

The Elephant Maker

Alec Nevala-Lee

He made the king who taketh pleasure in his kingdom, he made elephants and horses for his array . . . Wealth made he from which cometh pride; he made longings which none can satisfy.

—Malik Muhammad Jayasi

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I.

He had been on the run for a long time. At first, he drove himself ever forward, going deeper into the forest, aware of nothing but the need to keep moving. Much later, he realized that he had somehow circled back, returning to the places that he had known in his youth, although he knew that this would only bring him closer to the men who were trying to kill him.

When night fell, he wandered in search of food. It was easiest, he had found, to steal what he needed. He would plunder fields and gardens, break into granaries, even raid the slumbering villages themselves. Occasionally he would ambush travelers on the road. He was no longer young, but his strength, which was all that remained to him, had not yet deserted his body.

During the day, he rested. He often slept in a thicket for hours, snoring, waking only to pick his teeth or whisk away the flies. Even in his dreams, he was haunted by the static. It had been there forever, like a nest of wasps, but lately it had grown worse, as if he had been changed by isolation itself. Sometimes he could silence it by resting his head against a tree or the cool earth of a ravine, but it always returned, and he had no choice but to move on.

One evening, shortly before sunset, he had bathed at the river and was heading for the woods when he came across a small clearing. Looking between the trees, he found himself facing a village that he could not remember visiting before. Behind one of the houses was half an acre of plantains.

As his stomach growled, he whistled with satisfaction. There was no one else in sight. He knew that it would be safer to wait until dark, but hunger triumphed over caution, and he crept out into the open.

Going up to the garden, he moved easily past the fence. Clusters of starchy green fruit had sprouted along the thick stems, and he had just begun to root among the stalks when he heard a series of shouts.

He raised his head. From the direction of the village, five men were coming his way.

Turning aside, he retreated at once, leaving the fruit scattered on the ground. Behind him came the sound of gunfire, but by then, he was under the trees. Although he usually avoided the cart roads, he sought the nearest trail now, knowing that it would allow him to put distance between himself and his pursuers. They had taken shots at him before. Once, after an unlucky bullet had caught him in the shoulder, he had managed to escape into the woods, plastering the wound with mud from the river to staunch the flow of blood.

He kept to the remains of the old track, the thorns and scrub rising to either side, and entered a familiar part of the forest. Beneath a banyan tree stood an abandoned temple that was overgrown with moss. He moved past it, marking the location in his mind, and continued to the secondary road, where mounds of red earth stood at the margins. If they came for him, it would be here.

At the edge of the woods, a dense wall of grass rose above the level of his head. Pushing his way forward, he entered the thicket, turning so that he was looking out at the road through the coarse yellow stalks.

For a long moment, nothing happened. He was about to move on, sensing that the villagers had abandoned the chase, when he heard the murmur of an approaching vehicle, along with the voices of men. Forcing himself to remain still, he kept to the shadows, waiting as the vehicle came into sight.

It was a lorry, its headlamps on, crawling along the road on its wide tires. Several villagers were riding in the open bed, looking out at the trees to either side. One of them carried a rifle. Behind the lorry, two others followed on foot, with the man at the rear holding a shotgun.

From his sheltered spot in the darkness, he waited until the lorry had almost gone by. Then he plowed forward, the static thundering in his brain, and burst out of the undergrowth.

As he charged from the thicket, roaring, the man at the end of the line turned and raised a gun, uttering a single scream. He snatched the man up and dashed him against the packed dirt of the road, stepping on his chest, and felt the ribcage crack beneath his weight.

Up ahead, the lorry ground to a halt. Lifting his eyes, he saw the second man on foot running toward the others, followed by the flash of a gunshot. As the bullet struck him harmlessly on the side of the head, he headed for the woods, feeling detonations of pain in his legs and hindquarters.

A second later, he was under the trees again. Knowing that they were still coming, he hurried on, ignoring his wounds, and returned to the glade with the banyan tree. At the ruined temple, he halted, shaking his head to clear it, and withdrew into the dark. The static in his ears was rising.

He heard the lorry grinding ahead on the overgrown path. As soon as it came into view, before the men had time to react, he charged without warning and took one of the villagers in his trunk. Rearing back, he dashed the man against the tree and let the broken body fall.

On the lorry, the villager with the rifle was looking for a shot. Curling up his trunk to protect it, he charged again, ears folded forward, and smashed into the vehicle, rocking it violently on its springs. The men in the rear bed went flying. Ignoring the rest, he made for the man with the rifle, who had fallen to the trail.

As the others fled into the woods, he knelt on the chest of the man on the ground and gored him with his tusks. Even after the villager was dead, he continued to methodically tear the body to pieces with his trunk and teeth, rolling the remains around in the dirt until they were no longer recognizable.

At last, he lifted his head again. The lorry was still there, its engine running, but the men from the village were gone.

As the elephant turned aside, he was caught for an instant by the headlamps. Dark fluid streamed down his temples to either side of his mottled face, framed by the great parentheses

of his tusks, which were streaked with crimson. Moving out of the light, he passed beneath the trees again and lost himself in the shadows, alone, as the noise in his head followed him into the darkness.

* * *

Divakar Mehta stood in the dark, looking into the examination room on the other side of the mirror. This was his favorite place in the hospital. The rest of the building was lit with fluorescent tubes, making it hard to concentrate, and studying patients through the mirror was something like gazing at a television screen, which was reassuringly similar to the way that he saw the world.

Next to him stood Rana Banerjee, the head of clinical research at Vasana Labs, who was intently watching the scene in the adjoining room. Divakar had trouble reading emotions, but even he could tell that she was upset.

They observed in silence as an investigator conducted a picture completion exercise with a small boy. Divakar knew that he was six years old, that his name was Ishan, and that he had Kanner's syndrome. There were dozens of other details that he could bring to mind if he wished, but he kept the mental file closed for now, concentrating instead on remembering everything on the other side of the glass, in which his own birdlike features were faintly reflected.

Behind the mirror, the boy rocked in his chair as though he were trying to tip it over on purpose. He was scribbling on a pad of paper with an orange crayon, using the whole-hand grip. A pale scar, which ran from his left temple to the adjacent eyebrow, was the only sign of the operation that he had undergone.

The investigator held out the workbook, trying to get the boy to pay attention to the page, which featured a drawing of a cricket player whose bat had been erased. "Ishan, can you tell me what is missing?"

Ishan looked at the book. Screwing up his face, he managed, with visible effort, to force out a shapeless string of syllables. Divakar frowned at the evidence of regression. "He is doing worse than he was three months ago. And he had been showing improvement—"

Rana nodded. Her eyes were fixed on the pane of silvered glass. "Language skills were on the rise. He was speaking in sentences for the first time. Two weeks ago, he lost vocabulary, had a number of violent episodes, and tried to escape from home. It's as if the procedure never took place."

"And he is the third subject to experience regression over the last two weeks?"

"Yes. There's Ishan, here, and the two others I told you about. All were subjects who had been steadily improving until about three months after the procedure, when they had a resurgence of symptoms."

"So we may have a regression problem," Divakar said. "Does anyone else know?"

"Not to my knowledge. None of the investigators has access to the full data set."

Divakar silently studied the boy. Vasana Labs, his company, was halfway through a trial in which two hundred children had been implanted with the nerve stimulation system that he had developed himself. The previous trial, which had followed twelve subjects for three months, had achieved astonishing results, but now it was falling apart. First the lab had been accused of mind control, and then the effectiveness of the treatment itself had been called into question.

In the other room, Ishan rocked hard and went sprawling, his legs tangled in the legs of the chair. He lay on the floor for a moment, surprised, and then picked himself up, ignoring the investigator, who had rushed to kneel by his side. Looking at the fallen pad of paper, Divakar saw the words that the boy had drawn. They said FOR EXTERNAL USE ONLY.

Divakar pulled up the cuff of his coat to consult the watch on his wrist. He wore a second watch on his other arm. "I am due at the office soon. Will you kindly walk with me?"

He opened the door, allowing Rana to leave first, and followed her into the hallway, careful not to look up at the ceiling fans, which he found uncomfortably distracting. Descending to the reception area, they moved past the ranks of patients and emerged into the heat of the afternoon. Rana walked along the portico toward the street. "This could be temporary. We may see cycles of regression and remission. And one hundred other subjects are responding well—"

Divakar was a poor judge of emotional nuance, but even he knew when someone was trying to cheer him up. He was sorry about this, because he suspected that Rana was more upset than he was.

As they paused in the sunlight, he looked at her face. Rana was beautiful, he supposed, with dark hair prematurely streaked with gray. Despite his dependence on visual information, Divakar was indifferent to feminine beauty, but he loved her for the sacrifices that she had made. For him, an obsessive devotion to research was only natural, but Rana had given her life to their work, which was a fact that had taken him a long time to understand.

“If there really is a regression problem, we should see an increasing number of cases soon,” Divakar said. As always, he spoke slowly and formally. His grasp of language was learned rather than intuitive, which gave his words a detached quality, even when his passions were running high. “We implanted the patients over several months. If these regressions are real, we should see more instances in the next few weeks, as other subjects pass the period of the original study.”

Rana kept her eyes on the street around them. They stood a hundred meters from Mahatma Gandhi Road, one of the busiest thoroughfares in Mumbai. At the corner, a juice vendor was preparing a batch of sugarcane, chopping at the stalks with a machete before feeding them through a metal press. “The timing is bad. With the visitor from Cheshire here—”

Divakar struck his forehead with a closed fist, which was a gesture that he had been trying to eliminate from his lexicon of body language. He was amazed that he had forgotten so important a detail. “He’s arrived?”

“We’re giving him an overview tomorrow. He also wants to watch an operation.”

Divakar tightened the bands of his watches, hoping that this would calm him down. A year ago, he had been grateful for the investment by the Cheshire Group, but it had come at a price. “Can you handle the overview yourself?”

“He’ll want to meet you,” Rana said. “If you aren’t there, it will raise questions.”

“Cheshire will do a better job of defending our work if our visitor is convinced by it. As you know, I am a very poor liar, and if I attend the meeting, I may not be able to hide the regression problem. Revealing the results might even prejudice the study, if there is a chance that the data could be leaked—”

“Are you concerned that they’ll want to bring an outside manager on board?”

“Nasir and I do not always agree, but we have an understanding,” Divakar said, alluding to the head of the investment firm’s office in India. “Besides, if he changes his mind, I am sure that you can convince him otherwise—”

Rana’s expression, which was not hard to read, informed Divakar that he had hurt her feelings. He recalled that she and Nasir had once been in a relationship, which was technically still a secret.

“I’m sorry,” Divakar said haltingly. He sensed an infinite distance between them, one that was always there, but which he was usually able to ignore or overlook. “I did not intend—”

“It’s fine.” Her tone hit him like a tight slap to the face. “I know what you meant.”

Divakar wanted to apologize further, but he knew that it would not go well. Tact was not one of his strong points, and he was willing to leave things unsaid for years to avoid an awkward conversation.

He was about to change the subject when he heard cheers and shouts in the distance, like the roar during a cricket match. Rana, whose senses were not as sharp, took longer to hear the noise, but she finally turned in the direction of the unseen crowd. “What’s going on?”

Listening intently, Divakar searched his memory for the closest equivalent, and he came up with the only parallel that he could find in his extensive internal archive. “It sounds like a football riot.”

Rana’s face was dark. “No, it isn’t a football riot. It’s a demonstration. Against us.”

* * *

Early the following morning, Rana arrived at the office of the Cheshire Group, which was located in a tower at Nariman Point. The corridor on the fifth floor was in terrible shape, with

clumps of wires hanging from the ceiling and sacks of cement piled in the stairwell. By contrast, the firm's private space, which she entered now, was another dimension of glass doors and frosted partitions, with the air conditioning turned up to the arctic maximum.

In the conference room, the first man she saw was Ismail Nasir, the head of the India office, who was standing in one corner. He was physically fit but round in the face, with a baritone voice and delicate hands that made him seem softer than he really was, and she knew that he always felt compelled to prove his toughness. As she went by, she saw him smile at her outfit. She had decided on a dark blazer and severe skirt for the meeting with the visiting analyst from London.

As the newcomer studied her, Rana returned the scrutiny. Adam Hill was tall but oddly proportioned, with a bony frame that made him look like an overgrown adolescent. His blue eyes were observant, however, and he was the first to ask the question that she had been dreading. "Is Dr. Mehta coming?"

Rana came up with the story that Divakar had provided. "He's in the middle of an urgent project. As the head of clinical research, I'm more than capable of discussing our work in his absence."

Connecting her laptop to the projector, Rana cued up the slideshow. "The procedure in question uses an implanted pulse generator to send electrical impulses through the olfactory nerve to the brain. It's been known for years that stimulation of the cranial nerves can have therapeutic benefits, but this is the first systematic attempt to investigate its potential for Kanner's syndrome."

Adam made a note of this, although Rana assumed that he was familiar with the details. "How does it work?"

"Our best guess is that it induces progressive changes in the nervous systems of patients under treatment, reducing brain patterns that obstruct verbal development. It may also increase blood flow to cognitive regions or stimulate the release of neuromodulators. The olfactory nerve runs directly to the limbic system, where conscious thought takes place."

Adam tapped his pen against the metal of the table. "What about other conditions?"

"This therapy addresses a very specific set of symptoms. The human behavioral spectrum is the result of natural variation, and the system has no effect on individuals with milder degrees of neurocognitive difference, who may not require treatment at all. It has clear benefits for non-verbal patients with severe cognitive difficulties, which we conventionally define as Kanner's syndrome. The rate is increasing worldwide, which points to an environmental component, but until we have a better map of the brain, we can only treat what we can observe."

At the mention of environmental factors, Adam wrote something else down. "And the accusations of mind control?"

"This is a pacemaker for the brain," Rana said. "It uses a set of algorithms to determine if a brainwave is associated with adverse symptoms, based on standard psychological definitions."

"But with a pacemaker, there's no ambiguity over whether a rhythm is irregular or not. With the brain, the definition is bound to be somewhat subjective. It isn't hard to see how Savarkar was able to turn this against us."

Rana paused before replying. Mahadev Savarkar, the leader of the nationalist movement known as the Kalki Party, had openly declared his opposition to foreign investment, and he had seized on the clinical trial as an excuse to attack the Cheshire Group. The rally yesterday at Nariman Point had drawn over three hundred people, and there were more scheduled for the coming days. "This isn't about mind control. It's about mobilizing voters."

Nasir turned to Adam. "Savarkar wants to win an election. The Kalki Party controls the government of Mumbai, but they want to control all of Maharashtra, too. He's turning Vasana into a political issue."

"And we lack a forum for appeal," Rana said. "Savarkar holds no elective office, but he can still force the hospitals to discontinue the trials. Before a clinical study can take place, a proposal has to be approved by a hospital ethics committee. If the committee retroactively decides that community morals are opposed to our work, they can reverse their decision."

“The key committee is the one in Mumbai, which is scheduled to meet in ten days,” Nasir said. “If they order us to halt, others will follow. We’ll lose every hospital in India. And at the moment, the committee is worried.”

Adam noted this down. “Has Savarkar threatened the committee members directly?”

“There’s no need,” Nasir said. “Every time they turn on the television, they see another rally. They know what the consequences will be if they ignore the Kalki Party. Savarkar only has to intimidate seven people on the committee, and he has thousands of young men in the nationalist gangs. We need to deal with him from a position of strength. That means keeping Vasana alive.”

“And the stakes are extremely high,” Rana said. “Let me show you something.”

Using her laptop, she projected a video onto the wall. It showed the boy she had observed yesterday at the hospital, cradled in his mother’s arms, his wordless cries like distress calls from space. Even more striking was his mother’s expression, which constantly broke down and reassembled itself into exhaustion, resignation, and love. “This is Ishan. The video was taken three months ago, shortly before the system was activated. Here he is six weeks later.”

She cued up a second video. The subject was the same boy as before, but the change was breathtaking. In the observation room, he was smiling, speaking rapidly, and playing with the toys that the investigator had provided. “Within days, repetitive behaviors were reduced. An increase in social understanding and language skills was evident after two weeks. All of this was waiting to be released. And this is what Savarkar is trying to destroy.”

Rana turned to Adam, who was watching the video intently. She tried not to think of the regression that Ishan had recently experienced, and particularly not of the fact that he was her younger brother.

At the thought of Ishan, she felt her customary tangle of guilt and love. Divakar did not know that she was the boy’s sister, and neither did anyone else at Vasana. As the head of clinical research, she had easily managed to enroll him in the trial under a different last name. It was a conflict of interest, but her parents had insisted that she do something. Ishan had continued to escape from home, and it was only a matter of time before he was hurt.

When Adam looked back, there was a newfound intensity in his eyes. “If you’re right, Dr. Banerjee, you need to be careful. This trial will be closely scrutinized. If any lapses occur, we need to address them as soon as we can.”

“Of course.” As Rana closed her slideshow, she briefly wondered if Adam had somehow learned about her brother, which she had revealed to no one, not even Nasir. Adam gathered his notes in silence, as if he were working out something in his head, and left the room.

Nasir approached Rana as she was packing up. “What do you think of our guest?”

Rana replied with a quote from Nasir’s favorite author. “All head, no physique—”

“—and a hundred theories. You’re probably right. But he has no reason to interfere with your work.” Nasir paused. “I know the last few days have been hard. Can I call you later?”

Rana glanced at the frosted partition, through which Adam was visible as an indistinct outline. “All right. This evening.”

With a parting nod, Nasir turned away, as if he had done nothing more than congratulate her on her presentation. Watching him leave, Rana found it hard to believe that they had once been together for the better part of a year without anyone suspecting, aside from Divakar, who was not inclined to take an interest in such matters. She had found that she was quite good at keeping secrets.

As she put away her equipment, she wondered if Nasir had kept faith with the lab for her sake, as much for other reasons. Divakar might refuse to acknowledge it, but Nasir had taken great risks on their behalf. Remembering this, she found that she had made her decision. She would not tell him about the regression problem tonight, but she would tell him soon.

* * *

Divakar lived alone, a short walk away from his company, in an apartment that he had designed himself. Like his office, it had no fluorescent lights and was carefully soundproofed. At one point, he had considered installing a bed at Vasana, which would eliminate the time wasted

in going from one building to another, and he still kept a sleeping bag under his desk at work.

He slept in a mummy bag at home as well. It was pressure that he craved. As a child, he had buried himself beneath sofa cushions, and with the smooth cocoon of nylon hugging his sides, Divakar felt calm and safe. He had other ways of obtaining a pressure fix, but the mummy bag was the quickest and most convenient way to muffle the static in his head.

Tonight, he needed comfort badly. As he reviewed the data from the current trial, Divakar had to restrain himself from donning his pressure suit immediately. He knew that if he used it too often, the effects would wear off, but at the moment, he felt as though he were coming apart.

Earlier that evening, brooding over his conversation with Rana, Divakar had accessed electroencephalograph files for three children in the experimental group who had shown signs of regression, along with five other subjects who had received the therapy for three months. In violation of his own security policy, he had copied this data onto a flash drive and taken it back to his apartment.

After changing into the soft clothes that he wore at home, he had subjected the files to a few basic tests, and what he had found was alarming. When the trial began, as expected, the children showed spike and wave patterns characteristic of Kanner's syndrome. As the treatment continued, the deviations diminished until the recordings were indistinguishable from those of neurotypical children.

At the end of the third month, however, the brainwaves of the three affected children regressed until they resembled the series of recordings that had been taken at the beginning. And as Divakar pushed deeper, analyzing the files of the five children who had not yet experienced a resurgence of symptoms, he discovered something even more disturbing.

He could not believe that the treatment was failing. Like most of his ideas, it had originated in the early morning. He had been lying awake, staring at the ceiling, when the entire design had leapt into his mind. Over the following year, he had conducted tests on white rats and rhesus monkeys, and the results had been enough to raise outside investment, including money from Cheshire.

Divakar had never trusted his benefactors, whose goals were directly opposed to his. Because the fund had to return capital to investors after seven years, it had quietly pressured him to show results. Now everything was falling apart, and although he knew that he could find a solution, there was no longer time—

His cell phone vibrated, startling him badly. Because of his sensitivity to noise, he kept it on silent, but the vibration always went through his head like a dentist's drill. It was Rana. "I got your message. What's wrong?"

"I have been looking at the results. You may be right about the regressions." Trying to keep his voice steady, Divakar briefly outlined what he had discovered. "And it gets worse. Two subjects who have not shown signs of regression have brainwaves displaying epileptiform patterns. These have not led to a recurrence of symptoms, but they are likely to do so."

