

# The Malignant Moor

By Tony Culver

The British Union of Fascists Olympia meeting on June 4 1934 was a violent event. That summer BUF's support was growing. A lot of Jews, a lot of the Left didn't find this amusing. The rally descended into mayhem as anti-fascist demonstrators attacked the Blackshirts. Although BUF policies didn't include any outright anti-Semitic sentiments, the apparatus so closely resembled the German Nazi Party, Jews knew that such policies would soon be instigated. The Communists, aware of the arrests of their members in Germany, saw the BUF as a Nazi mirror image, Moseley as Hitler's puppet. He and his organization had to be stopped.

Fighting took place in and around the hall. Margot Levine was one anti-fascist demonstrator. She and her elder sister Daphne had cycled down from Highgate. Margot filled with passionate anti-right sentiments. Daphne tagged along to watch over her. At 29, the younger woman was attractive, athletic body, dark locks bobbed. She had given up teaching to edit a Leftie magazine. Her widowed father Isaac and librarian sister were naturally concerned but less intense about the threat. Father had his businesses, the bespectacled Daphne her Library job.

It was as well that the older woman hovered like a mother owl. When the clubs swung, Margot, screaming anti-Moseley slogans, was beaten up by a BUF steward. Coshed across head, punched in the eye, thrown to the ground and kicked several times in the ribs. Daphne swooped through the throng. Shoved the steward in the back, sending him flying. Dragged Margot out of the skirmish, as if she were an owl rescuing her young from the jaws of a fox. Margot had her wounds tended by a C.P. orderly. The gash on her head poured blood, but wasn't that deep. He stopped the flow. Her eye would be an unpleasant mess for days. The ribs weren't broken just badly bruised. He put a bandage round her chest and told her to have the injuries looked at by her doctor on the morrow. Eventually, Margot partly recovered, the two women started in the direction of their bikes chained to railings on Earls Terrace, a Georgian row set back from Kensington High Street. Behind them the violence continued.

Next morning Margot lay shivering in bed. Her hair beneath a bandage was wet with sweat. The right eye had swollen horribly and dramatically discolored, skin deadly pale. A tap at the door. Daphne came in with a tray. Set it on a bedside table. Took Margot's left hand and sat beside her. The undamaged eye half opened.

"Don't say it." Margot shifted and propped herself up. Reached for the bowl of cornflakes. "Whoops!"

I do feel rather the worse for wear. Not a bright idea to take on a lout built like a Johnny Wiessmuller". She closed her eyes trying to remember. "There's nothing broken is there?"

"No. You've got three badly bruised ribs, a two inch gash to the skull which needs stitches and that remarkable addition to your beauty. You'll be up in a couple of days."

"It's going to be longer than that, I feel absolutely ghastly. Totally drained, bruised all over. Finished." She looked up at her sister, on the edge of the bed, a framed photo of Greta Garbo as Queen Christina on the wall behind her. "Time to take a break. I'll shove off somewhere. Get some sea air in my lungs. I have been testing the edges of my physical and mental margins more than a little."

"Wonderful!" A smile suffused Daphne's plain features. "I've got a hol from the Library due. Shall we bundle off together? Go biking." She glanced out of the window. The sunlight sparkled from a blue sky. "It's high summer. Just the time to go away. You know it's never much fun on one's own."

Margot touched her sister's left cheek. "Why don't you organize it? Any plan you make will be absolutely fine, I'm sure." She closed her eyes. Sank back onto the pillows. Daphne rose. Picked up the tray and quietly left the white, bird-song touched bedroom.

Daphne arranged a bike tour of Yorkshire. They left, from Liverpool Street Station, two weeks later arriving in York on time at 3-30 in the afternoon. The weather was fine. They had visited before so finding the camp site proved no problem. They spent the evening chatting, reading books, socializing with other campers. Next morning was hazy. It cleared up around lunch with a late storm forecast. They packed, more adroitly than they had put up, the tent. At about 4 P.M. headed out of the city in weather that was almost stifling. This inclined them to dawdle. Stop to take photos It is 7 miles from York to Long Marston, near the Civil War battlefield, their first stop. It took them 2 hours to get into its vicinity. A farm laborer was approached, he led a horse shackled to a laden-with-hay cart. When asked the whereabouts of the battlefield, he brusquely and almost incomprehensibly, his accent so rich, said they were standing in it. He also mentioned that the farmer wouldn't mind if they stopped over-night on his land. Pointed out White Sykes Close, a sheltered copse of trees on a low rise, bang in the middle of the killing fields. This he didn't impart.

