

A Band of Brothers

-Abhimanyu Madhusudanan

In the rather tranquil buffer zone of Rajaji National Park, a group of eager batch mates found themselves immersed in a captivating natural spectacle. As they settled on a weathered log, the symphony of bird calls serenaded their ears, harmonizing with the gentle rustling of leaves. Their eyes were drawn to a distant herd of chital, gracefully grazing in the golden grassland that encircled them. Lost in the enchantment of the moment, their reverie was abruptly interrupted by the urgent call of their field guide. His voice carried a mix of excitement and caution as he informed them of the presence of a nearby group of elephants. With bated breath, they listened to his words, learning that this was an all-male group, known to traverse this very path on their way to the river, occasionally venturing to raid crops on the opposite bank. Eager to witness this rare encounter, the group settled beneath the protective canopy of *Pongamia pinnata* trees. Patiently, they awaited the arrival of these majestic creatures, their hearts pounding with anticipation.

Gradually, the group emerged from the depths of the forest. Amongst the males, the smaller individuals engaged in a spirited display of sparring, their tusks interlocking in a dance of dominance. Each clash and push was a testament to their strength and resilience, a ritualistic contest to establish their place within the group's hierarchy. The onlookers marvelled at the intricate social dynamics unfolding before their eyes, a glimpse into the behavioural ecology of these pachyderms. As the minutes ticked by, the largest male, adorned with impressive tusks, assumed a position of authority. With a measured stride, he approached the parked vehicles, his eyes scanning the surroundings with a mix of curiosity and caution. It was as if he sought reassurance that

no rival bull threatened his reign. Satisfied, he rejoined his companions, and together, they embarked on their journey towards the river, their destination shrouded in mystery. The observers were captivated by the sheer grace and power exuded by these gentle giants. Their immense size and delicate movements painted a vivid portrait of the delicate balance between strength and vulnerability. The landscape itself seemed to bow in reverence to their presence as if acknowledging their role as custodians of this natural realm. As the trio of bulls gradually disappeared into the distance, their silhouettes blending seamlessly with the horizon, the onlookers were left with a profound sense of awe and gratitude. They had been granted a fleeting glimpse into a world rarely witnessed, a tapestry woven with the threads of scenic beauty and the intricate behavioural patterns of the elephants.