Rana took the news as well as could be expected. "Goddammit. So what can we do?"

"Nothing. You and I are the only ones who are aware of these regressions, or even know which subjects are in the experimental group." Because the trial was a double blind study, not even the investigators monitoring the children knew whether the devices were fully activated or functioning only on a nominal level. "If Cheshire learns that the trial is going poorly, it will be less inclined to defend our work. It might even shut down the study entirely. Once this dispute with the Kalki Party is over, we can deal with the problem at our leisure."

Rana seemed unsure, but she agreed to discuss it further tomorrow. Divakar hung up, warmed by tender feelings toward his closest colleague. Certain things silenced the static in his head, and Rana was one of them. It was something like the sense of peace that he felt when he was working on a design problem, or when he had studied elephants in Karnataka.

Reassured by the conversation, Divakar set the phone aside and stripped down to his shorts. His pressure suit was hanging in the closet. Taking it down, he laid the components one by one on the bed. First was a life jacket, which he pulled over his head and secured around his waist. Then came a neoprene wetsuit, which he slipped over the life jacket, threading the tube of the

pressure control unit through the sleeve so it rested in the palm of his hand.

Divakar zipped up and lay down. Closing his eyes, he squeezed the switch, and the life jacket expanded within the wetsuit with a soothing hiss, pressing steadily and evenly against his chest and back. He released the button, easing the pressure, and forced himself to wait a full minute before repeating the process, drawing it out as long as possible until the jacket was fully inflated.

He had designed the pressure suit himself. As a teenager, he had been prescribed dopamine blockers to reduce the frequency and severity of his episodes. Eventually, he had realized that the medication interfered with the clarity of his thinking. The suit offered an alternative to drugs or other treatments, calming him without affecting his ability to work at a high level.

Waves of relaxation flowed through his limbs. His mind drifted like a kite, coming to rest on the image of a herd of elephants moving through fog, their hindquarters and legs spattered with mud. It was a memory, but it was also a vision that had haunted him since childhood. In his imagination, the elephants paused in the haze, their trunks lifted like periscopes, as the largest male, a tusker, raised a wrinkled foot and pressed down on Divakar's body with all his gentle bulk.

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Later that week, Adam Hill entered an operating room, dressed in surgical scrubs. Three gowned figures stood around a table, blocking his view of the patient. The room was suffused with green light, which minimized glare, and packed with computer monitors. One screen displayed a glowing circle. Another was divided into four quadrants, three of them empty, while a fourth showed the face of a boy with his eyes closed, immobile and white, like a death mask.

One of the gowned apparitions raised her glove to him as he approached. It was Rana, who introduced him in turn to the other members of the team. One was an anesthesiologist, while the other was an associate researcher, Sonia Wasey, whose eyes were enlarged by thick glasses above her surgical mask. Finally, Rana indicated the child on the table. "And this is Vikram."

Adam looked down. The sleeping boy had been draped in stiff green sheets that left only his face exposed, and his eyes and mouth were taped shut. Around his forehead was a cloth band with three silver spheres radiating out from the center. His skin was a deep brown, unlike the image on the computer monitor, which Adam realized was a virtual model of his sleeping face.

Rana asked the anesthesiologist to inject the turbinates of the boy's nose with anesthetic and a drug to minimize bleeding. "Yesterday, we did a scan of his head. The computer creates a model of the skull, which lets us track our instruments in real time. A camera on the ceiling picks up reflections from the spheres and maps his head to the model. It also follows this endoscope."

She picked up an instrument that looked like a large screwdriver. As she moved it, the glowing circle on the screen began to display chaotic images—a blurred shot of the surgical tray, a flash of green drapery, the tiles on the ceiling—captured by a miniature camera on the endoscope's tip.

Sonia entered a few keystrokes on the computer. A moment later, as three views of a skull filled the monitor, Rana inserted the tip of the endoscope gently into Vikram's left nostril. A slender black line appeared on the screen, moving upward as she probed the nasal cavity, and a pink tunnel came into focus on the second display, like the inside of a womb or cavern.

As they calibrated the guidance system, running a red dot from a laser pointer across the boy's face, Adam kept an eye on Rana. Although he was officially present to observe the procedure, he was also here to confirm his initial impressions. Nasir, he had concluded, was a capable man who took his role seriously, and he wanted to be sure that this was also true at Vasana.

He watched as Rana opened an incision along the side of Vikram's nose, using a surgical drill to make a small hole in the nasal bone, followed by a second opening beneath the right ear. When she was finished, Sonia unwrapped a package containing a thin metal tube, about eight inches long, and a plastic sheath. Sliding the sheath over the tube, she handed the tunneling tool to Rana.

After bending the tube until it was slightly curved, Rana inserted one end into the incision below the ear and threaded it beneath the skin until it emerged, coated with scum, from the open-

ing by the nose. Working with obvious care, she withdrew the tube from the plastic sleeve, which remained under the skin, creating a channel between the incisions. “The lead, please.”

Sonia opened another package. Inside lay an insulated wire with a pair of electrodes at one end and an electrical lead at the other. Rana took the lead and inserted it into the sleeve that protruded from the bridge of Vikram’s nose, where it was held in place by the plastic. Grasping the other end of the sleeve, she tugged it out, threading the wire through the channel.

“The next part takes some finesse,” Rana said. Using a pair of forceps, she guided the electrodes, which dangled half an inch from the incision by the nose, into the hole drilled through the nasal bone. When she inserted the endoscope into Vikram’s left nostril, Adam could see the electrodes within the nasal cavity, which were magnified on the monitor like blocks of granite.

Rana eased a slender metal wand alongside the endoscope in the boy’s nose. On the screen, the tip looked blunt and clumsy, like the end of a vacuum cleaner, as she used it to push the electrodes past the sinus toward the base of the skull. It took fifteen long minutes to affix the electrodes to the cribriform plate. When she was done, she withdrew the endoscope and exhaled. “That was the hardest part. Sonia, you can prepare the pulse generator.”

This was the last component of the system. After removing the generator from its package, Sonia held it up for Adam to see. The titanium disk was smaller than an almond, but it contained hundreds of components, as well as a lithium battery that could power it for years.

Rana inserted the lead beneath Vikram’s ear into the pulse generator, which she secured with a tiny screwdriver. After testing the lead with an electronic wand, she tucked the generator below the ear, forming a loop from the excess wire. “The extra wire gives him room to grow. Sonia, I’ll let you sew him up.”

Now that the hardest part of the operation was over, the atmosphere in the room lightened considerably. Rana set down the forceps and brushed her hand across Vikram’s hair. “What do you think?”

“You’re good at what you do,” Adam said. As a boy, he had spent weeks in the hospital with peritonitis, followed by a painful recovery. Aside from the diagonal scar on his body, traces of it could be seen in the angular bones of his face, as well as in his dreams, which had been shaped by the maps and books of geography that he had devoured in his hospital bed.

Along the way, he had learned to appreciate the kind of clinical tenderness that he had seen here, which was enough to satisfy him that Rana was doing this for the right reasons. The video at the presentation had affected him more deeply than he had anticipated, and when he multiplied it by the thousands of lives that might benefit from the treatment, he saw what was really at stake.

He realized that Rana was studying him closely. “You look tired. Are you all right?”

“I’ve been keeping strange hours,” Adam said, which was true. He had been weighing a tempting but unproven course of action. As a child in his hospital bed, he had been saddened by the thought that all the borders on the map were already drawn, but he later came to understand that this wasn’t necessarily true. There were still ways of guiding unseen lines of force, and if you could introduce an element of instability, the boundaries of power could shift overnight.

* * *

The following day, Rana told Nasir about the regression problem. As she had expected, he was upset that they had kept it a secret, but he agreed to hold off on telling Adam. At the moment, the lab’s greatest resource was its team of scientists. If it appeared that the treatment was at risk, there would be an exodus of talent to other companies, and it was in everyone’s interest to keep the firm operational. Vasana, like most things, was worth more alive than dead.

It had still been a difficult conversation, and Rana was wondering whether she should tell Divakar about it when her phone rang. On the other end of the line, her mother was in tears. “Ishhan has been missing for almost three hours. We don’t know how he got out of the house.”

As Rana listened, already heading for the door, she knew that this couldn’t last. Her brother was strangely skilled at picking locks. Her mother had taken to wearing the key to the cupboard around her neck, but Ishhan had learned to open it with a hairpin. They had once found him on

the kitchen floor, crackers scattered around his legs, drowsy and stuporous, like an addict after a fix.

To prevent him from leaving the house, the ayah who watched over him secured the front door with a combination lock. Ishan must have been observing her carefully, however, because he had managed to slip outside while she was in the bathroom, leaving his shoes behind. It was the second time that he had vanished since the treatment had begun to fail.

Arriving at their neighborhood, Rana got out of her car. After one of Ishan's previous disappearances, they had discovered him in Crawford Market, so she tried there first, focusing on the geometric stacks of mangoes that he found so fascinating. She searched until her shoes were filthy and her pants were speckled with mud, but there was no trace of her brother.

As night fell, there was nothing to do but look on every block. Rana took a flashlight from the house and went out alone, ignoring her father's muted protests. Trying to see the street through Ishan's eyes, she finally noticed a billboard with a line of crumbling orange letters. The rest of the advertisement had been worn away. It said FOR EXTERNAL USE ONLY.

Rana remembered that her brother would sometimes fill a sheet of paper with nothing but that phrase. Running toward the billboard, she found him curled up on the ground, asleep, a hand tucked between his knees. He was wearing only a kurta and a pair of jockey shorts.

When Rana brought him home, her mother was already brandishing a copy of that day's newspaper, which featured an unflattering article about Vasana. After an exhausting argument over whether to continue the therapy, they all went to sleep. Rana spent the night on the sprung sofa, telling herself that she couldn't blame her mother. After years of learning to live with Ishan's condition, his rapid improvement and equally swift regression had been a shock to them all.

When morning came, she dressed quietly, knowing that she had a hard day ahead. After washing up, she left the building and walked to her old Maruti, which was parked at the curb. As she fished the keys from her purse, a pair of men emerged from the doorway of a store. They wore shorts and sandals, and one was eating a vadapav sandwich. "Hey, you—"

Pretending to ignore them, Rana slipped one hand into her bag and closed her fingers around a nail file. Like most women in this city, she had developed ways of dealing with harassment. She glanced up the block, hoping to find a chowkidar standing guard at one of the buildings, but saw no one.

At her car, she was unlocking the door when a brick shattered the window. She spun, nail file in hand. Both men were grinning. The man without the sandwich had a translucent cataract over one eye, which made it look as though he were giving her a wink. The file seemed worse than useless, and she was angry that she had shown them that she was afraid.

"You stop your work," the man with the cataract said. "If not, we come see you at home. Maybe tonight—"

Rana realized that they had been sent by the Kalki Party. She was trying to remember the filthiest curses that she knew when someone spoke from over her shoulder. "Leave her alone."

She turned toward the new voice. Five men stood in the street behind her with cudgels and lathis in their hands. A large man at the head of the group, who was holding a pistol, took a step toward the pair who had threatened her. "Get out of here before we kill you."

As her assailants turned and ran, glaring at Rana, one of them dropped his vadapav on the ground, where it was trampled underfoot. A second later, they were gone, leaving behind the squashed sandwich.

Rana's legs felt weak. There were two tiny cuts on her hand where fragments of glass had broken the skin. Now that the danger seemed to be over, she was bewildered that anyone would threaten her because of her work.

The big man had a grim expression, but he did not seem dangerous. "You all right?"

Rana tried to sound tougher than she felt. This wasn't a conversation that she wanted to be having. "Who are you?"

He stuck the gun into his belt, tugging down his orange kurta to conceal it. "My name doesn't matter. We're from the Harkat Al-Mutasim. A friend of yours asked us to keep an eye on you."

Rana recognized the name of one of the leading Muslim gangs in Mumbai. She had to admit that they had appeared just in time, but she wasn't sure that she wanted this protection. "Which friend?"

"A gentleman from London." When Rana only stared back, the man smiled. "Don't worry. We'll keep you safe."

He said something to one of the others, who went into the grocery store and emerged with a small broom. After he used it to sweep the glass from her driver's seat, the men watched as she drove away. As a draft came through her broken window, Rana looked at the gangsters in her rearview mirror, their eyes following her intently, and wondered if this was supposed to make her feel better.

* * *

Divakar had attended countless meetings with the ethics committee, and he was glad that this one was almost over. "Our argument is partly an economic one. Kanner's syndrome is a condition of developed nations. If nothing is done to counteract it, the costs of caring for millions of affected children will cancel out any advantages that India derives from industrialization."

The ethics committee member, who was a professor at Mumbai University, was polite but guarded as he ushered them out of the office where they had been talking. "But what is causing the rate to increase? I would think that we should address the causes, not the symptoms."

"That's harder than it sounds," Adam said. "The vaccine myth has been conclusively debunked, but there are possible ties to parental age, certain medications, gestational diabetes, exposure to pollution, changing patterns in social mobility, and factors that we've only begun to explore. Most are associated with industrial development, which will continue whether we like it or not."

The professor left them at the door. "That strikes me as a failure of imagination. But I will consider the points that you have raised."

Divakar and Adam headed for their car. As their driver took them back to the office, Divakar closed his eyes and thought of Rana, who had presented him with yet another quandary. She had told him that she had informed Nasir of the regression problem, which left him with an emotional dilemma so daunting that he had simply decided to ignore it. As for the political situation, there had been no rallies in recent days, but Savarkar would not remain silent for long—

A second later, the car came to a stop. Opening his eyes, Divakar found that they had halted on a street in Colaba, where a mob of pedestrians was moving rapidly in the opposite direction. Adam was peering through the windshield. "What is it? Another demonstration?"

"No, not a rally." Their driver listened to the shouts. "It's an elephant attack."

Adam stared at the fleeing crowd, which made it impossible for the car to proceed. "Elephant attack?"

Divakar saw a dark shape moving up the road, visible in a gap between buildings. He opened the car door, ignoring the others, and headed on foot to a small courtyard, where he found himself facing an elephant. It was a makhna, or tuskless male, two meters tall at the shoulder, with a pair of broken ropes trailing from his rear legs. Black fluid ran from the temporal glands on the sides of his head, and his penis dribbled a continuous stream of urine.

Half a dozen men stood in the square, shouting in Marathi. An officer in a khaki uniform held a crossbow loaded with an immobilization dart. As he looked for a shot, the elephant took a clod of dirt with his trunk and threw it on his back, where the grit skated down his shoulders to the ground.

Divakar caught the eye of a boy at the edge of the crowd. "What happened here?"

Turning back to the scene, the boy told the story. The elephant, which was named Nataraj, belonged to a mahout who had illegally brought him to the city to beg. Yesterday, the mahout had noticed that the elephant's neck had thickened and black secretions were trickling down his temples, which indicated that he had entered musth, the cyclical madness from which all male elephants suffered. The mahout chained the elephant up, intending to starve him until it passed, but he broke free.

As the boy finished speaking, the officer raised his crossbow and fired a blank cartridge,

which drove the dart into the elephant's shoulder. The elephant trumpeted, dropping a clump of dung, and charged before abruptly reversing direction. A moment later, he halted and shook his head violently, his trunk whipsawing from side to side. He was slowing down, but it took nearly a minute before his eyes clouded over, and he fell to his knees.

The onlookers in the courtyard ran up to the unconscious elephant, whose sides rose and fell with forced respirations. While the officer shouted orders, Divakar came forward to help push the makhna onto his side, which would allow him to breathe more easily. As the men pressed their shoulders against the massive wall of his body, the elephant slowly toppled over. Someone propped up his trunk with a forked stick, clearing his airway, and ropes were looped around his legs.

There was a debate about what to do next. The officer, who was a member of the animal control service, wanted to haul the elephant away on a lorry, but there was no way to get it into the courtyard. An old man advised them to do nothing. "Keep him here until his musth has passed. If we give him nothing but dry grass, it will take only a week before he is back to normal."

Not surprisingly, everyone in sight had an opinion about this. As the officer stepped aside to make a phone call, Divakar saw Adam standing in the crowd. Joining the analyst, he told him about the concept of musth. "Bull elephants experience a surge in hormones that leads to periodic outbursts of aggression. No one knows why it happens. Left to itself, the madness lasts for up to three months. If they starve him, it will be over much sooner—"

The officer hung up. "The elephant stays here tonight. If we can't get a crane inside, we'll keep him here until his musth passes."

This comment triggered a murmur of anticipation, because Nataraj would need to be revived and led to a tethering place. A group of men ran the ropes around the elephant's legs toward a pair of thick but stunted trees. After a volunteer had been stationed at each rope, the officer injected an antidote at the base of the elephant's ear, which he flapped with both hands, encouraging it to circulate. Divakar had seen this sort of operation before, and he was prepared to intervene if necessary.

For nearly a minute, there was no visible effect. Then, in an instant, the elephant was up and bellowing, weaving and shaking his head as the men in front pulled on the ropes, while others drove him with bamboo staves. They wound the lines around the tree trunks, leaving a small amount of slack, and tied them securely. The elephant yanked the ropes, but they held firm.

Once the excitement was over, the onlookers dispersed. As the elephant continued to dash his trunk against the ground, Adam fell into step at Divakar's side. "You need to be more careful. You ran straight for an elephant attack without any consideration for your own safety. If someone wanted to fire you, that kind of behavior would give them a convenient excuse. You understand?"

Divakar was surprised to hear Adam speak so candidly. "I have a professional interest in elephants. I spent a year working with Vikash Chandra, who was in charge of elephant relocations for the forest department."

"You aren't working with elephants now. I'm trying to look out for your interests."

"I would like to believe that," Divakar said. "However, I do not think that anyone can understand my interests but me."

He knew that there was no way to explain this particular conviction. As a boy, he had been fascinated by the kumkis, or tame elephants, that he had seen at a forest preserve. Watching an elephant drawing in the dust with a branch, he had realized that she was an intelligent being, forced to share her world with creatures that were alien and unknowable, with an expression that displayed nothing but patience. After his return, he had become obsessed with elephants, as well as the problem of living in the world of men. But he had been one of the lucky ones.

Divakar saw that Adam was waiting for him to speak. "My two areas of interest have more in common than you might think. The frequency of elephant attacks on humans has risen across the world. So has the rate of Kanner's syndrome. Mr. Chandra and I often wondered if these trends were connected, or if something else about modernization was driving elephants to—"

He broke off. As he looked back at the elephant, which was still straining against its bonds, he

felt a sharp inward tingle, as if a fly were crawling along the inside of his skull. Frowning, he tried to pin down the sensation, but when he examined it more closely, it was gone.

* * *

On the day of the ethics committee ruling, Rana and Divakar went to the lab and turned off their phones. At a vacant workstation, they spread experimental records for all of the children who had experienced regression, hoping that luck or instinct would show them something that they had previously missed. Rana held up a piece of paper. "Have you seen these sniff tests?"

Divakar came over to look. One of the system's side effects was loss of smell, or hyposmia. To measure its severity, you unwrapped an alcohol swab and brought it toward the subject's nose. Patients with normal olfactory function could smell it at ten centimeters. It was a crude metric, but it required no verbal skills. You could tell from a child's expression if he smelled something unpleasant.

Most of the patients undergoing therapy experienced some loss of smell, but because the olfactory nerve was resilient, Rana had not considered it to be especially worrisome. She pointed to the page. "Over the last month, as the subjects regress, their sense of smell improves at a similar rate."

Rana saw that Divakar understood. "So the olfactory nerve is regenerating."

"It's always regenerating, of course," Rana said. "It's the only nerve in the body that regenerates continuously—"

Rana sensed that Divakar was already working through what this meant. Because the olfactory system was constantly exposed to contaminants, its cells were the only neurons capable of ongoing regeneration. This property had been one of the factors that had led them to focus on the nerve in the first place, since it could recover from surgery without damage.

"Look for studies of hyposmia in the scientific literature," Divakar said. "I want clinical accounts of subjects who lost their sense of smell in an accident and regained it without medical intervention."

"I'll see what I can find." Rana straightened up. "What are you hoping to see?"

"Lag time. If I remember correctly, the sense of smell does not always return immediately. I want to find out if there is a typical lag period, or an interval after which no further improvement takes place."

Rana left the room, glad to have something to do. Their anxiety over the impending ruling had temporarily dissolved the tension between them. In an hour or two, they would know the future of their work, but as they waited for the results, they had focused on the regression problem as never before.

