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TIGER *for*
BREAKFAST

The Story of Boris of Kathmandu

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broad daylight. In the hour preceding sunset, there is a strong probability that a tiger will come back to a kill, having already digested most of the food he ate the preceding night after actually killing the animal. In silence, one simply sits and waits. The minutes, perhaps hours, drag by before the tiger may appear and one can take a shot. This is not much sport, although it usually yields a tiger.

An eccentric friend of Boris's, another wealthy maharaja, practiced *machan* shooting in a big way. In his state he had a road some thirty to forty miles long and at every mile he had platforms erected, on each of which he staked a goat alternating with a buffalo. After dinner the maharaja would set out in a car with a built-in refrigerator stocked with six bottles of soda and two quarts of whisky (his evening ration), and equipped with a spotlight. In solid comfort His Highness would drive up the road shooting from his car at the game feeding on the bait. His Highness's record, the fruit of such organization, was seventeen leopards and a tiger in a single night.

One day His Highness was sitting over a killed buffalo on top of a precarious *machan* twenty feet above the ground, with a beautiful, new, very powerful, double-barreled .577 caliber rifle. After a short while a tiger came up to the kill, the maharaja aimed and both barrels went off at once. On one side of the *machan* lay a dead tiger, on the other side the half-dead Maharaja. When His Highness came down to Calcutta a few weeks later and dropped in at the 300 Club he brought along the guilty rifle. Boris had it taken to the best gunsmiths in Calcutta, Manton's. The rifle presumably repaired, Boris went to try it out, fortunately not from the top of a tower.

"I aimed and fired," he reported later, "and was simply lifted off my feet and hurled backward, even though I was well prepared. Again, both barrels had gone off at once."

While in India Boris had the opportunity to handle some of the finest guns in the world, from small .22 calibers to large guns espe-

cially made for various hunters. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar, owns a fine collection, in gauges ranging from 24-bore bullet- and shot-carrying guns to the rare 4-bore, biggest of them all. The Maharaja's grandfather, who was a physical giant, had a double-barreled 4-bore gun made especially for him that was so large and heavy that it took two normal men to raise it. It was that same Maharaja of Cooch Behar who made his state famous for its great "shikars." In a book entitled *Thirty-seven Years of Big Game Shooting*, the Maharaja recorded the incredible list of tigers, bears, rhinos, panthers and buffalo shot by him or his distinguished guests, who included many of the highest aristocracy of Europe and the Orient, such as Prince Esterhazy, the magnificent Lord Lansdowne, Lord Hamilton, Prince Christian Victor, Prince Hans Henry of Pless, HRH the multimillionaire Count of Tunis, and others.

The outstanding reputation of the shooting in Cooch Behar was also based upon the number of fine elephants owned by the maharajas of that state. In Cooch Behar, Assam and the Duars, hunting on foot is practically impossible, the elephant grass sometimes growing twenty to thirty feet tall. Naturally the elephants were the objects of considerable care. They were known to live as long as sixty years. Each elephant owned by the young Maharaja of Cooch Behar had its individual name and personal history. In general, four different sorts of elephants are recognized: the tall tuskers, upon whose backs are placed the heavy wooden and wicker howdahs; the *maknas*, males without tusks; *kunke*, which are rapid and agile; and *chaknas*, which are *maknas* with big heads. All tame elephants are called *hati* as compared to the wild elephant, which in Assam are known as *banuwa*.

When Boris first went to Cooch Behar there were some seventy elephants in the Maharaja's stable. The elephants that do not carry howdahs are saddled with pads, large, straw-filled, jute mattresses girthed around the belly of the elephant with the aid of thick ropes. The Maharaja owned one elephant that would inevitably signal the proximity of a tiger with a shriek.

By now mountaineering and exploring expeditions in Nepal had become ever more numerous, and the valley was continuously rocked by political intrigue. Since the fall of the Ranas, government had succeeded government, and for a while it was impossible to know from one day to the next which minister was in office and which had been put on the black list. This unstable state of affairs was not changed until finally, in 1961, the King jailed the new prime minister, B. P. Koirala, and in a bloodless coup took the reins of Nepal into his own hands.

One of the biggest events in Boris's life in Kathmandu was the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II of England to Nepal. He was informed early in 1961 of the invitation that King Mahendra had extended to the Queen and Prince Philip. The small Himalayan kingdom, which had for more than a century maintained close, friendly relations with the British, and had been host to King George V in 1911, wanted to show again to a British monarch the splendor of its regal displays and its fabled tiger shoots.

The Queen's Shoot, as it later became known, was indeed to be a spectacle worthy of this purpose, a spectacle so magnificent, in fact, that it is certain that never again in history will such a show ever be produced. As at the coronation, Boris's services were to prove essential in the realization of the ambitious Nepalese plan.