As they got to the Close, the sky over head darkened. They hurried to erect the tent. Thunder rolled around them. Within it they distinctly heard the sound of a trumpet. They stared out over the fields. A brief martial tune was discerned but the notes sounded strangely. They looked at each other.

"A bugler in the village hall?" Queried Margot.

They turned back to their tasks. Another roll of thunder shook the air that appeared to have within it

the rhythmic pattern of horses galloping. The wind whipped up the corn in long lines. It swayed as though beneath ranks of cavalry galloping up the rise. The sky darkened. Sheet lightning flickered to the west accompanied by multiple claps of thunder as resonant as an artillery barrage. It was answered to the east by more lightning, more cracks of thunder.

“We’d best get under cover!” Daphne, ever the prudent, shouted. “ We’re going to be soaked!”

At that moment the heavens split open some way away. A wall of rain descended and moved slowly across the field. Both thought they saw the figures of foot soldiers advancing in the line of turbulent water. Daphne stopped half in and half out of the tent flap. Were those cracks the sounds of muskets being fired in a ragged volley or the crackle of sheet lightning? She ducked terrified into the tent. Morbidly fascinated Margot stayed where she was. She’d never seen such a storm. The wind swung around. Blew from the opposite direction. With it came another wall of rain which advanced steadily towards the first now-static wall. She again saw the outlines of advancing soldiers in the wild criss-crossing patterns. Impossibly deluge met deluge. Gobbets of mud were thrown up by rain drops which exploded in the earth like bullets. Spears of water sliced hard into hedges. The wind, tearing through branches, sounded like the howling of warriors.

Margot scurried into the tent. Daphne had lit the paraffin lamp. It threw wavering highlights and shadows across them.

“So much for a peaceful holiday.” Margot muttered angrily.

“Unnatural forces are at work out there,” whimpered her sister, who was sitting clutching her sleeping bag.

“You don’t say! Seemed to me like it was the four hundred horsemen of the apocalypse. Quite terrifying.” She busied herself arranging her clothes. Daphne sat staring at her blankly. Outside the wind and rain gusted at the sides of the tent. Threatened to uproot it.

“I think it’s you. You’ve carried your love of violence up here. In some way it has infected this land. Brought out the long dead violence of the battle. Recreated this ancient conflict in the weather system.”

“Don’t be bloody daft, Daphe,” expostulated her sister. “I’m no psychic. Anyway, I hate violence.”

“No you don’t, you love it. Talk endlessly about the rise of fascism in Germany. It excites you. I watched you as you pitched into the melee at Olympia. You were smiling with pleasure as you clouted that steward. Nothing could please you more than the total destruction of the fascists. Their blood running in the streets, bodies torn by bullets.”

“It will come to that, Daphne, it will.”

“But you’ll enjoy it! Every Blackshirt killed will be a perverse thrill for you.”

“They want to clean us off the face of the planet. Why shouldn’t I want to destroy them?”

“But do you have to take pleasure in their destruction? Exult in every battle we win? Fight them, certainly but don’t wallow in the pleasure of wiping them out. It’s as ugly as their twisted mentalities.”

Margot looked long into her soul. Saw within the seething hatred that had filled her. Hatred that willed the destruction of the international Nazi Party. Saw that she might have to live with this obsessive hatred until they were defeated. She didn’t think she wanted to carry that around day after day for years, seething endlessly. Would much prefer not to hate. It was that which had exhausted her. Fight to get rid of the monsters, but clinically. Cut them off the international body politic as a surgeon might remove a tumor. The battle ahead would need calm minds, un-muddied by burning anger. She smiled. She drew back the tent flap. Outside the sky was beginning to clear.

Some weeks later Margot inadvertently discovered that White Sykes Close had been site for a last stand by the Royalist regiment called The Whitecoats. They’d been slaughtered by the New Model Army. Just what she’d wanted to see happen to Moseley’s Blackshirts.

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