it would be possible to go from Alhama with a mobile unit right up to the front, she cast off her melancholia and threw herself into nursing.<sup>65</sup>

By 24 January 1938, Pip's prolonged Christmas holidays were over and she was ensconced along with the other nurses in the grim hotel in Alhama de Aragón which partly served as the local hospital. It was bitterly cold and depressing. The winter of 1937–8 was one of the cruellest Spain had ever

suffered, the bitter cold at its worst in the barren and rocky terrain of Aragón with temperatures as low as  $-20^{\circ}$  centigrade. Pip was missing Ataulfo and there was nothing for her to do. She had been joined by Consuelo Osorio de Moscoso, the daughter of the Duquesa de Montemar. Alarmed at the prospect of spending time in their tiny unheated room, they impetuously decided to take matters into their own hands and go to Sigüenza where Consuelo knew some doctors. They hoped thereby to get to the front. However, when they reached the emergency hospital there, they were told that the front-line mobile units were fully staffed and had very few wounded. On their return to Aragón, they fell into an even worse gloom. 'There is nothing to do anywhere. The war seems to have paused and no one wants nurses.'<sup>66</sup> This was far from true. The battle for Teruel was still raging. Within ten days of the city falling into the hands of the Republic, the advancing Nationalist forces became the besiegers. The scale of the fighting can be deduced from Franco's remark on 29 January to the Italian Ambassador that he was delighted because the Republic was destroying its reserves by throwing them into 'the witches' cauldron of Teruel'.<sup>67</sup> Astonishingly, this was not reflected in the traffic through the hospital at Alhama where Pip was now assigned to a ward.

Much of her work was routine and unpleasant. One of her patients had a spinal injury – 'as he has lost all sense of feeling, he pees in his bed and we have to change the sheets which is both difficult and messy as he can't move at all, also he has no pyjamas and boils all over his bottom which is most unappetising. As for the other part of him, it is definitely an unpleasing spectacle which somehow always manages to be just where I want to take hold of a sheet.' However, the routine was short-lived. On 28 January, Mercedes Mila arrived to assign nurses to other hospitals. Consuelo and Pip pestered her to be sent to the front. At first, their pleas fell on deaf ears and the head of the Nationalist nursing services said that Pip was too young to be given responsibility in a dangerous position. However, with more senior nurses reluctant to go to the front, they were picked with three others to go to Cella, eight kilometres from Teruel, the nearest hospital to the front. Pip was excited and immediately thought of Ataulfo, 'I shall see them all going over to bomb everyday perhaps. I can't wait to go, my spirit of adventure is aroused.' Although she was aware the hospital might be shelled and bombarded, her principal concern was whether her nursing skills would be adequate when the lives of the seriously wounded were at stake.<sup>68</sup>

After a perilous journey on mountain roads, Pip and Consuelo reached the bombed-out village of Cella. Their welcome was muted since there was neither food nor accommodation to spare. The officers refused to believe them when they said they would willingly sleep on the bare floor. They were eventually put in a room with three others, without proper bedding or window panes and only the most minimal sanitation. Pip's spirit of adventure and her country background helped her make light of the situation: 'The town itself is crammed with soldiers and mules, and ambulances come and go in a continuous stream. I am so enchanted with the place that I long to stay but we are terribly afraid that they will send us back when the others come as they have precedence over us. It is a shame as they will hate the discomfort and dirt and all and we don't mind it.' Indeed, she was anxious to join a mobile unit leaving for a position at Villaquemada, even nearer to the front line. Just when Pip thought that she would have to go back to Alhama, a need arose for two nurses so she and Consuelo were able to stay. They also found accommodation in a peasant farmhouse. Possessing a car made a colossal difference, since she could drive to nearby towns to shop for household necessities to make their room more comfortable and also for food. In the operating theatre itself, Pip was shocked by the doctor's ignorance of basic procedures of hygiene, 'His ideas of antisepsia were very shaky and gave me the creeps to see the casual way they picked up sterilised compresses with their fingers.' She was equally alarmed to see their peasant hostess dipping into their food fingers 'black with years



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