



The beater held his ground as the tiger glided toward him. I raised my rifle. "Wait!" snapped Mr. Quereshi

Nobody but ruddy Americans would try to knock over a blinking tiger in a week," said the Britisher. He was one of the colonials at the Cecil Hotel in Agra, India. "It'd spoil a month," he continued. "And even then they mightn't get one of the blighters."

I didn't ball my fists. They knew India. My wife, Ethie, and I didn't. Through the Y.M.C.A., we "ruddy" Americans were trying to lease a 35,000-acre forest block in tiger country. We had hoisted a Lincoln and trailer onto a steamer sailing for Beirut, Lebanon. Upon landing, we cork-scrambled along a narrow road to the cracked-up old city of Damascus in Syria. Then we chased the horizon across the

most blasted blob of sand God ever forgot—the Syrian desert—and went on to Baghdad, capital of Iraq. In a few days we skidded over the mountain rock piles of Iran to Tehran and Meshed, staying overnight at caravansaries, missionary cottages, and sometimes flopping by the roadside, exhausted.

We barreled over bandit-infested roads to Zahidan where we loaded the trailer with gasoline for the drive across the trackless deserts of Baluchistan. From Quetta we went down the sleep pass into India with its dark millions wrapped in white cotton. Finally we tunneled through the dust of the highway to Lahore, which was lined with bo



Black Velvet On Gold

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I couldn't help laughing. "But what on earth do we want with a servant?"

"That's what I asked him," Ethie said.

Ethie was dressed in khaki slacks and wore a topee—a pith helmet—for protection against the stabbing Indian heat. "Mr. Smellie told me to beat the mattresses good when we get to one of those bungalows in the forest," she said.

"Why, for heaven's sake?"

"Cobras. They crawl through the bath drains and hide in the beds."

"Sounds cozy," I said.



Suddenly a hairy, black-ringed face was framed in our bedroom window. I reached for the rifle

While I bought a hunting license for a few rupees from a man who trailed me to the city square, Ethie ransacked the bazaars and markets for food, loading it into the car. On top of the pile, together with two suitcases, we stuck Mr. Smellie's servant, whose name was Shaker. He was as black as the inside of your pocket and sported a wrist watch that wouldn't run. Then we headed for Supkhar, 2,500 feet in the hills.

For 20 miles we switchbacked up a dirt road, past flame-of-the-woods, bamboo clumps, and jaman trees interwoven with lianas. Brilliant Indian gamecocks darted in front of the car and scurried into the lantern bushes. We stopped behind groups of thin, long-tailed colobin monkeys too lazy to budge until we nearly ran over them.

Soon we rounded a drive edged with whitewashed stones and shaded by smoky-looking white pines. We stopped in front of the bungalow used by hunters in the Supkhar forest block. It was half a mile from a native village.

Built mostly by native women, the stecco bungalow's thatched roof was peaked high over a wide, encircling cement veranda. Beyond it was a maidan, or meadow, of dry tiger grass. In the undulating heat waves, the field looked like a lake rimmed by low, rolling, green hills.

A tall, dignified Indian in a topee and khaki shirt and trousers walked up the drive. "My name is Quereshi," he said. "I'm the range officer." He spoke perfect Oxford English. "I've arranged for beaters, and we have four young buffaloes staked out for bait. Mr. Smellie sent a runner to tell me you had only a week to hunt."

"That's right," I replied.

Mr. Quereshi excused himself. He had work to do ar-

ranging for the beats, he said. Mr. Smellie's servant, Shaker, looked off into the maze of tall hardwoods, jumped up and down, and grunted. "Jungle! Jungle!" Finally he came to earth and lugged our stuff into the bungalow.

Inside, a large lounge with high ceiling was separated from a dining room by a screen. Off the lounge was a pair of duplicate bedrooms, each with two mosquito-netted iron beds and a bathroom. The bathtubs were of tin set inside cement curbing. After bathing, you turned the tub over and the dirty water ran outside through a drain.