Ten minutes later, Rana returned to the office with a journal article. "I found it. When subjects lose their sense of smell as a result of trauma, they sometimes experience recovery through natural regeneration of the olfactory nerve. It usually manifests within three months of the accident."

Divakar examined the page. "In other words, it takes three months for the olfactory nerve to regenerate to a point where the subject sees any improvement. It could just be a coincidence—"

"Even so, it's suggestive. Maybe the olfactory nerve is regenerating in response to the implantation procedure, but the effects aren't strong enough to interfere with the treatment until three months have passed."

Divakar scanned the text. "But why would regeneration cause the system to fail?"

"What about conductance?" Rana asked. "If regeneration of the olfactory nerve causes conductance within the body to change—"

Divakar rose, picked up his chair, and threw it against the wall, where it rebounded with a crash. Rana jumped back. As soon as the fit had begun, it was over, and Divakar pressed his hands against the desk.

"You are absolutely right," Divakar said quietly. "If conductance in the body changes, the calibration of the nerve stimulation system will be thrown off. Its voltage will be too high or too low. The difference will be tiny, but enough to render the treatment useless, given the sensitivity involved. We only set the baseline voltage of the system once, right?"

Rana began to grow excited. “Yes. It’s calibrated at the start of the therapy. The system measures how easily an electrical signal moves within the intercellular fluid and determines the correct voltage—”

“—and once the voltage is set, it never changes.” Divakar shook his head. “I never considered whether conductance might vary over the course of the treatment. Do you see why this matters?”

“Regeneration affects the electrical properties of nerve tissue,” Rana said. “It’s a bioelectrical phenomenon, like all forms of cell growth. That’s why the therapy is failing. At a certain point in regeneration, conductance has changed so much that the calibration of the system is wrong. So the answer—”

“—is to recalibrate the system on a regular basis. Either we bring back the patient to calibrate the system periodically, or we build a recalibration process into the system itself. That way, the system continuously adapts to take regeneration into account, and we stay ahead of the curve.”

Rana couldn’t believe how simple it was. Redesigning the system to recalibrate itself would take only a trivial amount of code, and Divakar was already scrawling figures on a whiteboard when there was a knock on the door.

It was Nasir. Rana read the meaning on his face at once, and as the strength left her body, she sank down into the chair that Divakar had thrown, which creaked beneath her weight. “We lost?”

“I’m sorry,” Nasir said. “The ethics committee withdrew its approval. We can keep the hardware in place until we figure out how to remove the implants safely, but the system needs to be turned off.”

At these words, Rana saw Divakar, who always had to make a special effort to live in the world, give up and retreat into himself. She tried to speak calmly. “Was it because of the demonstrations?”

“No.” Nasir’s voice was hollow. “It was because of the Declaration of Helsinki.”

Rana suddenly realized that she knew exactly what was coming. “You mean—”

“When an investigator is in a dependent relationship with a potential subject, approval for the subject’s inclusion in the study must be obtained by an independent physician,” Nasir said. “The committee learned that you arranged to enter your brother into the trial without the knowledge of the other investigators. They said that you allowed false information to be entered into his application and exploited the protocols of the trial to assign him to the experimental group.”

He turned aside, as though he were unable to meet her eyes. “According to the committee, this violation raises questions about your randomization procedures, and it implies that other lapses may have occurred. As a result, they had no choice but to close it down.” When Nasir looked at Rana again, she saw that he was keeping himself under control only with great effort. “I know that you did what you thought was best. But there was nothing I could do. The trial is over.”

* * *

That night, Divakar was unable to sleep. As he lay in bed, his eyes open, he told himself that he should have realized long ago that Ishan was Rana’s brother. Unfortunately, he was no good at reading faces, which made him less than qualified to live in this country, where every interaction was based on an idiom of nuance in which he was functionally illiterate.

As for the regression problem, he was sure that they had found a solution, but without a clinical trial, there was no way to be certain. It would be useless to test it on monkeys or mice. He required patients, but none would be available until the status of the trials was resolved, which could take weeks or months. By that point, Vasana might no longer exist—

Divakar opened his eyes. The answer jumped into his brain, fully formed, as quickly and miraculously as the design for the nerve stimulation system had appeared more than five years ago.

His internal clock was precise, and he didn’t need to check the time to know that it was two hours before sunrise. Unzipping the mummy bag, he changed into street clothes and went downstairs.

Vasana was just a short walk away. At the office, he went past the rows of benches to a room at the rear of the lab, which was lined with cages that had once held rhesus monkeys. Going rapidly from shelf to shelf, Divakar filled a duffel bag with supplies. The last item was an ampoule of etorphine, which he handled with respect, knowing that a few spilled drops could be fatal.

He was out again within minutes. Moving through the shadows, he hurried along the darkened streets until he reached the deserted square in Colaba, where a thin gray light was creeping across the metal roofs of the houses.

In the silence, Divakar could hear snuffling, snorting, and the whisper of a rope being dragged across loose stones, which made him think of a demon imprisoned in the heart of the city.

The entrance to the courtyard had been blocked by a wooden barricade with a warning in Hindi. Divakar ducked under the barrier and headed for the far end, where Nataraj, the elephant, was pacing back and forth. Even in the dim light, Divakar could tell that the ground by the makhna's feet was worn down to mud. His legs remained tethered to the trees, the bark of which had been stripped to cambium. Leaves and twigs lay scattered on the bare earth.

Nataraj was still in musth. Divakar could see the dark fluid dripping down the sides of the elephant's face, along with the trickle of urine from his tumescent penis, which was covered with a thin algal scum from its constant state of erection. Although Nataraj had not been fed or watered in days, he was still dangerous, like a god that had gone mad from isolation. Divakar had been worried that he would find a family of beggars sleeping in the courtyard, but fear had kept the rest of the world away. He and the elephant were alone.

Divakar set down the duffel bag, unzipped it, and removed a slender pistol. The immobilization gun, which had a rifled brass barrel one meter in length, was standard issue for labs that used large mammals in experiments. In elephants, the etorphine usually required between three and fifteen minutes to take effect, but it could be considerably faster or slower.

He put on thick gloves and used a syringe to inject the etorphine, which was a translucent liquid the color of straw, into the chamber of a tranquilizer dart. After mounting a hypodermic needle on the shaft with a pair of pliers, he pressurized it with a syringe full of air. Finally, he attached a red stabilizer to the rear of the dart and loaded it into the pistol.

When he was finished, he took a few steps forward and raised the gun. The elephant turned his head sharply in Divakar's direction, lifting his trunk and stamping his right foot against the earth. As he lunged forward, the top third of his ears folded back, but he was brought up short by the ropes around his legs, which caused a hail of leaves to fall to the ground.

Holding his breath, Divakar squeezed the trigger, sending a dart flying into the elephant's flank with a burst of carbon dioxide. Nataraj twisted himself around, trumpeting, toward the source of the pain. Blinking his eyes, he shook his entire body, his trunk swinging back and forth, as labored exhalations rumbled from his chest like the sounds of a steam engine.

It took five minutes for him to succumb to unconsciousness, but when the darkness came, it was very fast. The elephant's expression grew calm, his knees weakened, and he rolled on his side, his legs entangled in the ropes.

Divakar stood in the shadows for another minute, waiting to see if anyone had been awakened by the commotion, but he heard only the elephant's gentle snoring. After two days with Nataraj, the neighborhood had become accustomed to whatever sounds the makhna made. Now Divakar had an hour, maybe less, before the early risers began to appear.

He approached the unconscious elephant. Years before, he had participated in vasectomies on wild elephants in Karnataka. Because the testicles were buried deep in the gut, the operations, which lasted more than three hours, had been bloody and exhausting. Divakar remembered them well, as he did everything, and now he trusted in his memory to guide him through what followed.

Taking a penlight from the bag, he switched it on and placed it in his mouth, directing the circle of light toward the elephant. Finding the forked twig that had been used earlier to prop up the trunk, he thrust it into the ground. The trunk was heavy, and he had to lift it with both

hands. As soon as it had been draped across the fork, the elephant's snoring ceased.

To keep the airway open, he took a length of surgical tubing from the duffel bag and threaded it down the elephant's throat, holding down the enormous tongue with his fingers. After two days without water, it felt like a huge scrap of leather. He could smell the swampy odor of the elephant's breath, mixed with the acids of his stomach and the sour tang of his temporal secretions.

Finally, he set up a line of anesthesia in the elephant's ear, locating a blood vessel with difficulty. He had done this sort of work before, but it was hard to find a pulse in the ear's broad surface, and drops of sweat were rolling down his face by the time he was done.

Divakar reached into his bag and withdrew the nerve stimulation system, with each component wrapped in its own sterile package. Compared to the mountain of flesh sleeping beside him, it seemed ridiculously small, and the elephant's size only magnified the challenges. Without an endoscope, he had no way to reach the cribriform plate without engaging in horribly invasive surgery.

After briefly considering the vomeronasal organ, Divakar concluded that the only solution was to affix the electrodes to one of the proboscideal nerves that ran up the trunk, which led to the huge olfactory lobes. It was not an exact parallel to the procedure used for humans, but the nerve had similar properties, and he hoped that the system could calibrate itself to account for the difference.

To make sure that the sutures did not impede the elephant's mobility, Divakar had to implant the system as close to the base of the trunk as possible. He pulled on a fresh pair of gloves and selected the place where the first incision would be situated. It was close to the left eye, which was surrounded by coarse lashes that twitched slightly as the elephant dreamed.

After he had taped the lid shut, he swabbed the thick base of the trunk with orange antiseptic. Unwrapping a scalpel, he pulled together the shreds of his courage and made the incision.

The skin parted easily, and blood began to seep out from beneath the steel blade. Divakar realized that he should have shaved the site first, but it was too late to stop now. He cut two more incisions and slid the scalpel beneath the skin, hinging the flap away from the muscle beneath. Sweat was pouring down his face, and his gloves were streaked with crimson.

He took the penlight out of his mouth and shone the beam on the muscle. It was raw, like uncooked beef, and crossed here and there with translucent threads. He had to find and expose the proboscideal nerve without severing it. If he cut the nerve by mistake, the elephant would lose feeling throughout his trunk, unable to feed or water himself, and probably die.

Divakar probed the site, working by instinct, as the blood coated his hands and shirtfront. A second later, he uncovered the nerve, which lay in a groove next to the artery like a piece of white cord. After exposing three centimeters, he stripped the gloves from his hands and put on a fresh pair. Now that the nerve was exposed and drying out, he had no time to waste.

Removing the electrical lead from its package, he threw the wrapper away. Instead of the square electrodes that were usually employed, he had brought a pair of helical probes that had been developed for an earlier version. He gripped the ends of the first electrode with forceps and began to thread it around the nerve. With every beat of the elephant's heart, it disappeared under a wave of blood.

It took him more than five minutes to fix the electrodes in place. After attaching the lead to the pulse generator, he tucked the platinum capsule into a shallow pocket that he had excavated in the trunk. Taking the electronic wand out of his bag, he held it over the system and checked the leads carefully.

He folded the skin back over the exposed muscle and sutured the flap shut, which was harder than he had expected. Whenever he wiped his sweat away, the blood made his eyes sting. After he was finished, he poured disinfectant across the site and taped a square of gauze over the incision. He felt as if he had just emerged from an excavation deep within the earth, with the striations of the elephant's skin like great circles and meridian lines on a globe.

One last step remained. Holding the wand against the elephant's trunk, Divakar initiated the calibration process, which took a minute. Once it was done, he pressed a button to activate the

system.

Withdrawing the tracheal tube, Divakar detached the intravenous line and pulled the tape away from the elephant's eyelids. He filled a syringe with diprenorphine and injected it into Nataraj's left ear. Taking the broad leaf in his hands, he flapped it, allowing the drug to circulate. A moment later, before Divakar was altogether ready for it, the elephant awoke.

* * *

When Rana arrived at the office, the other researchers avoided her, for which she could hardly blame them. As far as she could tell, someone had hacked into Vasana's database, looking for families who might be turned against the lab, and had run the addresses of the trial subjects against Vasana's employee records. Rana had forgotten that she had given her mother as an emergency contact when she joined the company, and it had matched her brother's file.

The long rows of benches left her feeling exposed, so she gathered up her materials, went into Divakar's office, and closed the door. Seating herself behind his desk, she tried to focus on the shutdown. After yesterday's decision, the ethics committees at three other hospitals had announced that they would also be withdrawing their approval of the trial. Two hundred children would need to be brought back for deactivation, and their parents would be furious.

Rana was trying to decide what the first steps should be when her phone rang. According to the display, it was Divakar. She hesitated before answering, and when she did, Divakar spoke first, his voice raised, as if he were in the middle of a crowd. "I need you to meet me in Colaba."

Instead of waiting for her response, he gave an address and hung up without explanation. Rana stared at her phone, knowing only that she had to get him back to the office as soon as possible, and rose from the desk.

She took a taxi to the location that Divakar had named, which turned out to be a side street crowded with vegetable carts and hens in wooden cages. As she approached, Rana heard shouts and laughter. Going up to a courtyard, she saw a mahout and a young boy riding a tuskless elephant, surrounded by a cheerful throng. The elephant had a piece of white gauze taped to the base of its trunk.

Divakar was standing at the edge of the crowd. He looked tired, but he was smiling. Rana went closer, keeping an eye on the elephant, which the mahout was running through a series of basic commands, ordering it to trumpet or drop to one knee. The mahout carried a forked goad with an iron tip, or ankus, which he occasionally used to tap the sides of the elephant's head.

She went up to Divakar. It was the first time they had seen each other since learning about the ethics committee's decision the day before. "Here I am. Now can you tell me what this is about?"

The grin on Divakar's face grew sheepish. "I implanted the system into the elephant."

Rana was already worn out from a restless night, and it took her a moment to process what she was hearing. "What?"

"A few hours ago, he was in musth. Now look." Divakar showed her the electronic wand that he was using to monitor the system. "Within an hour of activation, he tested as normal, so I untied the ropes and let him go. You understand? The system works on elephants."

Looking at Divakar's rumpled shirtfront, which was covered with pale orange stains, Rana began to realize the audacity of what he had done. In the courtyard, the sun was bright, the colors were sharp, and a filmi song was playing on the radio. The elephant seemed to be having a good time. "Why?"

"We can perfect the system this way," Divakar said. "We do not need human subjects. We can solve the regression problem ourselves, using elephants instead of human patients."

Rana wasn't sure how to respond to this. "What makes you think this will work?"

"Elephants in musth suffer from symptoms that are analogous to Kanner's syndrome, including sensitivity to noise, disconnection from the social group, and a surge in testosterone. It can lead to aggression and outbursts of violence, which are greatly magnified in destructiveness by the elephant's size." He pointed toward the elephant. "His name is Nataraj. You know what that means?"

“The king of the dance,” Rana said. “It’s a common enough name for elephants—”

“Do you know why? In captivity, elephants sometimes sway back and forth on their feet for hours, which is the equivalent of the rocking often seen in Kanner’s syndrome. They press themselves against the bars of their cages, as if craving pressure. And the frequency of elephant attacks has risen in parallel with the rate of these symptoms across the world. Vikash Chandra and I always wondered if it was the expression of a similar condition in two different species—”

Rana found that she wanted to believe him. “Is it close enough to be useful?”

“Look at what happened to Nataraj. I did nothing to modify the equipment. The fact that Nataraj experienced an immediate remission of his symptoms suggests that the two types of conditions have fundamental similarities. On a structural level, the elephant brain is morphologically equivalent to the human brain, except that the olfactory lobes are proportionally much larger. If anything, this should make elephants even more responsive to the system.”

Rana saw a spasm run up Nataraj’s trunk, as if someone had snapped it like a whip. The tremor lasted only a second, and the elephant did not appear to notice it. “Did you see that?”

“Yes. When the pulse generator sends an impulse, it causes a muscle spasm along the trunk. It does not seem harmful. You actually see the system working, which might even be useful from a clinical perspective.”

“What exactly are you proposing? That we use this elephant to continue the trial?”

“Not just this elephant,” Divakar said. “Many elephants. We find domesticated males in musth, implant the system, and implement the new recalibration procedure. If we see no regression after three months, we know that our hypothesis is correct. We can perfect the system without waiting for the hospitals.”

“Divakar—” Rana wondered how to break the news. She had hoped to avoid this moment by leaving a note on his desk, but now she had no choice but to tell him directly. “I’ve decided to resign.”

“What?” It was Divakar’s turn to be surprised. “I refuse to accept that. I need you.”

Despite his controlled tone, the look in his eyes was raw and exposed. Rana knew that Divakar rarely allowed himself to appear so vulnerable, and she was about to respond as gently as she could when another problem occurred to her. “How long does musth usually last?”

Divakar did not reply at once, but he grew agitated almost immediately. A muscle fluttered under the flesh of his face, as though an unpleasant thought were forcing its way to the surface. “Three months. Possibly less—”

Rana rarely had the chance to point out a flaw in Divakar’s logic, and she took no pleasure in doing so now. “Then we can’t use elephants to test the recalibration process. Even if improvement persists after three months, it might indicate that it worked, but it could also mean that the elephant experienced a natural remission. It wouldn’t prove anything.”

It was clear that this had not occurred to Divakar. Turning back toward the elephant, which was accepting lumps of jaggery into his mouth, he swallowed hard. Without looking at Rana, he disappeared into the crowd. Rana took a step in his direction, but she decided to let him go.

She watched the elephant for a while longer before leaving the courtyard. On her way back to the main road, she passed a taxi driver who was washing his cab at the curb with a bucket of soapy water. Rana gave him a wad of rupees to drive her back to Vasana, and as she looked through the drying suds on the windshield, she found herself on the verge of tears.

When she reached the office, Divakar was already there. Calling her over to his desk, he pointed to his computer, on which he had called up a recent news article. The headline read: HUNT IS ON FOR ROGUE ELEPHANT. And in smaller type: GIANT TUSKER BLAMED FOR 24 DEATHS IN KARNATAKA.

“This elephant,” Divakar said, his voice trembling with excitement, “we can use.”

* * *

II.

Nasir was seated in his usual spot at Mondal, going over a set of financial projections for Vasana, when Divakar entered the restaurant. A moment earlier, Nasir had been weighing his options for overhauling the lab’s management, and he was less than happy to see Divakar, who

pushed a newspaper across the table. On the front page, a story was circled in red. "Read this."

Picking it up, Nasir wondered what fresh outrage he would need to confront. To his surprise, the article wasn't about Vasana at all, but about a rogue elephant. According to the story, the government of Karnataka had issued a proclamation for the destruction of Peer Bux, a rogue blamed for the deaths of more than twenty villagers near Bandipur National Park. The forest department invited qualified hunters in the possession of a .458 caliber rifle to submit bids for the destruction order, which were due by tomorrow afternoon.

As Nasir skimmed the following paragraphs, which gave a sensational account of the elephant's rampage, he did not immediately see a connection to Vasana. Looking up, he noticed for the first time that Divakar was a mess. Under his jacket, his shirt was stained and wrinkled, but his eyes were bright.

"This is how our work will survive," Divakar said. "I want to go after this elephant."

Nasir hoped that he hadn't heard him correctly. After learning about Divakar's encounter with an elephant earlier that week, however, he was no longer shocked by anything. "What are you talking about?"

"We need to capture Peer Bux and put the system into his brain. This is the only way to keep the lab alive."

As Nasir listened incredulously, Divakar explained that after implanting the system into an elephant suffering from musth, he had seen an immediate remission of dangerous behaviors. Unfortunately, most elephants suffered from musth for only three months at a time, which was where the rogue came in.

"A rogue elephant is different from an elephant in musth," Divakar said. "It exhibits the same symptoms, but without remission. Peer Bux has been attacking villagers for six months, which means that his musth is chronic and irreversible. If we can find him and implant the system, we can use him as a test subject to develop the recalibration process, since there is no chance of an independent recovery. This is the only way to continue our research in the absence of human testing."

"I was under the impression that we couldn't learn anything more from animal tests."

"Not from monkeys and mice, but elephants are in a different category. Like humans, their brains continue to grow and develop after birth. They have complex kinship groups, which makes the loss of social connection that results from musth even more pronounced. Their limbic systems are essentially identical to those of human beings. Rana agrees with me. We have already asked an old colleague of mine, Vikash Chandra, to lead the expedition. He was in charge of elephant relocations for the forest department, and his expertise may prove useful."

