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Kinabatangan

We rise early in the morning and set out on our boat to cruise the Kinabatangan river in search of wildlife. Today, we're looking for elephants. The guides got a tip of an elephant sighting a few days before, and so we set out eager to locate them ourselves. It takes more than luck and a trained eye to sight these elephants. As our boat drifts alongside the elephant grass, we hear the snap of vegetation and I know that the elephants are within. Our guide maneuvers the boat towards the left bank and as we stand on the bow, I see her. Tail swishing, butt facing me. To her right, her juvenile son's ears flapping in contentment. Our guide tells us there is no need to lower our volume; she knew we were coming even before we arrived. We're only seeing her because she's letting us. Her children feel safe and so she's stayed. Not content to see just her rear view, I speak to her through my mind, greeting her and asking if she would turn around to face me. I tell her I am right behind. It is one thing to spot an elephant in the wild, another to have her turn her body and look directly at you with those gentle, wise eyes. Her forehead is marked by a beautiful brindle, and her energy is calming and grounding. She holds my gaze and I say hello, cooing away at this mother. She moves closer and I imagine walking towards her and placing my palm on her forehead. Our connection is short but intimate. A mother recognising another. Soon, two more boats arrive and she turns away from me, disinterested in the crowd.