Ethie and I chose the right-hand suite since the other one had a reputation for nesting cobras. We unpacked, and later I wandered outside to look over the cookhouse. Suddenly a spindly, G-stringed Indian slid out of the forest and bowed low before me. He had so many teeth he could hardly shut his mouth.

"Salaam," he said. I nodded. He blasted me with a smother of dialect. He wanted something, but to be on the safe side I said, "No." He bowed deeply again, walked to the cookhouse, and began to lag in wood. Another native eased out of the forest and salaamed. "No," I said, emphatically. "No!" The black-eyed skeleton got a bucket and went for water.

This kept up until there were about a dozen Indians working around the bungalow. The servants there included two to carry food to the dining room; two to wait on table; a cook and his helper; a janitor who wore a flaming scarlet rowing jacket, and two sweepers to draw tubs and clean the bathrooms.

Inside the bungalow was a contour map of the Supkhar



The man's face oozed sweat and his hands shook. "A kill," he cried. "We've had a kill!"

forest block. Pictorially, it indicated the location of game in the area—bison, pythons, the 600-pound sambar deer, the many-tined barasingha deer, the chital deer, the barking deer, wild hogs, and tigers. The tiger beats were drawn in great detail.

I got a target from my suitcase, and walked a short way into the forest to sight in my rifle. When I came back I saw Shaker holding a mattress and Ethie, sleeves up, whaling it with a stick. "We got cheated," she said. "Not a single cobra here."

Mr. Quereshi hustled up the driveway, shouldering a single-barreled rifle. He held it out. "I'm going to back you up with this," he said. "It's a 500 Express. I've killed many tigers with it."

The stock was fastened with wire. I opened the breech and tried to squint through the bore. "Don't you ever clean it?" I asked.

"Why? It shoots all right."

"Black powder?"

Mr. Quereshi nodded. "Makes a fine big smoke."

I handed the blunderbuss back to him. I could see that I'd have to shoot my own tiger, and that was all right with me.

"I'll be on hand for a small beat in the morning," Mr. Quereshi said, then turned and left.

Shortly after twilight Shaker, clad in a white robe, swept us in to dinner. After passing platters of small native chicken, rice, and greens, he anchored himself behind my chair. Another grim-faced boy rose behind Ethie. I squirmed in my dusty, wrinkled suit, sure that I must be the only white man in India who wasn't dressed in a dinner coat.

Dinner over, one servant after another salaamed to Ethie, to me, said "Busti," and vanished. When Shaker smiled in I asked why the exodus.

"Men afraid of tiger," he said. "Go to busti—the village." He carried in a brazier of charcoal, salaamed, and disappeared.

In our room, Ethie and I huddled over the warm coals. We heard the shriek of jungle birds, the yapping of barking deer, the monotone of sounds that seem to have no origin. I loaded the Mauser and leaned it near the bed.

Ethie and I crawled under the blankets, arranged the nets, and promptly fell asleep.

About midnight I bolted upright in the bed, wide awake. Moonlight was streaming in the window. I could see Ethie, also sitting up, outlined against the silver light.

The roar of a tiger vibrated from the maidan, resounding and echoing among the jungle shadows. I saw Ethie shiver. I shivered myself. The roaring ceased. After an eerie silence, little noises hit my ears—animals in the brush behind the bungalow. Then an almost inaudible padding sound came from the veranda. Suddenly a hairy, black-ringed face appeared at the window. I reached for the 10.75. But like a specter, the big face vanished. The roaring resumed. The rest of the night I slept with my rifle. In the morning Shaker showed us the pug marks of two tigers in the driveway.

Mr. Quereshi appeared soon after breakfast, lifted his topee, and smiled grimly. "Ready for first beat?" I nodded and got my rifle, and Ethie took out her 8 mm. movie camera.