"Let me see if I understand," Nasir said. "You want to go to Karnataka with Rana and your former colleague, find this elephant, capture him alive, implant the system in the field—"

"—and bring him back. The other researchers can oversee a temporary shutdown of the trial in our absence. If my theory is correct, the improvement in this elephant's behavior will be immediate, but we will need to observe him for several months to be sure. And you should consider another possibility. There are thousands of domesticated elephants throughout the world. Scores of workers are killed each year by elephants in musth, and the drugs used to shorten its duration are not particularly effective. This treatment could become a standard procedure, like inoculation—"

Nasir considered this. If Vasana's technology turned out to have a practical application, no matter how unusual, the company would benefit. The argument was too clever to come from Divakar alone, and he wondered if Rana had proposed it. "How long will it take?"

"When I was with the elephant squad, Chandra rarely needed more than a week." Divakar fixed his eyes on Nasir. "It may seem strange, but it will buy us time. Our employees need to believe that research will continue. This will keep us going for long enough to find a permanent solution."

This was another convincing argument, and an even stronger one occurred to Nasir as he looked across the table. At the moment, he could either close Vasana until the political climate improved, move it to a different jurisdiction, or sell its patents and take the loss. None of these

prospects was particularly attractive, but if Divakar went to southern Karnataka, which was a thousand kilometers away, it would be easier to implement any operational changes.

It might be best to send Rana away as well. Nasir sensed that the next few days would be difficult, and he wanted her as far away from the city as possible. Now that Savarkar had achieved what he wanted, he would be looking to extract additional concessions from the firm, and Nasir suspected that Vasana was only the beginning. He decided to take the chance. "All right. But I want you to return with a harmless elephant, not a rogue. Do you understand?"

"I do." Divakar left at once, leaving Nasir to reflect on what he had set in motion. If nothing else, he thought, it was the kind of story that Vasana needed. A technology company could be sustained for years by a dream.

* * *

"Peer Bux first appeared near the village of Karkankote, in the south of Karnataka," the forest department officer said. "No one seems to know where he got his name, which the villagers have been using for months. He's three meters tall at the shoulder, with tusks over one meter in length. The right tusk is abraded at the tip, which indicates he favors it over his left. His trunk and face are speckled with pink. We believe that he belongs to the princely caste. You know what this means?"

"There are three elephant castes," Divakar said. "Peer Bux is the highest caste, from which temple elephants are selected."

"Correct." Taking a long sip of water, the officer glanced at the file on his desk. The room on the third floor of forest department headquarters in Bangalore was murky and sweltering. "Peer Bux has light eyes, which are often the sign of a killer. He has a black tongue and a bifurcated tail. Do you understand why I am being so particular on these points?"

Rana was writing in her notepad. "Otherwise, we might target the wrong elephant."

"Yes. We believe that this elephant is responsible for upward of twenty deaths in the area around Karkankote. The first verified attack was six months ago, and he has killed continuously ever since."

"This indicates that he is a true rogue," Divakar said. "And not merely in musth."

"If he were only in musth, yes, these killings would have stopped long before. He first appeared in Karkankote in the early spring, trampling the rice and sugarcane fields at the southern edge of the village, where it borders the forest. A handful of villagers tried to scare him away, but the rogue charged, trampled a man to death, and escaped into the woods."

"What are the woods like outside Karkankote?" Divakar asked. On the flight to Bangalore, he had looked out at the endless expanse of trees and grassland, trying to imagine what it would be like on the ground.

"It is deciduous forest, crossed by cart roads and trails. Much of it is covered with elephant grass, which can grow over three meters in height. The terrain is irregular, which is why it has not been claimed by farmers."

The officer took another sip from his glass. "The second victim was carrying a load of firewood when Peer Bux caught him in his trunk and repeatedly dashed him to the ground. The following week, he entered the village itself. A lantern was overturned, causing a fire that destroyed two huts, and a woman and her child were trampled. He later appeared in the fields four times in as many nights. Three villagers were killed, and one seems to have been partially eaten."

Rana glanced up from her notes, as if unsure that she had heard correctly. "Eaten?"

The officer seemed to enjoy her reaction. "So the villagers say. It starts by accident. Sometimes a piece of flesh enters the elephant's mouth by chance. Afterward, he may eat it on purpose. Shall I continue?"

Divakar suspected that the officer was toying with them, but he wrote down the allegation. "Yes, please."

"Peer Bux began to move north. He went on a rampage on the main road, overturning bullock carts, uprooting road markers, and killing two men. At a village twenty kilometers from Karkankote, he took a baby from its mother's arms and trampled it. Then he vanished for three

weeks, which made us hope he had only been suffering from musth. In June, however, he reappeared, even more murderous than before. He attacked a lorry, and a few days later, he struck at a police station. Several officers opened fire, but not one scored a hit."

"Does Peer Bux have any other injuries?" Rana asked. "Like a broken tusk?"

"None that the witnesses have reported. He appears to be in perfect health."

Divakar knew that the lack of visible injury was crucial. Elephants sometimes went mad because of infection, but Peer Bux had no serious wounds, which made him a good candidate for treatment. "There is one thing that I do not understand. Peer Bux had killed at least twelve villagers by June, which is the number required for a destruction order. Why was he declared a rogue only now?"

"We had to be sure that he was a true rogue, and not simply in musth. Villagers are forbidden to kill elephants, so they sometimes try to have a troublesome male declared so it can be hunted down."

Divakar hesitated before asking the next question. "So you approve our proposal?"

"With reservations. Normally, we're glad to consider any alternative to destroying an elephant, but because Peer Bux has caused so much loss of life, we cannot take the risk of his eluding capture. As a result, we have awarded a contract to a team led by Gordon Latsis. He was a hunter for many years before he turned to making documentaries. Latsis has volunteered his services to us on several occasions, and he has taken down a rogue elephant before."

At the mention of filmmaking, Divakar remembered where he had heard the hunter's name. Years ago, he had seen one of Latsis's programs on television, and he had hated it. "But—"

"Just a moment. Because of the novelty of your proposal, we have decided to take the unusual step of granting two contracts for the elimination of Peer Bux. If you can capture Peer Bux before he is found by Latsis, you can do whatever you please with him, as long as he ceases to pose a threat to the state of Karnataka. You're familiar with Ashwatthama?"

Divakar recognized the name of the notorious ivory and sandalwood poacher, who for many years had been one of the most wanted men in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. "Yes, of course."

"He's in the vicinity. You'll want to watch out for him as well." The officer looked at them sharply. "Ashwatthama and his men are responsible for over one hundred murders. Two years ago, they blew up a convoy of policemen with dynamite from a quarry in Kollegal. The rogue may turn out to be the least of your worries. Do you have your team assembled?"

"Yes," Divakar said. "I know a relocation expert in Mysore. His name is—"

The officer cut him off. He had a humorous look on his face. "Vikash Chandra?"

Rana seemed concerned by his expression of amusement. "Do you know him?"

"Only by reputation." The officer smiled. "From what I hear, Mr. Chandra is a good man. But he gets people killed."

Before Divakar could respond, the officer handed him a copy of the destruction order. Divakar folded the page and put it into his briefcase, along with his notepad. As he rose from his chair, his face was burning.

After they had left the office, Rana turned to Divakar. "He's a smug maderchod."

Divakar was grateful for the touch of obscenity, but he was still shaken by the meeting. They were placing their trust in a technology that had not yet been tested beyond its original application. In Mumbai, their research associate, Sonia Wasey, was preparing to evaluate the system's effects on Nataraj, but it would be a long time before they could draw any conclusions.

After signing a ledger at the front desk, they left the building, which was girded by a stone wall. In the garden stood an obelisk of black marble, which was engraved with the names of officers who had been murdered in the ongoing ivory and sandalwood wars in southern India.

The chisel marks on two names were fresh. According to the dates, the men had died the week before. Divakar knew that they had been killed by Ashwatthama, and he realized that the forest officer had been right. The rogue had tusks over a meter in length, so their ivory was valuable beyond reckoning. Ashwatthama would be looking for Peer Bux as well.

* * *

Vikash Chandra twisted the steering wheel as he took a sharp curve in the Land Rover. The

former head of elephant relocations was in his late fifties, with a beard like cat's fur, and even within the confines of the vehicle, he vibrated with repressed energy. "The soil will be like concrete. This elephant will be hard to track. But it's what comes next that has me worried."

Divakar looked out the window. The asphalt was edged with the cropped turf that was kept short by the deer that grazed throughout the forest. Fifty paces from the road, a wall of elephant grass hid the woods from view. Rana was seated in back, her eyes on the jeep behind them. Ashwatthama was on everyone's mind, and the Special Task Force, an extension of the regular police, had insisted on providing them with an escort. Rana glanced at Chandra. "Worried about what?"

"My squad has been responsible for over a hundred relocations, and we've lost only three elephants," Chandra said. "Usually, the trouble comes after you've brought the elephant down. Before the etorphine takes effect, he can run over a cliff, or you can lose him in the grass and find him dead of suffocation. Once you've tranquilized him, you need to haul him out of the forest with tame elephants or a lorry. Even if you manage to implant your system, this will come down to a tug of war."

As they neared Karkankote, the road beneath their tires degraded from asphalt to dirt. Two kumkis, or tame elephants, had already been transported from Bandipur, along with mahouts, grasscutters, trackers, a cook, and a gunbearer, each of whom would receive a bonus if Peer Bux was captured. After their destruction order expired in two weeks, anyone could take a shot at the rogue, but as a practical matter, Divakar knew that they had considerably less time.

They parked outside the village. Donning a fedora, Chandra climbed out of the Land Rover, which had a canvas top and a steel plate welded to its steering mechanism to protect it from the stumps and termite mounds that it encountered in the forest. Divakar took his pack and headed with the others toward Karkankote, noting that their escort remained behind. The police were considerably less popular in this part of the state than the poachers themselves.

Following Chandra and Rana, Divakar saw a circle of tents pitched outside the village, which consisted of two hundred houses of mud or brick. At the center of the camp, the mahouts were feeding balls of rice to a tuskless bull elephant and a smaller female. As they moved their jaws slowly from side to side, the kumkis dropped casual clumps of dung to the ground. Divakar remembered them from his time with the elephant squad. "Is that Dod Kempa?"

"And the female is Balmati," Chandra said. "Why don't you go and say hello?"

Divakar needed no further encouragement. He approached Dod Kempa, struck by the characteristic smell of wild honey, and stood quietly as the elephant sniffed him, vacuuming his armpits and crotch before turning away. Going to Balmati, he placed a hand in the kumki's mouth, rubbing her gums and blowing on her trunk. She purred in response, her entire body rumbling with pleasure.

One of the men caught his eye. It was the head tracker, whose neck bore an amulet inscribed with a magic square and some words in Arabic. Following Divakar's gaze, the tracker touched the amulet to his forehead. "To stop an elephant from charging. It never fails."

Chandra broke in. "We need to get going. Rana, you can stay behind for now."

Divakar left the elephants with reluctance. Before they departed from the village, he stopped at a ropemaker and purchased a piece of cord one hundred and fifty centimeters long, remembering that twice around an elephant's foot equaled its height at the shoulder. Peer Bux was reported to be three meters tall, so his prints would be one and a half meters in circumference.

They drove in the Land Rover to the southern edge of the fields, which were dotted with trees that were equipped with the machans, or bamboo platforms, from which crops were guarded at night. Arriving at the river, they climbed out. Divakar kept his eyes on the ground, which was covered with scrub and short grass that gave way to clay at the riverbank.

As they continued along the river, they saw a pair of small boys in sandals drifting on a bamboo raft. In response to a shouted question, they pointed upstream. "Elephants," Chandra said. "Less than a kilometer from here, watering at the opposite bank. No tuskers, just females and calves. It will make it harder to track Peer Bux. We need to push them back into the woods."

After a few minutes, they came around a bend, where they saw fifteen elephants gathered on

the far side. Some drew water into their trunks and squirted it into their mouths, while others thrust their whole heads into the river. Higher up the bank, more elephants were kicking at the grass, uprooting trunkfuls and knocking them against their knees to dislodge the dirt.

Divakar kept his eyes on the ground. After fifty paces, he saw a circular impression, like the outline described by a dinner plate. It was the mark of an elephant's foot. Pulling the cord from his pocket, he measured the print with the string, which did not make it all the way around. "This was Peer Bux. The marks of the toes are deep, which means that his tusks are heavy. It must have been made over a day ago. Water has already begun to seep in."

Continuing along the bank, he found the marks of the rogue's hind feet, which were oval, and impressions of his skin and tusk where he had bent to drink. Divakar looked at the current. "The river is shallow here. This is where he forded it to reach the fields. He will come again soon—"

Divakar broke off. Not far from the furrow that had been left by the tusk, he saw what seemed at first like the hoofmarks of a deer. He pointed them out to Chandra, who nodded. "I never would have seen it myself. They're from a man walking on his heels, trying to disguise his footprints."

"A poacher," Divakar said. Although he was afraid that he was too late, he took a branch and obliterated the marks that Peer Bux had left, hoping it would make the rogue harder for others to track.

Chandra watched as Divakar erased the prints. "The poacher's footprints are fresh. He must be following the bulls in the herd. We need to drive them off now, before the rest of these bandits move in."

Returning to the Land Rover, they headed back to Karkankote. Divakar was preoccupied by what he had seen, but as they neared the village, he felt the vehicle slow. Chandra was looking through the windshield. "What's this?"

Divakar followed his gaze. At the teashop at the side of the road, a forest officer sat at a plastic table, talking to a white man who could only be Gordon Latsis, the head of the rival elephant squad. A third figure was there as well, and for a second, Divakar could not believe his eyes. It was Adam Hill.

* * *

Adam had arrived in Karnataka that morning. After Nasir told him in confidence about the elephant hunt, he had decided to fly down at once. As a courtesy, he had checked in first at police headquarters in Mysore, where he had paid in cash for a ride to Karkankote. At the village teashop, he had noticed a camera crew, which clearly belonged to the rival team, and asked to stop for a drink.

Gordon Latsis had gladly struck up a conversation, and they had spent most of the last half hour sizing each other up. The forest officer was less forthcoming, but he was starting to relax as well, and Adam thought that this was his best chance to get an honest appraisal of the situation. He signaled to the shopkeeper to refill their glasses. "Tell me about Ashwatthama."

The officer lit a beedi from the end of the one before. "He's the son of a farmer from Tamil Nadu. He uses a .375 rifle, which is too light for elephants, unless you can make the frontal shot with great accuracy. No one knows how he looks, aside from a scar on his forehead. In prison, he cut himself and used the blood to slip off his handcuffs. That was more than twenty years ago. Since then, he has killed a dozen policemen. Yet the villagers here idolize him."

Latsis's smile turned his features into a wilderness of folds. His face was made for television, with a mustache, piercing green eyes, and enormous cheekbones. "The state burned their villages, forced them to relocate, and outlawed taking fruit from the forest. Ashwatthama offers a way out. They'll listen to anyone who gives them a gun instead of a hunger strike."

"I've heard he has connections in the north, where the ivory goes," Adam said. "He must work with the gangs in Mumbai—"

Instead of responding, the officer glanced to one side. Following his gaze, Adam saw a Land Rover pulling up before the teashop. A moment later, Divakar emerged, followed by Rana and a man in a fedora, whom Latsis rose to greet. "You must be Vikash Chandra. I know your work."

"And I know yours," Chandra replied. "Unfortunately, we have no time to chat. An elephant

herd has gathered at the river. We have to drive them away before the poachers descend.”

“If you need extra men, I hope you’ll allow me to assist you,” Latsis said. “All of us will benefit if the herd is driven into the hills. You’d need to sign a release, of course, before I could use the footage—”

Over the hunter’s shoulder, Adam saw that a film crew had approached, as if responding to a prearranged signal. As Chandra and Latsis argued over the plan, Adam went to the others. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you that I was coming. I thought that it would be easier to meet you here.”

“We can discuss it later,” Rana said shortly. “I have some other questions for you.”

“I’m sure you do,” Adam said. For now, they left it at that. After the teams reached an agreement, Adam followed them to the riverbank, while Rana remained behind in the village. Divakar walked with Chandra and a few local men who carried whistles and pans to bang, but Adam was more interested in Latsis, who brought his camera crew and a tusker of his own.

As he watched the rival team, Adam sensed that the next move would be made here. Savarkar had sources everywhere, and it was safe to assume that he had learned about the elephant hunt. This entire region was controlled by Ashwatthama, who had longstanding ties to criminal networks in Mumbai. It was a marriage of convenience, not politics, and it was tolerated by both sides as long as it was useful. If Savarkar was in contact with the poachers, he wouldn’t hesitate to utilize them to destroy Vasana’s best chance of saving its technology.

Adam was trying to decide what to do next when the herd came into view at the river. At a signal from Chandra, the villagers yelled, blew their whistles, and rattled pots. On the opposite bank, the wild elephants dashed their trunks against the ground, making a sound like a sheet of tin being folded in half, and began to fall back toward the trees. It seemed to be working perfectly.

A second later, from the direction of the village, a chorus of shouts rose above the din. Turning from the river, Adam saw flames rising from the area outside Karkankote. In a neighboring field, the haystacks were on fire, sending columns of black smoke into the air.

The yelling died down as the crowd turned to look at the blaze. Several men dropped their whistles and ran, and the rest quickly followed. Within seconds, all the villagers had disappeared.

On the far bank, the herd had refused to disperse. As Chandra’s mahouts continued to shout, the elephants retreated, but it was clear that the withdrawal was only temporary. The attempt to drive the herd away had failed.

As Adam looked at the flames in the distance, he knew that the fire was no accident. Someone had set it intentionally, only minutes after the decision had been made to drive away the elephants, which meant that their enemies were even closer than he had feared. And Latsis had been filming all the while.

* * *

Rana paced around the scene, watching the confusion, which she had followed after hearing the shouts. Seeing two villagers beating their heads and chests, she realized that they were the owners of the haystacks that were burning. During the summer, the only source of water was a borewell outside the village, and it was impossible to bring enough water to extinguish the blaze.

She turned to Divakar, who was examining an intact haystack. Reaching down, he withdrew a stick of incense, followed a second later by another. Their tips had been lit, but they had gone out before they could set fire to the hay. Divakar held them up. “The fires were started after our departure, to keep us from driving away the herd. Someone is working with the poachers.”

“I think you’re right,” Adam said, approaching from the village. “I’ve been talking to the forest officer. Ashwatthama has a lot of friends here. I’m going to ask Latsis if I can review his footage for clues.”

“Hold on.” Rana led him to a short remove from the others. “Why are you here?”

“India is smaller than it seems.” Adam glanced over at Divakar, who had continued to study the haystacks. “If Savarkar has learned about this project, he’ll know that it’s our best chance to save Vasana. To apply pressure to the firm, he’ll do whatever it takes to make sure that you don’t

succeed. The poachers would be after this elephant in any case, but he'll do what he can to help them. I'm here to keep an eye on the situation and lend a hand if you need me."

Rana was reminded of something else. "A few days ago, some men were at my house. They told me that they were there to protect me, and when I asked who sent them, they said it was a man from London. Was it you?"

Adam seemed to decide that there would be no point in denying this. "Yes. I made a deal with the Harkat Al-Mutasim. Savarkar's power is based on his control of the underworld. I thought that if I could get the Muslim gangs to protect us from the Hindu side, it would buy us some time."

Rana felt a surge of anger at his presumption. "Did Nasir know about this?"

"No. I was only trying to protect your research. I believed in it. And I still do."

Turning aside, Adam headed off to find the camera crew. Rana was less than satisfied by his answer, but a second later, she saw something that drove all other thoughts away. In the distance, above the trees on the far side of the fields, a column of vultures was circling in the sky. As one of the birds descended in a tight spiral, vanishing into the canopy, Chandra noticed it as well. He whistled to a mahout. "I don't like the look of this. We can take the elephants."

Balmati was led forward. The female elephant eyed the dying flames uncomfortably, grumbling and flicking her tail, but knelt in response to the mahout's command. At his invitation, Rana placed one foot on the elephant's soft knee, feeling it give beneath her weight, and then seized the rope and pulled herself into the saddle. Divakar climbed on behind her. The riding platform was secured over two pads of coconut fiber, one on either side of the elephant's spine, with a soft cloth running from her croup to the nape of the neck.