Newspapers and magazines throughout the world have described, and published hundreds of photographs to illustrate, the spectacular pageantry and grandeur of this royal hunt. Little has been said, however, as to how this extraordinary affair was staged and organized.

Hunting in Nepal had until 1960 been exclusively a royal privilege, and in the days of the Ranas the tiger shoots in the terai had already acquired the reputation of being the most elaborate, fabulous and luxurious in the world. King George V's party on his visit to Nepal in 1911 had shot thirty-nine tigers, eighteen rhinos and four bears.

In fact, tiger shooting in India was but a pale affair compared to those royal shoots in Nepal. In 1961, while all around the world high taxes and democratization were reducing the splendor of pageantry, Nepal got ready to produce the largest shoot in its history and give Queen Elizabeth II a welcome that none of her own subjects could have staged.

The Nepalese army was mobilized for the task of setting up the shooting camp. The spot chosen was on the banks of the Rapti River in the Chitawan Valley, at a place called Megauli. This was deep in the heart of the great terai jungle. For years the terai has been known for its malaria and other dangerous fevers. A land of snakes, scorpions and diseases, it also abounds in all of Nepal's fabulous game.

A road was bulldozed through the jungle to the proposed camp site, and in virgin forest an airstrip twelve hundred yards long was built. The actual camp site was then measured out: a mile-square tract of land on the edge of the Rapti River. For days bulldozers toiled and clanked, taking off two inches of topsoil from the vast camp site. Coolies were then sent with baskets to pick up every scorpion, bug and beetle from the ground. Aerial sprays then rid the entire vicinity of flies, malaria-carrying mosquitoes and the other remaining insects. After this operation, selected turf taken from other parts of the terai was laid down over the now aseptic camp site. Steamrollers were hauled in and for days huffed and puffed to flatten the newly laid down turf, and the fire engines of Kathmandu were then mobilized to water the grass, making it a lush green.

In the center of the camp a model of Mount Everest was erected of local stone decorated with colored sand. A large avenue was then drawn out and streets at right angles to it were traced in the soil. On either side of the main causeway, facing toward the central model of Mount Everest, were erected the tent palaces of Queen Elizabeth and King Mahendra of Nepal. From the airport large moss-covered arches led the way to the royal tents. On the eight-

foot-high screens of the royal compounds were painted the arms of King Mahendra and the British crown.

On the Queen's side of the central avenue was erected an entire village of large tents for her retinue, and a separate large camp for the press. On the King's side a large camp was provided for the Nepalese royal bodyguards, along with tents for the numerous attending generals and other officials, and a large encampment for Boris, his servants and the field kitchens. Three separate dining-room tents were also erected. The Queen's enclosure measured 150 yards square. At the entrance rose the tents of Her Majesty's aides-de-camp; and on passing beyond them into the enclosure one found a large campfire surrounded by comfortable benches covered with cushions.

To call the Queen and Prince Philip's residence at the camp a "tent" is slightly to underestimate the cloth palace that was to be theirs for one day and one night. Built a foot and a half off the ground, the "tent" comprised eleven rooms connected by corridors: a large sitting room draped in colored prints, two bedrooms, one for the Queen and one for Prince Philip, two dressing rooms, and two bathrooms, two toilets and two additional rooms, one for the Queen's lady-in-waiting and one for Prince Philip's aide-de-camp. All the fittings of the Queen's rooms were pink and all those of Prince Philip, blue. This included the bathtubs and toilets and all the small trimmings. The entire camp had hot and cold running water, not to mention the flush toilets. This subject was not overlooked, for Boris had often heard about the amusing contretemps that had occurred on the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to India. In the palace of a maharaja a new toilet had been installed for the royal visitors, but an oversight had failed to supply water to the overhead tank. At the last minute, no doubt to save face, a servant was placed above the privy with a small hole to spy upon the royal guests. When they pulled the chain he poured down from his perch a bucketful of water.

King Mahendra's camp had none of these shortcomings, and

everything was as modern and as comfortable as could be. A special well was drilled to supply the camp, and night and day large open fires heated great tanks of water for the guests.

The list of British guests included Foreign Secretary Lord Home (later Prime Minister of England) and his wife; Rear Admiral Christopher Bonham Carter, Prince Philip's treasurer; and Sir Michael Adeane, Queen Elizabeth's secretary. These last two members of the royal party were to play a significant role in the events of the days to come.

As final preparations in the camp, the night before the arrival of Her Majesty flowering trees were uprooted in the jungle and planted along the avenues!