Outside, a grarled, gray-haired old guide—a shikari—and a couple of bow-legged Indians as thin as bone cages jumped up from the grass. A gurbearer shifted the Mauser to his shoulder, and we walked down the dusty jungle road.

Sun-scorched fields, waist high in grass, opened between bushes of lantana and flame trees. Hardwoods towered above the mangoes, and here and there was a banyan tree, its branches bent down and rooted in the ground.

For half a mile we shuffled along in the dust, then almost bumped into five squatting beaters, each carrying a stick about two feet long with a knob on the end.

We pushed into the tangle of forest, then stopped abruptly under a half-dead tree. An Indian in a white turban dragged a ladder from the brush and leaned it against a native red bed that was lashed into the crotch of a tree. Mr. Quereshi smoothed his small mustache and pointed to the ladder. Ethie scrambled up, I climbed after her, and Mr. Quereshi followed with the rifle and camera. The ladder was taken away, and the beaters vanished.

We plumped down cross-legged on the springy bed. Ethie was on my right, Mr. Quereshi behind. Before us spread a grassy maidan, and stretching into the distance was a lane bordered by trees that looked like poplars.

I whispered to Mr. Quereshi, "Is there likely to be a tiger in this beat?"

"Possibly. But more likely other animals." Mr. Quereshi barely whispered the words. "Don't hang your feet over the edge. Don't talk. Don't move."

I nodded, placed my rifle across my knees. Ethie gripped her camera. In a few minutes I uncrossed my legs. Ethie shifted. Mr. Quereshi tapped each of us on the shoulder. Topee low on his head, his small brown eyes boring into the forest, he whispered, "A little practice and you'll learn to sit still."

For half an hour I didn't dare move. The quiet played on my nerves like a bow on a fiddle string. The spires of the trees trembled in the breeze, and in every shadow my imagination pictured tigers. I curled a finger around the trigger. Lips tight, Ethie was clutching the camera, her eyes centered on the lane that was striped with sunlight and shadow.

We heard a faint tapping. I turned to look at Mr. Quereshi. His sharp face was frozen as he gazed at the path.

Suddenly, at the far end of the lane, cutting through

the sunlight and shadow, raced an animal. Then another. And another. Straight at us.

Ethie yanked my arm. "Shoot! Shoot!" she screamed.

I stared at the animals. Streaked by the light between the trees, they looked something like tigers—at least I thought they did. But they were wild pigs. I picked the bristles that stuck up the highest, tried a guess where the boar was, and pulled the trigger.

The report boomed and echoed through the forest and the animals scampered off. A small army of beaters, swinging their short weapons, sauntered across the meadow and one of them set up the ladder. Ethie climbed down and I followed.

Ethie barged into a clump of lantana bushes. She was leaning over a long, black-haired heap when Mr. Quereshi and I ran up.

"Memashib, get back!" he cried. "A wild boar could tear you to ribbons."

"Not this one," Ethie said. "He's dead."

The white-turbaned crowd of small chocolate men bound the boar's legs, hung him from a pole, and lugged him, limp and swaying, to the bungalow.

The cook roasted a ham for dinner, but it was so tough you couldn't have cut it with a hack saw. That didn't dull the beaters' appetites, however. They sang, danced, and gorged themselves all night.

We sat through a dozen beats the next few days, but no tigers appeared. Each evening, because time was running out, the old shikari tied six buffaloes with small ropes which a tiger could break. We expected that at least one would drag his kill away and return to it when hungry.

But we had no luck. The British colonials had been right. A week was not enough. We had reservations on a steamer from Bombay, and after landing we would have many rough miles to drive and unbridged rivers to cross.

We began to pack on the day before Christmas. Ethie lugged our stuff from the closet, and soon the bedroom was as cluttered as if a tiger had charged through it.

"We're not as smart as we thought we were," I said. "Spent a lot of money. Wasted a lot of time."