Seating himself in front, the lead mahout pressed a knee against the elephant's flank. They headed for the woods, with Chandra and another mahout following on Dod Kempa, whose body was dusted with ash from the fire. Following the vultures, they entered the forest, where a trail had been cut for the villagers to gather firewood. Because elephants walked with their feet planted close together, Rana knew that a path had to be only a meter or two wide for them to negotiate it, and road builders often followed the routes that they left behind.

Through a break in the trees, Rana saw that the vultures had formed an inverted cone, which terminated at a point a hundred meters to the west. The mahout tugged on the rope around Balmati's neck, guiding her to the wall of grass that lined the path. Pressing forward, the elephant plowed through the stalks with her forehead, and the pollen and chaff formed a golden cloud around her shoulders.

At last, Balmati broke through the edge of the thicket and entered a small clearing. On the ground before them, nearly obscured by vultures and green flies, lay a dead elephant.

Balmati bellowed in dismay. Rana felt the elephant's spine curve beneath the saddle as she reared back, her trunk curling in a gesture of alarm. The mahout stroked the elephant's head and whispered in her ears, but he was obviously disturbed by the sight as well.

As they descended from Balmati, some of the vultures flew away, revealing the elephant itself. It was too small to be Peer Bux, but it was hard to take comfort in this. The elephant had fallen forward with its back arched, as if burrowing for safety, and its head was gone. Gobbets of flesh had been excavated by vultures, leaving it whitewashed with droppings, and a handful of ravens perched on the corpse, their gray heads swiveling on their black necks.

Driving the ravens away, Rana went for a closer look. A few steps from the body lay the elephant's head. Its tusks were missing, and the face had been chopped off, leaving a mass of red meat flecked with bits of bone. Next to her, Divakar pressed a finger against his upper lip.

Behind them, the grass rustled as Dod Kempa entered the clearing. As Chandra lowered himself from the saddle, Divakar moved around the clearing as though he were surveying the scene of a crime. Rana knew that vultures and flies would soon pick the skeleton clean. There was no mysterious elephant graveyard, she thought, only the impersonal efficiency of scavengers and insects.

Divakar bent down. Following his eyes, Rana saw something lying to one side of the elephant. It was the casing from a rifle cartridge. Divakar picked it up and handed it to Chandra. "What

caliber is it?"

As Chandra took the brass, Rana already knew what he was going to say. "A .375."

"I was afraid so." Divakar looked at the elephant's body, where the ravens and flies continued to feed. "Ashwatthama did this."

* * *

"If the rate of elephant attacks is rising, it's no mystery," Chandra said as they headed across the darkened field. "We're witnessing a breakdown in elephant society. Deforestation and poaching are disrupting herds. Calves have their parents killed before their eyes. If we can't separate our two species, we can at least make it possible for us to live together. Your system might be the answer."

As they pulled themselves into the machan, Divakar kept his thoughts to himself. It was just after sunset. The platform had been built halfway up a mayflower tree and covered in woven mats, and they climbed into it on a bamboo pole, with its branches lopped short for footrests. They had chosen a point near the river, where Peer Bux was known to cross, while Latsis had established his own watch alongside a disused irrigation tank two hundred meters to the east.

Chandra had brought the rifle that he favored for open terrain. The long barrel, which was mounted with a flashlight, would be cumbersome in brush but accurate at long distances. Donning gloves and a surgical mask, he prepared an etorphine dart, filling it with fluid from a syringe and attaching a stabilizer.

They settled in silently for the long wait. As an endless hour passed, then another, Divakar forced himself to look away from the hands of his watches. When he looked up at the branches of the tree instead, they reminded him of the wooden stockades into which wild elephants were driven for capture. Unfortunately, he thought, it would take weeks to construct a proper corral—

A rustling came from the sugarcane, faint, but of a different order than the whisper of the wind. In a flash, Chandra was up with his rifle. They listened. From the depths of the field came a swishing sound, rhythmic and purposeful, like a sweeper whisking the sidewalk. It was the noise that an elephant made when feeding, as it uprooted grass and struck the stalks against its knees to knock away the soil.

As dread rose within Divakar like a living being, Chandra whispered in his ear. "Follow me. Bring the torch, but keep it off."

Chandra slung the rifle over his shoulder and slid down the pole. Divakar followed, descending heavily, and nearly dropped his flashlight. Before leaving the base of the tree, he took a handful of loose earth and sifted it through his fingers to confirm that they were downwind from the rogue.

Keeping the rifle lowered so that moonlight would not reflect against the lens, Chandra crept forward. Divakar kept close behind, his heart pounding, and found that all of the saliva in his mouth had dried up. As they approached the rows of sugarcane, he could see the stalks moving as a massive body plowed through the field, the disturbance creating a visible wake in the grass.

The fastest route would take them along the river. Reaching the bank, they ran parallel to the field's edge, trying to outpace the elephant, who was moving in a straight line. For a second, Divakar glimpsed the dome of the elephant's head rising briefly above the stalks, like a volcanic island breasting the surface of the ocean.

They halted at the margin of the field, far from any cover. Chandra fell to one knee and raised the rifle, aiming for where he expected the rogue to appear. Divakar crouched nearby, worn out from the run.

The rustling in the sugarcane ceased. Divakar feared that the rogue had caught their scent, and he wondered if the wind had changed.

He was reaching for another fistful of dirt when the rogue burst into the open. A vast shadow loomed in the moonlight as Peer Bux drove his body forward in silence, legs stiff but powerful, bearing down with terrible momentum. Divakar saw the flash of tusks, the large ears folded back for the charge, and was filled with a terror as real as the death that was twenty meters away and closing.

Chandra switched on the flashlight. The beam cut through the night air and bounced off a bush that neither man had seen in the darkness, blinding them both for a fraction of a second. “Goddammit—”

An explosion of gunfire came from the other side of the field. Jumping at the sound, Divakar saw Peer Bux shake his head, his trunk whipsawing, as a slug caught him on the right temple. A spray of transparent fluid shone for an instant in the beam of the flashlight as a second shot struck the rogue between the eyes. Blood spurted from the wound in a parabolic curve.

The elephant’s legs gave way. He fell over, sending up a cloud of dust, and did not rise again.

In the aftermath of the attack, the silence across the field was absolute. Divakar stared at the elephant’s lifeless body, unwilling to believe that it could be over so soon, as Latsis ran up with his rifle, followed close behind by the cameraman. Chandra only hung his head.

Latsis reached the fallen elephant, warning his men to keep away, and emptied a round into the back of the rogue’s skull, where the bone was less than half an inch thick. Divakar started at the gunshot, smelling the tang of scorched flesh, but the elephant did not move.

Peer Bux had collapsed onto his right side, as though a meteorite had crashed in the fields. He had voided his bowels as he died, and the ground by the body was covered with steaming clumps of dung. His face was in the dirt, one tusk digging into the soil, the other raised toward the sky.

Divakar went up to the dead elephant, anguish clawing at his chest. Latsis’s men, who had whooped and cheered at their first approach, became somber, as if the kill shot had brought home the magnitude of what they had done. A red dot shone in the darkness as the cameraman knelt to film the body.

Following the camera with his eyes, Divakar found himself looking at the elephant’s tail. It took him a moment to realize what he was seeing, and when he did, he was overwhelmed by relief and dread.

“This is not Peer Bux.” Divakar reached down and raised the tail, which was heavy in his hands. It seemed like an act of presumption to touch it. “His tail is not bifurcated at the end.”

Chandra stared at the tail. “I’ll be damned,” he said. “This is the wrong elephant—”

From the direction of the village, a woman screamed. Divakar couldn’t make out her words, and her cries were silenced an instant later by a collapse, as though a house had been knocked to the ground.

Chandra cursed. Slinging the rifle over his shoulder, he ran toward the source of the shrieks, shouting for his men to follow. It was a long run through the fields. As Divakar sprinted, kicking up clods of dirt, lights appeared in the village, and he heard tiles falling as families scrambled onto the roofs for safety.

As he approached the houses, Divakar saw a monumental shadow heading away from Karkankote, a hundred meters from where he stood. He recognized the shape from his dreams.

Chandra raised the rifle and fired. An explosion of carbon dioxide sent the dart flying into the darkness, but the shadow continued to move, as implacable as the leading edge of a storm cloud. The shot had missed.

As they watched, the shape reached the trees at the edge of the field and vanished.

Divakar tried to press on, but a hand on his shoulder restrained him. “No,” Chandra said. “Not at night, without the elephants—”

Instead of responding, Divakar went to view the carnage, and he found that Peer Bux had attacked the village teashop. The storefront was smashed open, with casks and crates broken underfoot, and an overturned lamp was licking at the straw. On the ground lay the shopkeeper, whose chest had been crushed to jelly.

As Divakar stared at the latest victim, Rana and Adam ran up from another part of the village. While Adam worked with the villagers to put out the fire, Rana knelt by the dying man, a medical kit in her hands, but only looked up in despair. There was nothing she could do.

A sucking noise, soft and whistling, came from the shopkeeper’s chest. A second later, it ceased. Divakar held his own breath and listened, but he did not sense the passing of a soul. Instead, he understood that he could not wait for Peer Bux to come to them. They had to take the

hunt to the rogue.

* * *

Adam rose at sunrise. Karkankote was crossed by two main paths running from north to south, along with several dirt tracks, one of which he followed to where the elephant had fallen. A crowd had gathered at the body, which had been gnawed overnight by scavengers. The elephant had been old, with torn ears and a nearly hairless tail, and according to the villagers, he had been blind in one eye.

As Adam watched, two men excavated the dead elephant's tusks with a chainsaw and machete. Once they were removed, a tracker stuck his fingers into each tusk and withdrew the inner nerve, which was a quivering tube as thick as a baby's wrist. Latsis was standing to one side. "Our rogue knows that he's being hunted now, so he'll be gone for a while. The farmers are going to a temple to ask questions of the goddess. I want to film it. Care to come?"

"I would," Adam said, sensing that there was more to the invitation than met the eye. Chandra was planning to drive away the elephant herd and establish a camp in the woods, and there was little that he could do to help in the meantime. Before leaving the village, he asked the camera crew for the footage that had been taken of the elephants yesterday, which Latsis had agreed to provide. As soon as he got back, he planned to review it on his laptop.

He took a lorry with Latsis's team to an area south of Karkankote. Parking at the edge of the forest, they hiked to the temple, where a man in ochre robes was seated beneath a tree, the top half of his face covered in ash. After speaking to a villager, Latsis turned to Adam. "A holy man. He showed up last week. The rumor is that he's a bankrupt farmer who retreated to the woods to avoid paying his bills."

Adam joined the others at the temple, where a granite statue of a local goddess stood on a pedestal. As they sat on the tiled floor, a priest took a basket of flowers, dipped them in water, and pressed them against the sculpture's face and neck. Adam kept an eye on the villagers, who were lighting dishes of camphor. Before they left, he had checked the shops without success for the incense that had burned the haystacks, and he didn't see it here either.

Clearing his throat, the oldest villager spoke to the goddess. Adam was surprised by his tone, which was angry and emphatic. On the way, Latsis had explained what was supposed to happen. "If a flower falls from the right, the answer is yes. On the left, the answer is no. Of course, the answers usually confirm what the villagers have already decided."

The ceremony continued for ten minutes, but the goddess refused to give a sign, and finally the villagers stood. As Adam put his shoes back on and left the temple, Latsis took a swig from a canteen. "It's good to have an adversarial relationship with the gods. If your patron treats you poorly, you're justified in feeling betrayed. I'm sure you understand that."

Adam noticed that the crew was still filming inside the temple, and for the moment, they were alone. "I understand more than you know. My firm has sources in the television industry. Your production company received a large infusion of cash the day before you arrived, and you obtained your permits in record time. You must have powerful friends."

"I take my friends where I can find them," Latsis said. "You should do the same."

As Latsis went to rejoin his men, Adam headed instead for the woods. He needed to think, and he wanted a few minutes on his own. From the beginning, he had assumed that Savarkar would encourage the poachers to go after Peer Bux. If he was sponsoring Latsis as well, it might just be a form of insurance, but it could also mean that Savarkar wasn't sure that he could keep Ashwathama under control.

He realized that he had wandered out of sight of the others. As he turned back to rejoin Latsis's team, he saw three forest fowls running along the ground, their heavy tails dragging in the dirt. The birds ran past him, apparently unaware of his presence, and disappeared into the undergrowth.

Adam looked in the direction from which the birds had come. At first, he saw nothing but a white crescent against a dark background, which hung two meters above the forest floor. Like an optical illusion, the background shifted, his eyes adjusted, and he realized that he was facing an elephant.

Peer Bux stood twenty meters away. His visible eye was locked with Adam's own.

The elephant was still, so it was only with an effort that Adam could see his outline against the trees. His face was covered with blotches that would be pink in full sunlight but were closer to gray in the shade. Both tusks were caked with fresh mud, and Adam saw that he had been resting one tusk in the fork of a branch, keeping to the forest in the heat of the morning.

Adam did not move. He tried to remember what he had been told to do in case of an elephant attack, but his mind was blank. Peer Bux was motionless, but there was no doubt that the rogue had seen him. His eyes were translucent, the color of broth, and fixed on Adam's face. In the silence, he heard the elephant breathing, which was proof enough that this was not a dream.

A second later, Peer Bux rumbled and turned away. Adam saw the rogue pivot slowly, his movements so silent that they seemed supernatural, and move toward the wall of elephant grass. As the rogue turned, Adam caught a glimpse of his tail, which was bifurcated at the end. Finally, Peer Bux disappeared into the thicket, the blades closing over him like a curtain as he vanished. After he was gone, the woods came back to life, one section at a time, as the birds resumed their calls and insects hummed again in the undergrowth.

* * *

Divakar sat on a pad by the fire, reviewing the details of Adam's story. They were seated in the circle of tents that the elephant squad had erected an hour ago at the edge of the forest, far from any area that had been recently inhabited. In areas where houses had once stood, the soil would be full of salt, which would sicken the elephants if they ate it. "You said that the rogue was resting his head in the crook of a tree. And there was mud on his tusks?"

"Bull elephants will often rest their tusks in the fork of a tree, or against the ground," Chandra said. "The weight can be a problem."

"Yes, but there may be another explanation. The mud implies that he had been pressing his tusks against the earth. He wedged his tusk against the tree for the same reason, to generate pressure, which relieves the symptoms of musth." Divakar turned back to Adam. "The pressure left him in a state of relaxation, which is why he did not charge. You were lucky."

"I know," Adam said. "But you're wasting time. I've seen the map. The temple is an ideal resting place, but he won't stay there for long. I didn't tell Latsis, but he'll figure it out soon enough."

Addressing the rest of the team, Chandra began to issue instructions. Rana and Adam would ride on Balmati, while Divakar would take Dod Kempa. Each would be accompanied by a mahout, with the cook and grasscutters walking beside them on foot. The head tracker would lead the procession on the ground, while Chandra and the gunbearer followed in single file through the forest.

After breaking camp, they mounted the elephants and rode for the temple where Peer Bux had been seen. Under the trees, the tracker knelt by the marks of an elephant's front toes, which were pressed deeply into the dust. A nearby heap of dung was covered with white butterflies. Taking a stick, the tracker opened the clod and used his thumb to feel the core, which had grown cool.

Forming a line, the elephant squad headed into the forest. The men in the lead walked ten paces apart, and from time to time, the tracker would pull out a machete and hack at the bushes. As they moved out of sight of the temple, Divakar saw the resident holy man emerge from the woods. Taking no notice of the newcomers, he walked slowly over to a banyan tree and sat in the shade.

Seated on his elephant behind the lead mahout, Divakar listened to a steady drumbeat of debris from the canopy as birds dropped fragments of fruit and leaves. A minute later, the tracker halted, took the cord from his pocket, and measured a print on the ground. When Dod Kempa had advanced to the point where the tracker had paused, Divakar saw a circle in the grass. As he watched, one of the trampled blades rose until it was nearly straight.

Because of the hard soil, the tracker could find marks only every twenty or thirty meters, and Peer Bux was taking an irregular route, which implied that he had grown wary. After crossing a stream with a rudimentary bridge, they found a hole in the soil of the far bank, which had been

excavated by the rogue's tusk as he pressed his face into the clay. Divakar saw that some small trees had been toppled over, leaving streaks of mud high up the trunks, and the bark had been peeled nervously away, as a child might tug at a loose strip of wallpaper.

A second later, the tracker halted at the head of the line, forcing the others to wait. In the distance, Divakar heard the sound of wood breaking and splintering, followed by an abrupt crash. He felt his senses contract into a sharp point of awareness. It was the noise made by an elephant pushing down a young tree in order to reach the tender boughs at the top.

The sounds were coming from beyond a cluster of lantana bushes. Striking a match, the tracker blew it out and watched the direction of the smoke. Judging from his reaction, they were upwind from the rogue. The wind could change at any moment, however, and Divakar knew that air currents along the ground, near an elephant's lowered trunk, often blew in the other direction.

At a silent signal from Chandra, the gunbearer handed him the immobilization gun, keeping the rifle in his own hands. A second later, the sound of feeding stopped. The entire team strained to hear, and then the brush exploded outward as Peer Bux burst into the open.

With a shout, all the men scattered. Divakar realized that they had been lured into an ambush, but he could see nothing but a blur framed by huge arcs of ivory. As the elephant charged, his feet kicking up clods of earth, Chandra stood his ground, aimed, and fired.

A dart flew out of the rifle. It struck one of the rogue's tusks, ricocheted, and fell uselessly to the ground.

Chandra cursed and jumped out of the elephant's path. The rogue hesitated, distracted by multiple targets, and then bore down on the tracker, who had hidden himself at a tamarisk bush. As the rogue closed in, Divakar saw the tracker grope for the amulet that he used to ward off elephant attacks. Blowing on it, he touched it to his forehead and shut his eyes.

Ignoring the incantation, Peer Bux lowered his tusks and impaled the tracker, who screamed. As blood gouted in red blossoms, Divakar cried out and turned away. He heard the thud of the tracker's body striking the ground, and an instant later, the screams were silenced.

Without pausing, the rogue turned and came straight for Dod Kempa. Divakar saw a massive blur, too fast to be processed, as leaves and fragments of bamboo were driven before a dark mass. He had only a fraction of a second to take in the monumental outline, mindless but magnificent, before the two elephants collided like a pair of lorries at a hot intersection.

Dod Kempa roared in pain as the rogue buried his tusks in the kumki's side, narrowly missing Divakar, followed by a wet crunch and the smell of blood as Peer Bux withdrew for a second attack. The forest slid sideways. Divakar seized the rope of the harness to keep from falling, the skin of his palms sloughing off, and heard Rana screaming. Turning toward her voice, he saw only a flash of sunlight breaking over the shoulder of the elephant coming his way.

As the rogue charged again, Dod Kempa retreated into the forest. Divakar fell back in the saddle as his elephant fled, clutching the ropes with his wounded hands in a desperate attempt to keep his balance. It was like riding the roof of a train. He heard the pistol shots of snapping twigs, followed by a tap on his shoulder, almost delicate, as branches lashed at his arms and legs.

He turned. Peer Bux was inches away, his trunk groping for purchase on Divakar's body. The rogue had yellow eyes that caught the light beneath the trees, boring into his own as they fixed him in their memory forever.

As the elephants plowed through a grove of bamboo, which exploded like a string of firecrackers, a noose of hanging creepers caught the mahout around the neck, sweeping him off the saddle. Divakar clutched at the mahout, trying to keep him from falling, but the other man slid to the ground. Peer Bux slowed for only an instant, and then he continued his pursuit of Dod Kempa.

Divakar pressed himself against the elephant's body, the branches beating against his back. With his head down, he saw nothing but the coarse hairs of the kumki's head, and he felt a warm river of blood, not his own, pulsing across his leg from the wounds in Dod Kempa's side. He forced himself to look back. The rogue was ten meters away and rapidly closing.

He faced forward in time to see a branch coming straight for his face. Without thinking, he

jumped for it, clutching its stout base as Dod Kempa drove forward. A bundle of equipment slammed into the small of his back, and he found himself dangling in midair. He pulled himself into the tree, the adrenaline giving him less strength than he had hoped, and clung to a limb with both arms.

A moment later, Peer Bux was there. Divakar climbed higher as the rogue tore off the branches within reach, sending leaves raining to the forest floor. Looking down, Divakar saw the rogue's rheumy eyes and the ichor running down his temples. The tree shook. There was a splintering sound as Peer Bux pressed the trunk with his forehead, the wood yielding and breaking.