While these preparations were going on in the terai, Boris was frantically making his own arrangements. He had been given short notice of the Queen's visit and had immediately flown down to Hong Kong, where in a frantic, ten-day shopping spree he purchased forty-eight tons of goods, not only food, but also such items as freezers, camp stoves, camp chairs and other equipment, which he packed and shipped by steamer to Calcutta in record time. With this immense and unusual cargo Boris began a rush against time. He flew to Calcutta and there learned to his dismay that the ship with the precious, urgently needed goods had been indefinitely delayed at Chittagong, the port of East Pakistan. Boris rushed to see the Pakistani High Commissioner and arranged that the ship be no longer held up but immediately sent on to Calcutta.

When the freighter arrived at the Sand Heads of the Hooghly River Boris achieved miracles with the usually slow Calcutta port authorities and the habitually meddlesome customs officers, who were accustomed to taking their time. The moment the freighter arrived in sight a pilot rushed out to meet it and steer it into port. At the docks all was prepared to unload the vessel. But time was running short; the ship arrived on February 11 and the Queen and her party were due in Nepal on the 26th. It seemed impossible that

the vital supplies could reach Kathmandu in time. At the docks the cargo was to be loaded directly from the vessel onto trucks, but the day the ship arrived it rained—and when it rains in Calcutta the dock men do not work. The rain lasted for three days. Finally, in exceeding haste, everything was piled onto the waiting trucks, which in a convoy of nine rumbled off to the Nepalese border, a trip of some six hundred miles by road.

While the trucks drove up to Nepal, Boris flew back to Kathmandu. There a small plane had been placed at his disposal. He flew down two days later to the terai to check on his precious cargo. When he reached the frontier town of Raxaul he was informed that the bridge over the Segauli River had been washed away and that all the trucks were stranded. He immediately hired all available vehicles in Raxaul and made for the Segauli, fifteen miles away. The cargo was then shipped on primitive boats across the river to the new trucks, which proceeded on to Kathmandu. On February 23, three days before the arrival of the Queen and her retinue, all essential supplies and equipment finally reached the Royal Hotel.

Those next three days were spent in frantic preparations. The forty-eight tons of goods were rapidly sorted and expedited either to the camp in the terai by plane, to the Singha Durbar, where in the famed crystal room the King's banquet was to be held, or to Sital Niwas, the newly appointed and redecorated guest house. Queen Elizabeth was to give her banquet in the large baroque dining room and palatial drawing room of Laxmi Niwas, the second palace in the valley after the Singha Durbar, which belonged to the descendants of the last Rana maharaja.

While Boris had been rushing around, Kathmandu again gave itself a complete spring cleaning. As for the coronation, buildings were redecorated, streets widened and paved, trees cut down and houses pulled to the ground. Newspapers in England openly attacked the royal party for participating in a shoot that not only was cruel and outmoded but that also taxed the budget of a small, un-

derdeveloped country. Whether it was for this reason, or simply a coincidence no one knows for sure, but it was a great disappointment to everyone in Nepal when Prince Philip turned up wearing a handsome uniform—and a bandage on his right forefinger.

The Prince, it was announced, had an infected “trigger finger” and would not be able to shoot!

The first great event after the arrival of Queen Elizabeth and her party was King Mahendra’s banquet in the fantastic crystal hall of the Singha Durbar. This hall, the pride of Kathmandu, is decorated with heavy crystal chandeliers and has as its central attraction a large crystal fountain and a crystal grandfather clock. Here, with an army of servants, Boris served the first elaborate meal of the Queen’s sojourn, which included fresh caviar sent by air from the Caspian Sea in a relay race by international airlines.

The banquet went along smoothly. When saddle of *muntjak* (barking deer) was served, the King called Boris to explain what *muntjak* is. Prince Philip, seated next to the King, asked, “Are you Boris?” and went on to say that he had heard of Boris’s overland luxury cruise project. For five minutes Boris chatted with the Prince, who informed him that the Duke of Norfolk had imported barking deer to his estate in England and that some had got away and occasional reports were heard of barking deer being shot in the English countryside. The Prince remembered this conversation, for three weeks after the royal visit Boris received from the British embassy a copy of the magazine *The Field* in which had been singled out an article relating to a hunter having shot a *muntjak* in England.

The following morning Boris saw to the serving of the royal breakfast, then rushed to the airport to fly down to the royal camp where the hunt would take place. The flowering trees had just been planted and all around the camp Gurkha soldiers of Nepal, with fixed bayonets, awaited the eminent guests.

To speak only of the hunting camp is to overlook the most fascinating aspect of this shoot, which was declared by the world’s

press to be the most spectacular such display ever seen. It was not the bathtubs, the immense camp, or flowering trees that made that day of shooting in the terai unforgettable. Nor was it the marksmanship of the hunters, which in fact was deplorable. It was the splendor of no less than 376 elephants that had been gathered all over the jungles of Nepal for the occasion. Never had so many elephants been assembled together in modern times, and they formed a truly incredible spectacle. Lined up one behind the other these elephants would have made a chain two miles long!