Suddenly Ethie raised up. "Mr. Quereshi!" she cried. The range officer's olive face oozed sweat as he greeted us, his thin hands shook, and his mustache twitched. "A kill," he said. "We have found a kill. Four tigers got that bait. I have sent all over for men. I need 150 of them. Every night I have prayed, and now my prayers have been answered."

I flopped on the bed. My mouth went dry. Never having shot even one tiger, I was now to be confronted by four. I wished Mr. Quereshi hadn't prayed so hard. Just one tiger would have been plenty.

"I shall return after lunch," Mr. Quereshi said. "We'll have to drive 15 miles so as not to disturb the tigers."

"O.K.," I grunted. But if I had suddenly come down with malaria, cholera, and tetanus at the same time, I wouldn't have minded too much. Four tigers! I should have stayed in Agra gazing at the Taj Mahal in moonlight.

After lunch, Ethie eased into the driver's seat of the car and I got in back with Mr. Quereshi and the assistant range officer. We had the 500 Express and the 10.75 mm. Mauser. Ethie started the engine. Suddenly, the servants flocked about Mr. Quereshi.

They jabbered, yanked at his sleeves, and punched the air with their thin black fingers. "Jungle?"

Mr. Quereshi answered in dialect. Soberly he shook his head. He was firm, and in the end the white turbans bowed and the gang wandered back to the cookhouse.

"They don't know how to protect themselves against snakes, and they'd make too much noise," Mr. Quereshi said.

We rolled over the soft jungle wheel tracks, skirted



Ethie was whaling away at a mattress. "We got cheated," she said. "No cobras!"



On Christmas Eve—after I'd shot the tiger—natives put on a tribal dance in front of our bungalow in the Supkhar forest block

savannahs of high, silver-topped, waving grass, splinters of tangled forest, and an occasional big tree. We saw a chital buck that must have weighed about 200 pounds. My finger itched for the trigger, but I slapped the finger down. In a large maidan, a shaggy umber-brown sambar with a stately rack stood as though asking for a bullet.

Stop, memasahib!" Mr. Quereshi rasped at Ethie. Then he turned to me. "Take a shot at him. Those horns are for a record. We won't disturb the tigers—they're too far away."

I shook my head. "No. The four tigers will be enough." To get our minds off the sambar, I asked, "How do you work these tiger beats?"

He seemed as anxious as I to break tension by talking. The well-rounded words came with a cultivated accent. "Well, when a tiger kills a buffalo, the shikari follows the tracks to where the kill is hidden. It's dangerous, but he knows how to do it. The beaters, five yards apart, then form a three-quarter circle around this area. They drive the tiger just where they want him to go. The machan is at the center of the circle, and on the open flanks men called 'stops' are in trees every 40 yards to keep the tiger from running by them."

I got the idea, and I knew I'd get the rest clear when the business was over. For an hour nobody spoke. The car creaked in and out of ruts, around curves, and up and down small rises. The forest tangle pressed so close you could touch it, and thoughts of four tigers pressed so close against me that I squirmed. What if I should miss them, or in some way ball up the deal?

I saw about a dozen natives squatting on the edge of a sandy ravine. Ethie stopped the car, and a gunbearer reached for my rifle. Another shouldered Mr. Quereshi's single file, we plunged into the forest.

The Indians poked the knobbed ends of their sticks into holes and probed for snakes as we climbed a slight grade. Knowing that four tigers were near didn't make breath come any easier. Behind the little man carrying her camera, Ethie was wading through an ocean of head-high brush, her hands before her face. After an hour, we stopped on the edge of a glade where some beaters were looting about a native bed which they'd carried from the village.

Mr. Quereshi spoke to one of them, then turned to me. "The beat is ready. But there is no good tree here to set up the machan." He grumbled again. "We have only 100 men. We need 150 of them." Then he and the beaters vanished into the forest, leaving Ethie and me standing alone with two bearers.

Mr. Quereshi seemed to be gone a century. Any moment I expected to hear the beaters rustling up those tigers, or even to see the tigers. But all I heard was the buzzing of insects, the far-off cry of birds, and the chatter of monkeys. Then I felt Mr. Quereshi's tap on my shoulder.

"We're ready," he whispered. He motioned us to follow. After a short walk I spotted the machan, well hidden and commanding a sweeping view of the glade. They had found a tree for it, but I noticed that the bed was only about seven feet above the ground.

"It's a bit low," Mr. Quereshi said. "But it's the best we can do."

The men set the ladder. We shinned up and wriggled into place, with Mr. Quereshi on my right, the 500 Express beside him, and Ethie behind me, breathing down my neck. Fingers near the trigger I laid the 10.75 mm. Mauser across my thighs.

Mr. Quereshi's eyes swept the glade. There was not enough breeze to ruffle even a stalk of the long, coarse, yellow grass beneath us. On the rim of the glade, to our left and in the center, the line of forest was broken by small openings.

Half breathing, I sat listening to the staccato pumping of my heart. Sensations like the touch of dry ice surged in waves through my body. Quit this, I told myself. You wanted to go tiger hunting. Now you are tiger hunting. Don't think of missing. Why should you miss?

The shadows were lengthening. As the sun dipped below the trees, one bright spot after another darkened. I watched every tip of the tall grass. A large peacock cried and, with a swift rush of wings, sailed across the glade. A swarm of bees hummed by, sounding like the muted roar of a distant train at night. A gaudy parrot looted from one tree to another.

I heard a faint tapping begin, miles away, like the echo of a woodpecker. Gradually, the forest was filled

with a man-made din. It grew louder. Four tigers were being driven by 100 men. Driven at me. Four of them. How could I possibly shoot fast enough to get the foug? Those cold waves began surging up and down my spine again and the Mauser trembled in my hands.

The noise of the beaters stopped, and a low, faint rumble began. I concentrated on the rumble and my hands tightened. It seemed as if I waited an hour. The sun floated down, and the shadows lengthened.

Suddenly one of the beaters, a brown little man in a white turban, darted out of the forest and crouched beside a plum bush at the edge of the glade. We watched him, holding our breaths. He stood motionless, peering through the bush at the center opening in the forest.

Then I saw the tiger. Big, his stripes blending into the tawny glade, he glided through the center opening, parting the burnished grass and leaving a path behind him. By inches I raised my rifle.

"Wait!" snapped Mr. Quereshi.

The tiger floored on, muscles rippling under the velvet sheen of his hide. Within a few yards of the plum bush the tiger stopped, swung up his head, and cocked his ears nervously. Then I saw the beater flatten himself on the ground, caught the lightning streak of the tiger's spring, and heard a thud on the ground behind. The tiger vanished.

I lowered the rifle. Mr. Quereshi shook his head. Silence!

I took in a deep breath. Slowly the man got up. Mr. Quereshi smiled.

From the center opening in the glade slid two more tigers, much smaller.

I started to raise my rifle. Mr. Quereshi touched my shoulder. "No. Only half-size," whispered.

Again I settled the Mauser across my thighs. The tigers skittered into some shrubs.

Sweat streamed into my eyes and down my belly. I had hope for a multiple kill, and now a large tiger had passed through the lines. "I need 150 men," Mr. Quereshi had said. The lines were thin. Two of the tigers were

too small to shoot. Would the fourth also be too small, or break back through the overpacked beaters? We might yet have to return to Agra with nothing but a tiger story—no tiger.

Then I felt a light touch on my arm and caught words so softly spoken that I wasn't sure I had heard them.

"There is your tiger!"

My eyes raced across the yellow glade. I could detect nothing. Then I saw stripes moving slowly. In the forest opening at the left of the glade, a golden tiger, body lithe, black-ringed head straight out, moved stealthily over a clump of matted grass, placing each paw as carefully as if afraid of bending a single stalk.

According to Indian ethics I couldn't shoot until the sinuous gleam was beyond the machan. A wounded animal might turn on the beaters. But did I dare wait? Three of my four chances were gone.