As the rogue charged again, the force of the second blow threw Divakar off balance. He clawed at the branches, looking for a handhold, but failed. Looking up at the sky, which was impossibly blue, he fell backward and collided with the ground, directly before the elephant's massive legs. Divakar rolled away, panting, and shut his eyes to wait for the end.

* * *

Rana had sensed the charge a second before Peer Bux burst into view, but there was no time to react, and she saw the rest only in flashes. When the rogue impaled the tracker on his tusks, she closed her eyes, and when she opened them again, both Peer Bux and Dod Kempa were gone. In the distance, she could hear the two bull elephants crashing through the forest.

Chandra ran to Balmati, but when the mahout ordered the elephant to kneel, she only kicked at the earth with her feet. Cursing, the mahout took the ankus that hung from the elephant's neck and jabbed it into her zygomatic arch. As Balmati roared, bending to the ground, the mahout yanked the rope that held the equipment, sending the bundles toppling from her back. Chandra squeezed behind Rana and Adam as they followed the trail, which led to the tracker's body in the grass.

After a hundred meters, they found the lead mahout standing in a bamboo grove, his nose bloodied. A second later, Rana caught a glimpse of movement under the trees. It was Divakar, whose face was covered in grime. Chandra told the kumki to approach, and as their mahout slid off to lead from the ground, Divakar pulled himself up. His voice was oddly calm. "Peer Bux was coming at me. Then he turned away, as if he had something else on his mind."

When they reached the river, Rana nearly cried aloud at the sight. Kneeling on the bank, the blood streaming down his flanks, was Dod Kempa. The elephant's sides were heaving, his posture exhausted and defeated, and Rana saw to her horror that part of his tail had been torn out.

Across the river, fifty paces downstream, Peer Bux was heading into the wall of trees. His tusks were covered in blood, and he carried fresh wounds on his back and shoulders. Chandra raised the rifle, then hesitated. Rana knew that he was wondering if they could cross before the elephant suffocated after being immobilized, and before he could decide, the rogue was gone.

When Chandra asked if Balmati could be ordered across the river, the mahout said that it was too deep, and there might be crocodiles. At his order, Balmati allowed the riders to dismount and went over to Dod Kempa, touching him with the tip of her trunk. The male did not react. There were tusk wounds on his sides, a jagged tear on his rump, and many scratches from thorns and brush. Tears had made clean furrows in the dust beneath his eyes.

A moment later, the grasscutters appeared with the tracker's body, which they had covered in a bloodstained sheet. Looking at his remains, Rana felt a wave of despair, but her thoughts were cut off by the sound of gunfire. As two shots came from across the river, the members of the elephant squad turned toward the opposite bank, where they saw nothing but the trees.

"Latsis," Adam said. They waited for more, but heard only silence. Seeing the fear in Divakar's eyes, Rana realized that the shots might also have been fired by the poachers, which was even more frightening.

As they waited for the team to reassemble, Rana did what she could to bandage what was left of Dod Kempa's tail. A mass of trampled mud and grass marked the place where the two elephants had fought, with a pair of furrows that Peer Bux had made when he slid into the water.

Adam touched her on the shoulder. Looking where he was pointing, Rana saw that an elephant had appeared in the trees on the far side of the river. She was about to raise the alarm

when she saw that it was Latsis's tusker, bearing a mahout, a tracker, and a cameraman. Lashed to the saddle was a bundle wrapped in a plastic tarp. While Rana watched, the elephant waded reluctantly into the river, apparently wary of crocodiles, and made for the opposite shore.

As the elephant plowed through the current, which roared against his flanks, she saw that the mahout was clutching at his ankus, and the cameraman beside him looked numb. Only the tracker seemed at all composed.

Reaching their side of the river, the tusker knelt at the bank, his sides glistening. He was unwounded, but his trunk dangled limply, and his open mouth revealed his enormous tongue. Chandra stared. "Where's Latsis?"

Dismounting, the cameraman untied the bundle from the rear of the saddle, laid it on the ground, and undid part of it. It was Latsis, or what was left of him. Rana recognized only his boots, which had been left intact, while the rest did not resemble a human being. Gathering the tarp, the cameraman wrapped it up again, hiding the shapeless mass from sight.

The story gradually emerged. According to the cameraman, a crewmember had been recording ambient sound in the woods when he heard a commotion on the opposite bank, where he saw Peer Bux fighting Dod Kempa. Latsis rushed to the scene, but he was unable to score a shot from across the river. A moment later, Peer Bux noticed Latsis's tusker on the far bank and plunged into the current, leaving Dod Kempa behind. Latsis decided to lead him into an ambush in a nearby clearing, which was bordered by groves of bamboo.

When the rogue was halfway across the river, the mahout ordered the tusker to withdraw into the forest. As Peer Bux drew closer, the kumki panicked and charged through the grove where Latsis was waiting. Latsis leapt from the blind, but he ended up exposed in the open. He managed to squeeze off two shots, one of which struck Peer Bux uselessly on the side of the head. A second later, the rogue caught Latsis beneath his feet. He died instantly, but Peer Bux rolled the corpse along the ground for another quarter of an hour before disappearing.

After hearing the story to the end, Chandra turned to Divakar. "It's over. We need to destroy this rogue before he kills anyone else."

"I have an idea first," Divakar said. "When I was in the woods just now, it came to me. We can build a stockade."

Chandra shook his head. "It takes dozens of workers to build a proper kheddah—"

"Not a proper kheddah." Divakar took Chandra by the arm. "An imaginary one."

* * *

When they returned to camp, Adam listened as Divakar explained his proposal. He was obviously shaken from the deaths that they had witnessed, but as he spoke, his voice remained steady. "Years ago, elephant hunters would construct a pen into which elephants were herded for capture. It had a tapering entrance, like a funnel, leading to a corral with a gate."

"This was not a trivial operation," Chandra said. "Even with dozens of men, it took weeks to build a kheddah."

Divakar cupped a glass of freshly brewed tea in his hands. After they made camp in the woods, a grasscutter had accompanied the bodies back to the village, along with what remained of the other team. In the meantime, Latsis's tracker offered his services, apparently seeing an opening. Despite the air of gloom hanging over the project, Chandra spent five minutes negotiating his salary, and the tracker joined their group. He was a friendly man who was quick to smile, but something about his easy manner made Adam uncomfortable.

"I agree that it makes no sense to construct a stockade in the traditional sense," Divakar said at last. "However, there are other ways in which elephants can be herded and confined." He gestured at the bedsheets that the team had hung on lines around the camp, which had been erected to deter boars and deer. "Like these sheets. They are insubstantial in themselves, but they form a psychological barrier. We can build a stockade out of such things."

Adam sensed that Divakar was speaking from experience, but he knew that they were running out of time. Savarkar, he guessed, had pinned most of his hopes on Latsis, whom he had provided with resources and information. Now that the hunter was dead, he would turn to the poachers, who would not be as willing to play by the rules. "So where do we build it?"

“Along the river,” Divakar said. “Peer Bux will return to this side eventually. Elephants prefer to cross in places where the waters are shallow or less rapid. If we erect barriers, real or otherwise, along most of the crossing points and prepare an ambush at the last ford, we can bring him to us.”

Chandra unrolled a map and pointed to a spot along the river. Despite his initial resistance to the proposal, he seemed willing to lead the discussion. “This is where we last saw Peer Bux. He forded the river here because he saw Latsis’s elephant on the opposite bank, but it isn’t a favorable crossing point. When he returns, he’s bound to pick a different place.”

“We can approach this logically,” Adam said. “Where the river bends, the banks are steep, and the water on the outside edge is fast, so he’ll avoid these places. The widest parts are often the most shallow, and water flows most uniformly along straight channels. It will also be slower on flat stretches than along an incline. So we need to focus on wide, straight channels on level ground.” He saw that the others were looking at him curiously. “I’m good with maps.”

Chandra examined the region in question. “I see four places that meet these criteria. One of the points is spanned by a bridge, which a wild elephant will avoid. If we block off two of the others, we can focus our energies on the third.” He marked the points with a pencil. “If you’re serious, we need to move soon. There’s no guarantee that Peer Bux will stay on his side.”

Looking at the locations that Chandra had indicated, Adam saw that scale presented a problem. “The spots you’ve marked are hundreds of meters long. We can’t cover them all.”

“If we had a painting machine, we could leave lines on the riverbank,” Divakar said. “Bright white lines are often used as cattle guards, instead of physical barriers. They may work for elephants as well.”

“The bank is all mud and grass. Even if we could lay down the lines, they wouldn’t show up.” As Adam spoke, he tried to imagine how an elephant would see the world. Divakar liked to point out that the brains of elephants and humans were similar in structure, but there were also fundamental differences. An elephant’s olfactory lobes were proportionately much larger, which meant that its life was governed by smell, not sight. “I have an idea.”

After Adam explained what he had in mind, Chandra asked for one of the brass pumps, or bousers, that the mahouts used to cool off the elephants. Taking it apart, he examined the pieces and scratched his chin. Finally, he set it aside. “I still have my doubts, but this might work.”

The next step was more challenging. Gathering the elephant squad, Chandra offered a cash payment for anyone who made a donation. Despite the promise of a reward, the men seemed reluctant to volunteer, so Chandra went first, in full view of the others. While he ate dal and drank some water, Rana opened her medical kit. Her equipment included blood collection bags and a dozen sterile trochars, which were enough for every member of the team.

Bringing the kit to the center of the camp, Rana handed Chandra a stone to squeeze while she swabbed the inside of his arm. Unwrapping a trochar, she drew a pint of blood, removed the needle, and dressed the wound. When she was done, Chandra jumped up. Fishing out a wad of rupees, he asked the assembled men if they were willing to make a quick bonus.

While the others volunteered one by one, Adam saw that Divakar was looking at him with something like respect, which he hoped was justified. Borders drawn in blood, with their promise of danger, would send an invisible warning to any elephant, and they could use it to lead Peer Bux to them.

* * *

As Divakar rolled out a groundsheet near the place where they expected the rogue to appear, his eye was caught by the river, which sparkled in the moonlight. His watches had been cinched as tightly as they would go, but he was unable to prevent waves of nervousness from spreading in circles across his chest.

After taking blood from all the men, Rana had given the bouser to Divakar and Chandra, who put the plan into effect. While the elephant squad transferred their camp to the spot where Peer Bux seemed most likely to cross, they brought Balmati to the opposite side of the river. Whenever they reached a ford, they sprayed the bank with blood, and for good measure, the mahouts

urinated copiously as well. Only the area by the encampment had been left untouched.

As the others remained at their primary camp, two hundred meters from the river, to avoid alerting the rogue, they settled in for the watch. Chandra laid his rifles side by side, and Divakar took out his immobilization pistol and loaded it with a dart, which made him feel marginally less defenseless.

The forest waited along with them. In the trees, which formed a curtain at the edge of the woods, the birds had grown silent, leaving it quiet enough for him to hear the ticking of his watches. Chandra cleared his throat, shifting in place to keep his legs from falling asleep. As the hours crept by, Divakar drifted, feeling as though he were floating in the ocean with only a slender line to tether him in place.

An instant later, his head jerked upward, and it took him a moment to remember what had awakened him. Then he heard a gentle torrent as something gigantic crossed the river. It was Peer Bux, and he was close. At some point in the last few minutes, the elephant had come halfway across the water.

Chandra started, as though he had been dozing as well. Reaching out, he seized the rifle with the longer barrel. Divakar strained to see the outline of the elephant as Chandra stood beside him, listening to the contoured wash of sound produced by the current on the rogue's flanks. A torch and hooded lantern lay nearby, but they didn't want to turn on either light until the last possible moment.

Divakar saw a patch of black moving against the superficially lighter darkness of the riverbank. A glint of ivory might have been real or imaginary. "There," Divakar whispered. "Do you see him?"

Chandra nodded. "We'll wait until he comes over to this side. Otherwise—"

He broke off, but Divakar knew that if they immobilized the rogue in the river, he might drown as the etorphine took effect. As his eyes adjusted to the moonlight, he could make out the tusks, which were gray in the darkness, and the shine of water on the elephant's sides.

The sound of the current changed in quality, as though Peer Bux had paused in midstream, but the angle made it difficult to tell, and Divakar's heart was pounding so insistently that he feared that the rogue might hear it. After a pause, the elephant finally continued forward. As he neared the bank, his size became clear for the first time, and Divakar was filled with wonder and terror.

Peer Bux reached their side of the river. There was a squelching sound, loud and rude, as his huge plates came out of the water and planted themselves in the softer earth and silt of the margin.

"Come on, my friend," Chandra whispered, and he squeezed the trigger of his rifle.

An explosion of carbon dioxide propelled a dart into Peer Bux's left flank. The rogue roared, his trunk swinging back and forth, and charged at his unseen enemy. Within seconds, he was on them both.

The two men shouted and jumped to either side as Peer Bux plowed ahead, trampling their tent and catching his feet in the guylines. Divakar smelled the rogue's newly washed body, mingled with the odor of musth streaming out of the elephant's pores. The earth shook beneath the elephant's weight, and as he scrambled to get away, Divakar could feel the soil vibrating under his fingers.

When Peer Bux paused, his coiled energy was even more frightening than the charge. Only a few seconds had passed since the dart had struck home. Taking shelter behind a tree, Divakar prayed blindly that the rogue would head for the forest and not the water, where he might stumble and drown.

A second later, the elephant went for the river. Divakar shouted in despair. "No—"

There was an explosion, followed by several more in succession, as a string of firecrackers went off. Adam and the other members of the team stood a hundred meters up the bank, sparklers in their hands, trying to drive the rogue toward the trees. A bamboo gun rocket launched in a burst of orange. It ascended, spitting motes of fire and burning fragments, and then fell downward to the river, rushing to meet its own distorted reflection.

Peer Bux hesitated, his eyes catching a spark from the fireworks. This was something new. For the first time ever, Divakar sensed uncertainty in the elephant's stance, and he felt something almost like pity.

Finally, the elephant moved from the river's edge toward the shelter of the forest. After his initial roar of surprise, he had grown silent, except for the collisions of his heavy plates against the ground.

Chandra whispered in Divakar's ear. "Don't let him out of your sight. If we lose him, he might suffocate—"

Divakar took off with his flashlight in hand. Listening to the rogue crashing through the undergrowth, he felt branches tearing at his skin, but he no longer cared, as a wave of excitement bore him toward the end.

They ran through the forest, parallel to the water, the beam of his flashlight bouncing off trees and rocks as they plowed through the grass. Within seconds, his shoes were soaked with dew. Finally, the noise faltered, and Divakar slowed as well, wondering if this could be one last ruse. He had left his immobilization gun behind, and he was cursing this oversight when he heard a resounding crash.

Divakar entered a tiny clearing, with Chandra following a few steps behind. Lying on the ground was a dark mass that loomed like a boulder in the trembling beam of his flashlight. Drawing closer, he saw the rogue's sides rising and falling. A dart protruded from one flank. Peer Bux was unconscious, but alive.

* * *

III.

When Nasir arrived at the office the following morning, a woman with glasses was waiting in the reception area. As he approached, she rose. "My name is Dr. Sonia Wasey. I work with Dr. Mehta at Vasana."

"I know who you are," Nasir said. "You're in charge of our elephant in Mumbai."

"Yes, I have been observing Nataraj. This is why I need to see you urgently. Would it be possible for you to come with me? I'm sorry for the intrusion, but you're the only one here who will understand—"

This was the last thing Nasir wanted to worry about now, but Vasana was still his responsibility, and the look on her face implied that this was not an idle request. "You have half an hour."

They went downstairs and took his corporate car to a neighborhood in the Fort district. As they drove, Sonia explained that her team had found a vacant building, formerly a motorcycle repair shop, that it had purchased and renovated for Nataraj. "We moved him there last week. The therapy is working remarkably well, but we've seen some unusual behaviors."

Nasir thought that he heard a nervous catch in her voice. "What kinds of behaviors?"

"It began after we transferred Nataraj to his new quarters. When Divakar implanted the system, he bandaged the trunk. The morning after we moved Nataraj, we found that the dressing had fallen off during the night. We didn't think much of this, so we replaced the gauze and forgot about it. The next day, we saw that Nataraj had removed the bandage again."

They turned onto a side street. "I'm afraid that I don't see the significance."

"It seemed trivial at first. Our initial guess was that the implant was bothering him, but when we examined the site, we saw that healing was proceeding nicely. All the same, I remained curious about why Nataraj had removed the bandage, and then I realized what had happened. He saw himself in the mirror."

The car pulled up before a wall of weathered brick. Sonia climbed out, unlocked the front gate, and led Nasir into the enclosure, which was a paved yard filled with concrete rings. Handfuls of feathers had been scattered on the ground and taped to the walls. In the center, Nataraj was playing with an automobile tire. Seated beside the elephant, leaning back in a chair with his eyes closed, was the mahout who had illegally brought him to the city.

Sonia pointed to the roof of the garage, where a convex mirror was mounted to one of the eaves. "It's a security mirror. When we refurbished the garage, we left it in place. As you can see, it is at the right height for Nataraj to look at himself. When he saw the bandage on his face,

he took it off.”

Nasir was beginning to sense the reason for her excitement. “And this is unusual?”

“More than unusual,” Sonia said. “It’s extremely rare for elephants to exhibit mirror recognition. They assume that the reflection is another creature, and they never associate it with themselves. A few studies have shown limited degrees of recognition, but only with larger mirrors that allow the elephant to see its entire body. Otherwise, the only animals to demonstrate mirror recognition are apes, dolphins, and human beings. As far as I can tell, Nataraj is the first elephant in the history of science to do it with a mirror of this size. Let me show you.”

Sonia walked over to the mahout, who had been awakened by their conversation. “I’d like to show my colleague the feather test.”

“Of course,” the mahout said in Hindi. “Anything to show what Nataraj can do.”

At his command, Nataraj kneeled, allowing the mahout to caress his trunk. As the old man whispered soothing words, Sonia taped a feather to the center of Nataraj’s forehead. The elephant gave no indication that he noticed the ornament, which sat above his eyes like a tilak. “We’ve scattered feathers on the ground and walls to habituate him to their presence. Now watch.”

On a far wall of the compound, a tarp hung from a curtain rod. Sonia went across the courtyard and drew the tarp aside, revealing another mirror hanging at the elephant’s eye level.

The elephant was drawn toward the mirror immediately. Leaving the tire behind, he approached his own reflection. It seemed to Nasir that the elephant recognized himself, making curious head motions, as if wondering how the reflection would respond. Finally, lifting his trunk, he removed the feather from his forehead, allowing it to drift to the ground.

“You understand?” Sonia said. “The mirror is a gauge of consciousness. Most children fail to recognize themselves in a mirror before they are two years old. To see it in an elephant is phenomenal.”

It occurred to Nasir that the implications of the discovery extended beyond Nataraj. “Does Divakar know?”

“I haven’t been able to reach him. He’s in the forest, looking for Peer Bux—”

“He captured Peer Bux last night. I got a call from Adam. They’re implanting the system now.”

Sonia’s eyes widened. “They need to stop. We don’t know what else it might do.”

“If they halt, we lose our last chance to keep your research alive. Once Peer Bux is in the city, we can evaluate the situation, but if Vasana ceases to exist, your work will end along with it.” Nasir looked at Nataraj, who had resumed playing with the tire, and felt the weight of his own compromises. “And it’s too late to change what we’ve already done.”

* * *

The operation was over. Kneeling by the river, Rana peeled off her gloves and splashed water on her face. Peer Bux lay sleeping nearby, an anesthetic line snaking from his ear, a few inches from where the nerve stimulation system had been implanted. At the sound of steps, she looked up to see Divakar with the electronic wand in one hand. “We’re ready,” Divakar said. “It’s time to get started.”

Rana headed back to the slumbering rogue, her face still wet, checking herself silently to make sure that she was fully there. Chandra and his men had run ropes around Peer Bux’s legs. His rear feet had been hobbled, and one leg had been tethered to the tree that overlooked the river.

As Chandra crouched next to Peer Bux, using waterproof tape to secure a transponder to the crown of the rogue’s head, Rana studied the elephant. From where she stood, he was a mountain of flesh, his head larger than her entire body, his tusks gleaming where they were not caked with mud. A slug from Latsis’s rifle had left a recent wound, which she had dressed before the operation.

Holding the electronic wand against the implantation site, Divakar pressed a button on the screen to begin the calibration process, which would be done manually for now. After another moment, he activated the system.

Rana approached with the diprenorphine. After removing the anesthetic line and tracheal

tube, she lifted the rogue's ear and inserted the needle. She glanced at the others, who had taken up the ropes. "Ready?"