Many of these beasts were richly decorated and they formed an impressive living herd of gigantic proportions as they trumpeted and swayed with their *mabouds* and *pachwas* on their backs. The fame of the mighty shoots of Nepal had always stemmed especially from these tremendous beasts, which in the past, through court privilege, had been at the disposal of the Rana maharajas, and which were now available to King Mahendra.

Queen Elizabeth was taken by car to the jungle from the airfield; there on a saddle elephant she rode out to a large howdah elephant that had been prepared for her. In the meantime, in stately procession, hundreds of elephants had filed into the jungle, where the tigers were presumed to be lying beside their kills. There were elephants for all the foreign dignitaries, a dozen reserved for the press alone, and six bar elephants that Boris had set up as extensions of the Yak and Yeti. These bar elephants, with Inger and other girls serving as barmaids, circulated during the shoot, serving anything from beer to iced champagne to all the guests.

When the impressive caravan arrived at a designated spot marked out by the shikaris who had beat the bush the preceding day, they split in two, one elephant turning right, the other left, the double column fanning out and finally forming a gigantic circle. Trampling down bushes and trees, the pachyderms then moved in so as to form a vast circular trap enclosing the unsuspecting tigers. This ring of elephants side by side measured no less than a

mile in circumference. Two elephants loaded with white cloth passed inside the edge of the ring, dropping to the ground the white sheet, a yard high, that was to be strung up, forming a shiny barrier that the tigers would not dare to cross.

This complete, and once the Queen and the other royal guests had taken up their positions around the ring, six elephants penetrated into the ring to rouse the powerful beasts. The *mahouds* of these elephants then drove a tiger toward the guns. As Prince Philip could not shoot, the honor of the first tiger was given to Lord Home. Suddenly the tiger thrashed out of the tall grass, right where it should have been, within easy range of Lord Home who, from his howdah, aimed and fired. He missed; the infuriated tiger disappeared before the now nervous elephants. When he reappeared Lord Home missed again, then again, till finally, after having missed three times, he sought the help of Rear Admiral Carter and Sir Michael Adeane. They both fired simultaneously and dropped the tiger. This poor show of marksmanship in no way reduced the grandeur of the shoot, although the comic aspect of the matter greatly amused the press, to whom Lord Home confessed that he had never been on an elephant before and had seen tigers only in a zoo.

After the morning shoot the Queen retired to an open-air table on the banks of the Narayani River, where Boris served an exquisite meal. The Queen was offered twenty-two varieties of Nepalese game, including such gourmet delicacies as black partridge, wild boar shashlik, shredded vension curry, and rare florican crane. The guests went through this gastronomical tour de force of Boris's before the beautiful scenery of the river and the jungle and the white backdrop of the great Himal Chuli range.

The afternoon was reserved for shooting a rhinoceros, unfortunately one of the last few of the once numerous one-horned rhinos of Nepal. Again Lord Home asked the assistance of Carter and Adeane and the three together dropped the rhino in his tracks.

That evening the royal couple were entertained by the King in

the large dining tent. There Queen Elizabeth congratulated Boris on the peacock pilau he had served, along with other exotic dishes.

The Queen remained at the camp overnight, enjoying herself tremendously, filming the shoot herself and racing Prince Philip back to camp on elephant back. Before departing, the Queen told radiant King Mahendra that it had been "one of the most exciting days of my life."

As the royal party was about to leave, Boris suggested that all the elephants be lined up along the route of the guests. This took some time and occasioned a short delay, which was nevertheless worthwhile, for never before and probably never again in hunting history will such a spectacular sight be seen as those 376 mighty elephants, decorated and painted, with gold and silver howdahs on their backs, forming a massive, living wall along the royal route, and lifting their trunks in a salute as the Queen slowly drove along.

From the camp the Queen flew directly out to Pokhara to catch a close glimpse of the Annapurna Range. Boris flew ahead, supervised a meal there, then rushed back to Kathmandu, where at a reception in the British embassy he was given an autographed photograph of the Queen and Prince Philip in recognition of the job he had performed. From the British embassy Boris rushed off to Laxmi Niwas, where the Queen was to entertain King Mahendra at a banquet again composed and served by Boris. After the meal, at coffee, Queen Elizabeth came up to Boris to thank him, and Boris, on departing, kissed her hand, as he had done before, against all rules of protocol. It now appeared that the Queen appreciated the czarist gallantry, as she extended her hand to be kissed.

From Laxmi Niwas Boris charged out to prepare the final reception at Singha Durbar. Finding no car to take him there, he ran out into the street hoping to be picked up by some friends. In fact, a fire engine came by and to the wail of the siren and clanging of bells he arrived just before the Queen to set everything up.

Boris had hardly slept for a week, and was by now completely