I threw up the rifle and watched the yellow-and-black shoulder slide by the front head. I swung slowly across the stripes, marveling at how nearly they camouflaged the animal. I remembered the dreary miles we'd driven, remembered my boyhood dreams of shooting a tiger, and now, here was a tiger only 75 yards away.

My hands were steady. My finger, snug against the trigger, had taken up all but the last bit of slack. But still I hesitated. After a narrow escape by one beater, I didn't want to risk the life of another. I let the big mauler put more distance between him and the beaters.

Any instant now, the tiger might take fright, make a couple of swift leaps, and vanish into the forest. Slowly I let out the breath I had been holding and pressed the final touch on the trigger.

The deep boom burst across the glade, the echo raking back and forth, back and forth. The tiger lay still—a length of black velvet on gold. A Christmas tiger, I remember thinking. What a wonderful gift.

"Good shot," Mr. Quereshi shouted. "Never saw a better."

Ethie hugged me. "Nice going," she said. "But I thought you were never going to pull that trigger." THE END



Holding 10.75 mm. Mauser, I stand by tiger with Mr. Quereshi, right, and beaters. Machan, a native reed bed, at far right



Black Velvet On Gold

by RALPH HAMMER

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN McDERMOTT

Knock over an Indian tiger in a week?
The British colonials thought we must
be mad. But they didn't figure on Mr.
Quereshi's prayers, and neither did we

I washed the dust off my face and barged out to find the forest officer, Capt. V. C. Maitland, to whom Mr. Hindi had wired a request to make the preliminary arrangements for us. Captain Maitland lived a short way up the street in a red brick house much like those maintained by well-to-do New England farmers. On the walls of his office were tiger skulls, sambar heads, and wild-boar tusks.

"Why do you want to go tiger hunting?" he asked bluntly. "It was a fair question, but I had to think. 'I don't know,' I spluttered lamely. 'Ever since I was a kid I've always wanted to.'"

Captain Maitland's large, pale face wreathed into a smile. "I know," he said. "But you must understand that tiger hunting can be a bloody business. Sometimes the beggars break back through the beaters' lines and a man is killed. It happened a few months ago."

Then we talked about rifles, my 10.75 mm. Mauser in particular. It shoots a 347-grain bullet with 65 grains of nitrocellulose.

"I was once following on foot after a tiger that some bloke had wounded," said Captain Maitland. "I glanced around and saw the brute hurtling through the air. I remember thinking in a flash that I'd better hit him in the chest. I fired my .450 double rifle. It killed him all right—but too late. I just got out from three months in the hospital." He loosened his belt and showed me where bits of leather, mashed into his belly by the tiger's claws, still remained in his flesh.

"Well, you can have Supkhar," he grunted finally. "It's the best block in the district."

Back at the bungalow, I gave Ethie the news, and she told me that the deputy commissioner had paid a visit. "He said that Mr. Hindi had wired him too," she reported.

"What was his name?" I asked.

"Smellie, B. A."

"Some name," I said. "What did he look like?"

"Tall, with a large face, dressed like an Englishman. Said he picked the name when the Indian government let the people choose names they liked. Smellie suited him. He's been very happy with it. And he insisted we take along one of his servants on our hunt." (continued on page 68)

trees, jamans, and mangoes, and from there to New Delhi where we met Mr. Hindi, superintendent of the Y.M.C.A.

"I can fix you up with a tiger hunt," he said.

Dodging parades of rhythmically swaying bullock carts, we continued to Agra. Then, with a billowing cloud of dust trailing us for two days, we made the 650-mile trip to Balaghat in the Central Provinces. At long last we were in tiger country. We put up at the Indian version of a motel. Our cottage had cell-like rooms with cement walls and floors, iron beds covered by mosquito nets, and a ceiling punka—a fan which clumped around like a helicopter propeller as it stirred up the breeze.