Chandra raised the rifle in his hands, preparing to take the forehead shot in case the elephant attacked. The rest of the team was watching intently, including Adam, who had volunteered to cut the rope holding the rogue to the tree. A mahout had led Dod Kempa back to the village, since it was too risky to leave the two bulls together, and Balmati was sucking at her own trunk, which was a sign of agitation. Her role in the coming translocation would be crucial.

Holding her breath, Rana pressed the plunger home. An instant later, far sooner than she had expected, Peer Bux awoke.

She scrambled backward as the elephant struggled to his feet, his expression dull but rapidly clearing. It was the first time that she had really seen him while he was awake. Before, he had been a blur in the undergrowth or a shape glimpsed from across a river, but now he stood before them all, bellowing and magnificent, like a creature from another order of existence.

When the rogue realized that he was tethered to the tree, he trumpeted in anger. The men gripped the ropes, straining to keep the elephant in place, as he threw a trunkful of dirt across his back. As he did, Rana saw a spasm run along his trunk, followed at once by several others. With each spasm, the system was sending signals to Peer Bux's brain, gauging his neural activity, smoothing out the patterns, and bringing him out of his permanent musth.

When the spasms had ceased, Peer Bux raised his head and saw Balmati. The ropes grew slack. Rana could hear the rogue breathing steadily as he watched the female elephant. He beat his trunk against the ground, making a sound like a cooper hammering at a cask, and stood with his feet planted in the mud, regarding Balmati with his pale yellow eyes.

Chandra whispered a command to the mahout on Balmati's back. Pressing his feet against the kumki's head, the mahout led her away from Peer Bux, caressing her with his hands as they moved toward the forest. At another signal, Adam cut the rope binding the rogue to the tree, and Peer Bux took a step forward, as the men prepared to restrain him if he tried to charge.

They had decided to employ the traditional method of elephant relocation. Wild elephants tended to avoid domesticated members of their own sex, but bulls were invariably drawn to tame females. Usually, as a female led the wild male forward, a larger kumki was used to control him, but since Dod Kempa had been sent back to the village to recover, they were forced to rely entirely on ropes and the nerve stimulation system to keep the rogue in check.

So far, it seemed to be working. Peer Bux had not threatened the men, and he barely seemed to notice the ropes. Moving forward at a shuffle, his rear legs hobbled by the chain, he followed Balmati into the forest, his ears fanning the air. The men pulled at the ropes to make sure that he did not stray from the path, but he did not seem inclined to charge.

Chandra slowly lowered the rifle. "I'll be damned. The bloody thing works."

As they entered a denser area of trees, Balmati remained a few steps ahead of Peer Bux, but her nervousness was subsiding. Lifting and tossing her head, she rumbled in her throat, pausing now and then to browse at the leaves. At first, Peer Bux struggled at his bonds, but he eventually seemed to accept the situation. As he stood in place, waiting for the female to resume her progress, he inserted his trunk into his mouth, withdrawing saliva and spraying it onto his back.

At last, they reached a secondary road, less than a kilometer from where their vehicles were parked. Seeing the asphalt, Peer Bux dug his legs into the ground, evidently disturbed by the contrast with the natural colors of the forest. The men pulled at the ropes, trying to drag the rogue forward, and it was only with effort that they drew him out of the woods.

With Balmati leading the way, they headed down the road toward Karkankote. Before long, Rana noticed familiar markings on the ground, indicating that they were just a short distance from their Land Rover, which was parked around the bend. The sight filled her with relief.

As they came around the curve, Rana saw a convoy of jeeps and a row of barricades wavering in the heat. Before the vehicles stood a dozen policemen with rifles in their hands.

The team halted in the road. Coming to a stop behind the kumki, Peer Bux grunted and moved to turn aside into the forest, but he was restrained by the ropes. As the members of the elephant squad stared at the roadblock, Rana thought that Adam seemed particularly disturbed.

When an officer in khaki approached the team, Rana recognized him as one of the policemen who had escorted them to Karkankote on their arrival. She glanced at Peer Bux, her heart thumping. The rogue was standing with his mouth hanging open, and she did not want to imagine the consequences of a sudden attack, with the rifles only a few hundred meters away.

Regarding the elephants with obvious suspicion, the lead officer addressed himself to Adam. “Mr. Adam Hill?”

Adam did not let go of the rope attached to the rogue’s foreleg. “Yes?”

“We have a warrant for your arrest,” the officer said. “You’re wanted for questioning with regard to your involvement with the Harkat Al-Mutasim, the leading criminal organization in Mumbai—”

Adam let out a laugh, which landed like a gunshot in the silence. “You’re kidding me. Did Mahadev Savarkar put you up to this?”

The officer ignored the question. As two of the policemen came forward for Adam, he turned toward the others. “We’re also taking control of the rogue. Your license covers capture, but not ownership. You are not legally allowed to remove this animal from the forest.”

Divakar stared at him in disbelief. “You have no right to take this elephant from us.”

Chandra was examining a document that the officer had given to him. “I hate to say it, but I think they do—”

The officer looked at Rana. “We’ve been instructed to take you into custody as well. Questions have been raised about the medical procedure that you conducted on this elephant. You’ll need to come with us.”

Rana took a step back, but as a pair of policemen drew closer, she realized there was no way out. Looking at the convoy, she saw more men with guns, and for a long moment, all she could hear was birdsong, along with the steady breathing of Peer Bux, as his impassive yellow eyes took in the scene.

* * *

Adam was forced with Rana into the back of a jeep. Through the grimy windshield, he could see the police arguing over how to load Peer Bux onto the lorry, but his mind still refused to believe that the elephant could be confiscated like contraband at customs. Savarkar, he saw, was more than capable of calling in favors in other states, and he had kept this move in reserve, knowing that no matter who won the hunt, he could simply change the conditions of the game.

The elephant squad was standing next to the officer who had ordered the arrests. Divakar’s face was blank, as if he had switched himself off, while Chandra looked like his forehead was about to burst. A moment later, they were ordered to drag the rogue to the lowered bed of the lorry, which had been camouflaged with dirt and leaves. Taking hold of the ropes, they hauled Peer Bux forward, as officers waved and shouted to guide him. At first, he refused to move, but then he lost his footing on the gravel and stumbled onto the lorry, where his legs were lashed into place.

Adam thought of the satellite phone in his pack, which he had brought because it had better reception in the woods. He urgently needed to contact Nasir, but for now, he could only wait helplessly with Rana as the barricades were dismantled. When an officer used the bouser to spray Peer Bux, the rogue lashed out and struck his trunk against the lorry. The men all laughed, as though they had forgotten that this elephant had killed over two dozen people.

Once the bed had been raised to driving height, two jeeps led the convoy toward Bandipur, with Adam’s vehicle and the lorry bringing up the rear. The road was covered with branches, so progress was slow. Glancing back, Adam saw Peer Bux swaying as the lorry took the curves. As a spasm went up the elephant’s trunk, he remembered that the electronic wand was still with Divakar, so there was no way of controlling the system in the meantime.

A minute later, they came to a stop. Looking through the windshield, Adam realized that they had halted at a point between an embankment and the edge of the forest, which sloped downward into a ravine. A tree had fallen across the road, its scattered leaves baking on the asphalt. Behind the wheel of their jeep, the officer cursed and spoke into his radio.

Rana straightened up. She had been leaning back in her seat with her eyes shut, trying with-

out success to rest. "What's going on?"

"There's a tree blocking the way forward." Adam frowned. "I wonder—"

Before he could finish his sentence, the jeep at the front of the convoy exploded. He fell back in his seat, jolted by the blast, as a wave of dust and smoke blew back across the road.

As his skull struck the headrest, Adam's teeth clicked over his tongue, drawing blood. For an instant, he could hear nothing but the ringing in his ears. When his hearing recovered, he heard Rana screaming, burning fragments falling against the jeep's roof, and the roars of Peer Bux. Shrapnel had hit their windshield, shattering it, and the jeep in front was a smoking wreck.

At the sound of another crash, he saw that a second tree had fallen across the road, making it impossible to go back. Two shadowy shapes were running down the embankment. When he saw that one was holding a chainsaw, Adam knew precisely who had ambushed them, and everything else was erased by fear.

From the embankment came a burst of gunfire, sending up spumes of dust as the bullets struck the ground. Two holes appeared in the windshield. Adam ducked, yanking Rana along with him, but not before he saw the policeman in the driver's seat slump across the wheel. Rana was pale. "Is it—"

She was cut off by more shots. In the front seat, the surviving officer opened the door and flung himself to the road. Adam checked that Rana was out of the line of fire before risking a look through the window. On the hillside, men in shorts and sandals were moving with rifles in their hands.

The policemen fired back, but they were outnumbered, and Adam could hear the desperation in their shouts as they crouched by the wheels of their jeeps, shooting at random. Automatic fire tore up the road to either side, and everything was covered with red earth from the explosion.

A roar came from behind him. Lifting his head, Adam saw blood pouring from a pair of holes in Peer Bux's flank. As he looked at the wounds, which were perfectly round, he realized that if the rogue died, they would have nothing. Opening the door of the jeep, he turned back for a moment, finding himself eye to eye with Rana, and then rolled onto the road.

He fell to his hands and knees, the asphalt burning his palms, and scrambled around to the rear of the vehicle, where a policeman was firing from behind the wheels. For a second, the man looked over in surprise, and then he turned his attention back to the firefight. Adam forced himself to rise, tried the rear compartment of the jeep, and found that it was unlocked. His pack was inside.

Seizing it by the strap, he turned to the lorry. The cab was five long paces away, and there were no other points of cover. He gave himself three seconds to cross it, guessing that this was the amount of time that a man would need to aim and fire, and ran into the open.

The policemen had scattered. Adam made it to the side of the lorry that was shielded from gunfire and fumbled the machete from the pack. As he did, a shot caught Peer Bux on the neck, tearing another roar from his throat.

Adam scrambled toward the bed of the lorry and hacked the cords that held the rogue in place. It took two blows to cut the first rope. Peer Bux kicked out one leg, nearly braining Adam, and rumbled with excitement. He cut the second rope, then the third, and he was about to cut the fourth when something stung him on the arm. Looking down, he saw blood pouring down his sleeve.

His first thought was relief that he had arranged for a tetanus shot before leaving for India, which was immediately followed by astonishment that the poachers were actually shooting at him. Lifting his eyes, he saw a man sprinting down the side of the hill, raising a cloud of dust. The bandit was barely five feet tall, but he was holding a pistol, and his gaze was locked on Adam's.

Hearing something snap, Adam turned to see that Peer Bux had strained forward to break the last remaining rope on his own. The rogue backed out of the stall and lowered himself to the road. For a second, Adam feared that the elephant would slip, but then he recovered and charged for the forest. A bullet caught him on the rump and another nicked his ear, but before

the poachers could manage the fatal shot, he had disappeared into the woods.

Adam remembered that his assailant was still coming. Rising from his crouch, he saw that the other man had raised his pistol, and Adam was steeling himself for the impact when a gunshot knocked the bandit off his feet.

He looked up to see that a third group of men had emerged from the trees. It was the elephant squad. Chandra was kneeling in front, a rifle in his hands, methodically firing at the poachers one by one.

Now the fight was evenly matched. Coasting on adrenaline, Adam saw that the bandit had dropped his pistol in the dust. He grabbed it and tried to make it to the shelter of the jeep, but as the shots continued, he fell back for the forest instead, aiming for the trees. Several policemen were lying on the ground, brass casings were everywhere, and the air was thick with smoke.

He made it into the woods and tumbled down the ravine, where momentum carried him along the slope. Adam tripped and rolled, the pistol falling from his fingers as grass and thorns slashed at his skin. At last, the ground leveled and he coasted to a stop, bleeding and bruised.

Standing in front of him was a figure in ochre robes. It was the holy man from the temple in the forest, but he was not the same as before. He was standing upright, his spine no longer curved, and his expression was hard and intelligent. The ash had been washed away from his face, revealing a scar on his forehead, and his rifle was pointed at Adam's heart.

Adam knew who it was. He nearly laughed at the force of the realization, his lungs burning, the wound in his arm bleeding freely as he drew himself up to his full height. "Ashwatthama."

The man in the robes bowed slightly. Something struck Adam's solar plexus, driving him to his knees, as unseen figures surrounded him, twisting his hands behind his back. He tried to break loose, but finally a more powerful blow landed on the side of his head, and darkness descended.

* * *

When Adam came back to himself, he was on his feet and moving, following a line of men through the forest. He did not know how long he had been on the march. Looking down, he saw that his arms had been bound at the wrists with green nylon cord. His head ached. The wound had stopped bleeding, but it throbbed incessantly, ticking off the seconds like a metronome.

Through the forest canopy, it was hard to fix the position of the setting sun, but they seemed to be headed east. The ground was stony, covered with boulders and shingle, with tufts of grass and scrub between the rocks. There was no visible path, but the poachers moved easily through the woods.

A few steps in front of him, a young bandit carried a rifle and an ammunition pouch fashioned from the fabric of a car seat. Glancing back, Adam saw another poacher with his pack. As he waited for the second man to catch up, he tried to recall his phrasebook Tamil. "Vanakkam. Where are we going?"

Instead of responding, the poacher jammed the butt of his rifle against Adam's chest. Adam fell back. The blow was not a hard one, but it sent the blood rushing to his face as he locked eyes with the other man, who pointed toward the procession. Adam had no trouble understanding, and as he fell back into line, he noticed that the rifle had left a triangular smudge on his shirt.

The blow had cleared his thoughts, and he began to evaluate his resources. His passport was still tucked into his hip pocket. The police had seized his wallet and keys, which meant that they were probably back in the jeep, unless the poachers had looted it. His watch crystal was cracked, but the hands were moving. Three hours had passed since the attack. If his sense of direction was accurate, they were approaching the border of Tamil Nadu.

Adam knew that the crucial thing was the satellite phone. If he could make a call, the signal would allow Nasir or the police to fix his position. All that he needed was a minute alone with his pack.

He followed the poachers over a ridge of granite into a clearing where the grass came up to his thighs, broken up at intervals by boulders and the trunks of fallen trees. There were at least

fifteen men in sight, although it was hard to take an exact count. Several were nursing puncture wounds, apparently from shards of rock driven by ricocheting bullets.

Hearing a murmur, he turned to see Ashwatthama emerge from the woods. The leader of the poachers still wore his disguise, but he had hiked the robe up around his waist to allow for easier movement through the brush. His rifle was slung over his shoulder. Adam noted that he was not the largest or strongest man here, but there was no doubt of his claim to authority.

As darkness fell across the forest, the birds stirred the treetops with their heavy wings, and the men spread sheets across the ground to divide cakes of sugar, while others began a game of dice. Adam knew that many poachers were drawn from the ranks of villagers who were no longer able to earn a living by farming, and he observed that Ashwatthama kept his distance from the others.

The man with his pack was seated to his right. Adam caught his eye. "I need my medicine. Malaria pills."

He mimed unscrewing a bottle and tossing the pills into his mouth, but the man only moved the pack away. Adam was about to try a second time when he saw Ashwatthama coming in his direction.

At a word from his leader, the man handed over the pack and withdrew. Ashwatthama opened it silently and laid its contents on the ground one by one. Adam saw his satellite phone, his laptop, his water, and most of his other possessions. The last was his bottle of malaria pills. Ashwatthama studied it for a second before tossing it to Adam, who caught it with a nod of thanks.

Picking up the phone, Ashwatthama looked at it briefly, and then he set it again on the ground. He left and returned with a stone, which he clenched in his fist and brought down on the phone several times. When he was done, it lay in fragments. Bending over, Ashwatthama fished out the battery with his fingers and threw it into the woods, where it was lost in the undergrowth.

At last, Ashwatthama turned away, leaving Adam alone with the rest of his belongings, which it looked as though he would be allowed to keep. He pocketed the pills and took a draught from his bottle of water, reminding himself that it might need to last for a long time.

Taking out his laptop, he opened it, and he felt relieved when the screen lit up at once. At the sudden illumination, a few poachers glanced over without interest. They knew as well as he did that there was no chance of finding a data signal in the forest, at least not without the satellite phone.

He had intended to use the laptop only as a source of light, but he quickly checked the hard drive, which appeared to have survived its recent adventures unscathed. His notes from the trip were all intact, along with the video footage that he had downloaded from Latsis.

Looking at the film of the elephants by the river, the sound turned down, he wondered what had happened to Peer Bux. During the assault on the convoy, the elephant had been wounded, but not seriously, and had managed to escape into the woods. With luck, Divakar and Chandra would be able to track him down with the transponder, and the project could continue.

Yet now the dangers had multiplied. As he looked around the camp, trying to fix every element in his memory, he told himself that he had to warn the others. The assault had been carefully planned, which meant that the poachers had known where Peer Bux could be found as soon as the police did, and perhaps even earlier. This intelligence could only have come from an informant who knew the exact details of the elephant squad's movements.

Adam was struck by a thought. He glanced up at the poacher reclining closest to him, then looked back down at the laptop, on which the footage of the elephants at the river had continued to play. Working quietly, he opened his notes from the project and deleted them all.

A moment later, he motioned to the poacher, gesturing to indicate that he needed to use the bathroom. The man yawned and looked at Ashwatthama, who had been watching in silence. After a beat, Ashwatthama nodded.

Adam spent another second at his laptop, which he left open on the ground. Picking up a rifle, the poacher motioned him forward, keeping the gun trained on his back as they headed for

the edge of the clearing.

At the point just before the glade gave way to the forest, the poacher indicated that he should stop. Adam turned slightly away, aware of the other man's eyes, and began to undo his belt.

From behind him, there came a sudden commotion. A man shouted, followed by a general uproar of whistles and noisemakers, and above it all the trumpeting of distant elephants.

In an instant, the camp was awake. As the poachers scrambled to their feet, going for their guns, the man next to Adam spun in the direction of the noise. The momentary distraction was all he needed. As soon as the rifle was no longer pointing in his direction, Adam took off for the trees.

Behind him, the video on his laptop continued to play, the sound cranked to maximum volume as the footage from the river unfolded, with its initial minute of silence followed by deafening confusion. Adam crashed through the brush, the thorns tearing at his skin, hearing more shouts from the clearing behind him as he flung himself headlong into the darkness.

* * *

Moving through the forest on Balmati's back, Divakar swayed in time with the elephant's strides. On the ground, Chandra consulted the receiver and led the line of grasscutters into the woods. They were heading for where the transponder had halted, ten kilometers from where Peer Bux had last been seen.

Above the trees, the morning sky was like the inside of a skull. The team moved forward in silence, mindful of the danger, which was no longer from Peer Bux alone. Several of the men carried pistols, which were useless against an elephant attack, but perfectly effective against the bandits.

Divakar's memory of yesterday's carnage was uncomfortably vivid. Once the poachers had retreated, Rana had emerged from the jeep, shaken but unhurt, and told him that Adam had managed to free Peer Bux. Going up to the lorry, Divakar had seen the rogue's footprints leading to the forest.

As a handful of men remained to look for Adam, the rest made their way to the next village, where Divakar used the squad's satellite phone to place a call to Cheshire. Nasir bombarded him with questions, forcing him to endlessly review the assault, and closed by telling him to call Sonia Wasey.

Early the next day, leaving Rana in the village, they had gone after Peer Bux. As they followed the transponder signal, Divakar considered what Sonia had told him about Nataraj. On reflection, he was not entirely surprised. Once you were ready to believe that the system could profoundly alter the human brain, the idea that it might cause unexpected neurological changes in other species did not seem farfetched. You couldn't dismiss miracles based solely on degree.

At the head of the line, next to their new tracker, Chandra motioned for the others to halt. Divakar saw him consult the receiver, shading it with his fedora to view the display, and speak to the gunbearer, who handed him the immobilization rifle. They were close to the source of the signal.

The mood grew serious. Divakar listened for the sound of feeding or movement, but he heard nothing but the regular breathing of Balmati. A bead of sweat was sliding down the neck of the mahout in front of him.

At a sign from Chandra, the mahout pressed his ankles against Balmati's head, urging her forward until they emerged at the edge of a river. The current was sluggish and calm, flowing in a broad watercourse, but Peer Bux was nowhere to be seen. When Divakar asked to be set down, the mahout commanded Balmati to kneel, allowing them both to slide off.

Divakar walked toward the river, his eyes scanning the grass and shingle. A few seconds later, at the base of a magnolia tree overlooking the water, he saw the shine of plastic. Reaching down, he fished out the transponder, which had been partly buried in the mud.

As Chandra took the tag, he shook his head. "It shouldn't have fallen off like this."

Divakar studied the tree. In several places, the bark was scraped and streaked with earth. "Look here. Peer Bux rubbed his head against the trunk. He pulled the tag off deliberately."

Chandra followed his gaze. "You're right. Maybe the tag was bothering him—"

Divakar bent to examine the ground more closely. A set of rounded prints was heading for the river, with the first two toes of each foot leaving deep impressions in the mud. Following the prints to the water, he saw the curved impression of a tusk where the rogue had paused to drink.

He knelt by the river and took up a fistful of silt, allowing the damp particles to trickle between his fingers. As he looked at his reflection in the smooth current, an idea began to form.

"Peer Bux saw himself," Divakar said. "He came here to drink, and when he did, he noticed his reflection and saw the transponder on the top of his head. When he was unable to remove it with his trunk, he went over to the tree and rubbed against it until the tag fell off."

"That's impossible," Chandra responded. "Elephants can't recognize their reflections. At least not in running water—"

"Peer Bux can." Divakar explained what Sonia had told him about Nataraj. "If these cases are similar, Peer Bux is no longer what he was before. Recognizing his own face is only the beginning."

Chandra frowned down at the broad surface of the river. "So what does that mean?"

Divakar wasn't sure. It was one thing to follow prints, but if Sonia was right, it might be possible to anticipate Peer Bux in other ways. An animal that had recently learned to recognize itself in a mirror would have a particular relationship to its environment. "Give me a map of the taluk."

Without a word, Chandra handed over the map, which Divakar unfolded across the ground, searching for patches of blue. Trying to envision the features as they would appear in life, he saw a number of lakes and reservoirs, including several within ten kilometers. The largest was only a short distance away, but Divakar found his eye drawn toward one of the smaller ones, which was located near the edge of the woods, far from human habitation.

Divakar pointed at the page. "Here. This is the first place he would have gone."

Chandra seemed willing to follow his hunch. Leaving Balmati, they climbed into the Land Rover and drove toward the lake until they hit a cart road, which they followed as far as they could, moving at a crawl through the trees. When it was no longer possible to continue by car, they parked and went on foot. According to the map, the lake was a hundred meters away.

A moment later, they reached the water's edge. It was a small lake, sheltered on all sides by the trees, and its surface was a perfect mirror, reflecting the inverted bowl of the sky.

At his side, Chandra spoke in a voice that was almost a whisper. "I'll be damned."

Divakar looked up. At first, he did not see what Chandra had noticed. Then he caught a hint of movement at the edge of the lake.

Peer Bux was standing in the shadow of a tree, looking down into the water at his reflection. He had plastered the wounds on his flanks with mud. Looking more closely, Divakar saw a spasm run down the elephant's trunk, which meant that the system was still working.

As he watched, the rogue suddenly raised his head. Following the direction of the elephant's eyes, he saw a solitary figure emerge from the woods. He was ragged and dirty, but Divakar knew at once that it was Adam.

* * *

Chandra and Divakar sat at a campfire across from a storage shed, which had been turned into a makeshift stall in the forest. Peer Bux stood in the shade, his foreleg fastened to the rear wall. The chain gave him room to wander, but he chose to remain under the coolness of the roof, where his tusks and the light splotches on his forehead were barely visible in the shadows. Taking a branch from the fire, Chandra lit a cheroot. "I underestimated Adam. He knows his maps."

Divakar nodded, although he was finding it difficult to focus. After escaping from the bandits, Adam, who had studied the geography of the region, had made his way to a disused aqueduct, which he knew would bring him to an inhabited area. In the end, after following it for several kilometers, he had arrived at the same lake that Peer Bux had sought for different reasons.

Only a handful of people knew where the elephant had been brought. After finding the rogue, they had monitored him from a distance until Balmati could be led to the lake for the re-

location. Chandra had called ahead to a forest department officer he trusted, who had arranged for this encampment, and a number of other guards were standing watch nearby.

The satellite phone rang. It was Adam, who had gone with Rana to the nearest village to send an update to the firm. His voice was strange. "I just got off the phone with Nasir. Your position may not be secure. We should think about transferring Peer Bux to another site."

Divakar stood up. The static in his head was increasing. "What makes you say that?"

"We know that Latsis, or some of his men, were working with Savarkar. But by the time the poachers attacked, Latsis was already dead. There has to be someone else on the inside. Do you trust your team?"

"Of course," Divakar said. "But there is one man who only recently joined us. One of Latsis's trackers. I wonder—"

Before he could finish, a whistle like the high whine of an insect cleaved the air by his right ear, and a hole appeared in Chandra's chest. Chandra reached down to touch the bullet wound, evidently surprised, and then slumped in his chair, his fedora falling to the ground.

Divakar saw a plume of dust as a second bullet struck the earth at his feet. Without thinking, he flung himself down. Adam's voice crackled from the phone. "Divakar? Are you—"

A volley of gunshots cut him off. Divakar dropped the phone and rolled, clutching his bag, and stumbled toward the shed where Peer Bux was tethered. The black rectangle of the door filled his field of vision as something nicked him in the leg and sent him crashing forward.

Divakar braced for the impact of more shots. Instead, smelling straw and dung, he found that he was inside the stall. Agony blossomed across his thigh, and when he stood, the pain nearly made him cry out. Clenching his teeth, he managed to pull the door shut. In the sudden darkness, he groped for the lock, and then he remembered that it was on the other side.

Bullets ricocheted off the metal as Peer Bux reared back, bellowing, and Divakar saw his full predicament for the first time. There was no way out, and the men who had shot Chandra would be on him soon.

The tap of a bullet against the metal, weirdly polite, broke the spell. Divakar rose, his leg bleeding, as his senses were overwhelmed by the smell of the shed, the quick raps of gunfire, and the shape of the elephant in the darkness. As Peer Bux stamped the floor, sending up shards of straw, Divakar steadied himself against the rogue's flank. Something in the roughness of the skin, with the hint of muscle beneath, seemed to infuse him with strength.

As a gunshot exploded outside, Peer Bux roared, shifting his feet, and almost crushed Divakar against the wall. Divakar was afraid that the rogue would lash out, but then a spasm ran down his trunk as the system engaged to calm him down. Instead of charging, the elephant sent a hot stream of urine gushing to the floor, where it hissed against the packed soil.

"Bhenchods," Divakar said, swearing aloud for the first time in years. In a moment, the attackers would enter. He crouched at the rear of the shed, which felt like an extension of the circle of consciousness that he had guarded all his life, and saw that someone had left an ankus on the ground by his feet. As he looked at the forked iron goad, he saw what he had to do.

Peer Bux pawed at the floor, his tusks catching the light. The duffel bag was nearby. Divakar removed the electronic wand, entered a command, and held it as close to the elephant as he dared.

Two words appeared on the glowing display. SYSTEM DEACTIVATED.

If Peer Bux felt the difference, he gave no sign, but continued to kick at the loosened dirt. The system had shut down. The only question was how quickly the regression would take place.

Divakar tightened the watchband around his right wrist. The pressure, which cleared his head for a second, made him wonder if it was the last moment of clarity that he would ever have.

As he reached down to pick up the ankus, he heard footsteps, followed by low voices. There were at least three men. He saw a shadow fall across the gap between the wall and the door.

Asking forgiveness in advance for something that no good mahout would have done, Divakar thrust the forked tip into the flesh above the elephant's hind leg. As he did, the noise in his head disappeared.

At the unexpected pain, Peer Bux roared and charged, smashing open the door of the shed with his forehead. As the world flooded with sunlight, Divakar saw flowers of crimson as one of the poachers was crushed underfoot. Another man fell backward, screaming as Peer Bux caught him in his tusks. His rifle fell to the ground and discharged, which only enraged the rogue further.

Rearing back, the elephant tossed the bandit like a doll. The man landed in the dirt, rolled, and lay still. Everything was exquisitely sharp, the trees breaking the sunlight into shards of gold.

A taller bandit raised his rifle. Bracing himself for the gunshot, Divakar saw Peer Bux reach out with his trunk and yank the rifle from the man's hands, as easily as if the rogue had plucked a leaf. The elephant tossed the rifle aside. Staring at the rogue with amazement, the man ran for the trees. Divakar was equally astonished by what the elephant had done, which implied that certain changes to his behavior persisted even when the system was turned off.

Someone was shouting. When Divakar turned, he saw a pair of forest officers running up the road, and he finally got a good look at the carnage. Peer Bux was snorting and pawing the body at his feet. Three minutes, maybe less, had passed since Chandra had been shot. Divakar walked on unfeeling legs toward Peer Bux, the electronic wand in his hand, and reactivated the system. As a spasm ran down the rogue's trunk, Peer Bux grew calm.

Chandra was leaning to one side in his chair, his fedora lying in the dust. There was blood in his beard, and the cheroot was still clutched loosely in his fingers. Looking more closely, Divakar saw that he was breathing.

One of the bandits was dead. Another had escaped. The third lay where he had fallen a few steps away. His chest had been gored in two places, and the blood was pooling on the grass below. Surrounded by the forest officers, he tried to stand, failed, swore in Tamil, and hawked a gob of mucus in their direction. A pale scar ran across his forehead. It was Ashwatthama.

* * *

Adam tucked a newspaper under his arm and climbed out of the car. As his driver pulled away from the reception center at Bandipur, he saw Rana walking in his direction. She had gone ahead to the park as soon as they had received word of Ashwatthama's capture. "Any news from Divakar?"

"He's with Peer Bux," Adam said. He checked his phone, which wasn't receiving a signal, and headed across a gravel parking lot toward a handful of cottages with red tiled roofs. A bright line of laundry ran between two walls. "At another site in the woods. Divakar deactivated the system during the attack, but it's working now. Chandra's in the hospital. It looks like he'll make it. And our friend?"

Rana led him toward the canteen. "I dressed the wounds in his chest. He lost a lot of blood, but he'll survive. We put him in one of the cottages. Latsis's tracker is in another building. Both have guards. They won't announce the capture, not even to their superiors, until we know what the bandits are doing."

Adam saw two men lounging by the canteen door, sharing a cheroot. Noticing the pile of camera and computer bags at their feet, he recognized them as members of Latsis's crew. "What about them?"

"They arrived a few hours ago. I think they're waiting for a ride back to town."

"All right." Adam forced himself to think systematically. It was only a matter of time before the police or the poachers learned where Ashwatthama had been taken. "Do you speak Tamil?"

Rana seemed surprised by the question. "Not very well, but I can manage. Why?"

"I want you to talk to the cameramen. Ask if we can borrow their equipment and the laptop that they use for editing. If they want money—"

Handing her a stack of rupees, he quickly outlined what he had in mind. When he was done, Rana only looked at him for a moment. Then she turned away, waving with both hands, and approached the camera crew.

A few minutes later, they stood before the cottage in which Ashwatthama was being held, where Rana informed the nervous forest guard that there were urgent reasons why they should be allowed to speak with the prisoner. After some encouragement, the guard agreed, although

he was more persuaded by the wad of rupees that Rana thrust into his hands.

The officer unlocked the entrance to the cottage, which made for a fine holding cell. It was spacious and secure, with a veranda fenced with mesh to protect it from the wild dogs that roamed at night, and the windows were covered in grilles that could not be removed.

They went inside. In the bedroom of the cottage, where the shades were drawn, Ashwatthama was bound to a chair. A forest officer with a rifle stood in the corner. As Adam entered, Ashwatthama looked up, his eyes gleaming in the darkness. The wounds on his chest had been bandaged, but through the gauze, Adam could see the lacerations that the elephant's tusks had made.

The officer waited as Adam set up the tripod. As soon as the camera was in place and recording, Adam asked him to leave. He seemed reluctant to go, but after speaking briefly with his colleague and accepting a suitable bribe, he granted their request, closing the door behind him.

Adam unfolded the newspaper that he had brought. As Rana checked the viewfinder, Adam knelt by Ashwatthama and set the paper in his lap so that the front page was visible. Once it was in place, he got out of the way. A moment later, when Rana signaled that she had obtained the shot, he went to retrieve the paper, and he was bending over to pick it up when Ashwatthama lunged forward, his teeth clicking, as though to take a bite out of Adam's face.

The chair's legs banged against the floor. Adam jumped back, his pulse leaping, as Ashwatthama laughed and spoke in a low voice. Rana translated. "He says that you seem afraid."

Adam saw scars on Ashwatthama's body from bullets, knives, cudgels. "Tell him I know about his relationship with the Kalki Party. He moves ivory to the north through the gangs in Mumbai, and in return, Savarkar passes along information from his sources in the south about the government's actions against the poachers. They don't like each other, but they have an understanding."

As Rana translated, Ashwatthama did not appear overly concerned. When she was done, he spat thoughtfully into the corner of the room and grunted a few short sentences in Tamil.

"He says that he doesn't need the Kalki Party," Rana said. "Savarkar couldn't survive two days outside the city."

"Tell him that he's probably right." Adam turned off the camera. As he reviewed the footage, he picked up the satellite phone that he had taken from the elephant squad and dialed a number.

After three unbearably long rings, a familiar voice spoke on the other end. "Nasir."

"It's me." Adam glanced at Rana, who was watching from the corner, as he explained the situation and outlined his proposal as quickly as he could. "In a minute, I'll send you a video that confirms my story. The rest is up to you. But this window won't be open for long."

There was a brief silence. At last, Nasir exhaled deeply. "Send us the proof."

"You'll have it soon." Adam hung up. After the guards returned, it took him longer than he had expected to connect the camera to the laptop, upload the crucial footage, and transmit it to Nasir using the satellite phone. Once he was done, nothing remained but to wait.

Half an hour later, the call came. Adam answered on the second ring. "Yes?"

"I've spoken to Savarkar," Nasir said. There was exhaustion in his words, but also the elation of a man who had seen his future change in unexpected ways. "When can you get here?"

* * *

The following morning, Adam was in Mumbai, looking around the room in the restaurant where the company's future would be decided. Nasir had decided to hold the meeting in the empty cigar lounge at Mondal, which was painted a deep shade of aquamarine. Adam was about to propose that they find a spot in the corner when he saw Nasir stiffen. "Our friend is here."

Adam turned to see that Mahadev Savarkar had entered the lounge. He was a stocky figure in khadi, beads, and a saffron stole, and his head was shaved and glistening. Making his way to the seating area, along with his bodyguard, Savarkar sank into a comfortable armchair. "Jai Maharashtra."

Nasir sat across from Savarkar. "If you don't mind, I'd prefer if we spoke alone."

After a pause, Savarkar gave a short nod, and his bodyguard departed in silence. Adam took a

seat next to Nasir. The location had been chosen at the last minute, so their conversation could not be recorded.

Savarkar studied the ends of his nails. "I'm afraid I only have twenty minutes."

"That should be more than enough." Nasir nodded at Adam, who turned to the laptop on a nearby table and typed a shortcut, revealing a window in a program that was already running.

Savarkar turned to the computer as the video appeared on the screen. It showed a man bound to a chair with the newspaper across his knees. It was Ashwatthama. A time stamp in the corner of the screen indicated that the footage had been taken the day before. Savarkar studied it without any change in expression. "Would it be possible to obtain a copy of this?"

"Of course," Nasir said. "If you like, you can take the laptop when you leave."

"Thank you." Savarkar's eyes came to rest on Adam's. "What is it that you want?"

"A deal," Adam said. "We want you to convince the ethics committee to reverse their decision on Vasana. If you cooperate, we'll release Ashwatthama at a time and place of your choosing."

As Savarkar listened, the trace of a smile appeared on his face. "And if I decline?"

"We hand Ashwatthama over to the authorities. I expect that he'll eventually confess to his connection to your network, as well as your involvement in the violence in Karnataka. Countless people have died. Even your influence goes only so far. If Ashwatthama talks, you'll have a new set of problems on your hands. Give us Vasana, and we give you the man."

Nasir spoke in a low voice. "And you should consider the larger picture. This isn't a threat. It's an offer. We're prepared to reach an understanding. Like it or not, we need men like you. If you prefer, we can destroy each other. But neither of us is going anywhere."

It took Savarkar only a few seconds to make up his mind. He fixed them with his dark eyes. "Ashwatthama is a brave man. You and I will never be able to understand that kind of courage. But he is also an anachronism. The real bandits are in New Delhi." His smile broadened. "You have your deal. I will withdraw my objections to your research and encourage the ethics committee to do the same."

As Adam listened, he wanted to picture Rana's brother, along with all the others who would benefit from the treatment, but these thoughts were overshadowed by another memory. On his arrival in Mumbai, from the window of the plane, he had seen the logic that lay beneath the city, which had grown like a living thing from its deep natural harbor, and had reminded himself to take the long view. India was changing in ways that would be felt far beyond its borders, and he knew that a man like Savarkar could never be entirely tamed.

* * *

Adam handed his driver a piece of paper with an address, which turned out to be an enclosure down the street from a schoolyard. Asking the taxi to wait, he rang the bell at the entrance of the building, which had been recently reinforced. A bank of security cameras overlooked a brick wall, but he saw that someone had left a few fragments of food on banana leaves on the ground.

When the door opened, Divakar seemed glad to see him. "Are we meeting today?"

"No, I didn't make an appointment," Adam said. "I wanted to see you before I left."

"Nasir mentioned that you were going." Divakar stood aside, allowing Adam to enter the courtyard. "We have been busy with Peer Bux, but Rana remains on good terms with Vasana—"

"I'm glad to hear it," Adam said. After the trials resumed, Rana had resigned to focus on her work for the neurodiversity movement. Although Divakar remained as a consultant, most of his time was spent with Peer Bux. The regression issue had been solved, allowing the therapy to continue indefinitely, and it was expected that it would be authorized for use throughout India.

A gate had been set across the entrance of the garage, which still had a mirror hanging from the roof. "We had the bars installed three months ago," Divakar said. "Nataraj is being kept in a separate location. We are always concerned that these elephants will escape. As you know, they are extremely clever—"

Divakar opened the gate and pulled it aside. Inside the garage, Peer Bux stood in the shadows, where several researchers were observing his behavior. Rana was seated nearby, drinking tea

from a steaming cup. When she looked up, her eyes were calm and clear. “It’s good to see you again.”

“It’s good to see you, too,” Adam said. “I’ve heard that your brother is well.”

“Yes. He’s doing fine for now. But we don’t know what the future will bring.”

Adam wasn’t sure what else to say. He turned to Peer Bux, feeling something like affection for the rogue whose fate had been entwined with his own. There was a wildness in his yellow eyes that the system had done nothing to erase, as well as a spark of awareness that had not been there before. The system would soon be implanted in thousands of elephants as a treatment for musth, which never would have been approved without Savarkar’s support. “I’m leaving the firm.”

He had hoped for a dramatic response, but Rana only looked at him evenly. “Why?”

“I’ve quit,” Adam said. “Technically, it’s a leave of absence, but I won’t be back.”

He knew that the full story would never be known. After the forest department had been bribed into silence, Ashwatthama had been killed within days of his delivery to a police station, supposedly while trying to break free. Ever since, Cheshire’s board of directors in London had been increasingly willing to negotiate with the Kalki Party, in exchange for the freedom to invest throughout the country. Adam had been surprised to discover that this arrangement was one that he could not accept, and he suspected that Nasir felt the same way.

Divakar evidently wanted to change the subject. “We have been teaching Peer Bux to paint. It took a long time for him to grow used to the materials, but he finally produced a painting by himself. Would you care to see it?”

An area of unexpected nervousness condensed in Adam’s chest. “Yes, of course.”

Rana went to a shelf and removed a roll of butcher paper. Kneeling on the floor of the garage, she unfurled the scroll along the ground, a few paces from where Peer Bux was standing. A row of black lines had been painted across the page with crude but confident brushstrokes. Adam stared at it. “What are they?”

Rana smiled, as if she had answered this question before. “The bars of his cage.”

Adam looked at the drawing that Peer Bux had made. When you saw the world clearly, he reflected, you became aware of the walls of your prison for the first time, and the real question was what you would do next. Even as this thought passed through his mind, he remembered that he was leaving India for good, and he finally understood how much he was sorry.

Alec Nevala-Lee was a 2019 Hugo Award finalist for the group biography Astounding: John W. Campbell, Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard, and the Golden Age of Science Fiction. His most recent book is Inventor of the Future: The Visionary Life of Buckminster Fuller, which was a New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice.