

# 《市中「森」之家》

## CITY CENTRE FOREST HOME

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**編者的話：**活在瞬息萬變而且高度城市化的世界，動物會否也有「何處是吾家」的困惑？香港動植物公園可以說是城中的綠洲，既有專門飼養和保育的瀕危絕種動物，也吸引了貓、松鼠、蝙蝠等外來動物在此生活。文字記錄者陳曦靜對園內不同動物的生活環境及習性充滿好奇，為公園撰寫了一篇短篇奇幻故事：主角孤兒小松鼠在園內東奔西跑，跟不同動植物交流談話，嘗試瞭解何謂幸福的家。小說細緻勾勒公園生態，相信讀者能從中探尋家的意義。

**Editor's Note:** Living in a rapidly changing and highly urbanised world, would animals also be perplexed by the question "Where were our homes?" The Gardens is considered an oasis in the city where not only endangered animals are protected and cared for, but which also attracts other animals like cats, squirrels and bats to make a home. Curious about the habitats and habits of the different animals in the Gardens, writer Chan Hay-ching has written a fantasy short story featuring the Gardens. A little orphaned squirrel, the protagonist in the story, dashes around speaking to the plants and animals of the Gardens in its attempt to understand what a happy home is to them. From the sensitive narrative about the ecology of the Gardens, readers can probably explore what a home means too.

沒有誰知道，消息是誰、甚麼時候、從哪裏傳開的。不過，大家都聽說了，公園大興土木的原因，並非表面冠冕堂皇的「改善動物的生活質素」，而是希望藉機淘汰「冗員」——無特殊技能、外表平庸、沉悶乏味……簡而言之，就是無人駐足觀賞之輩——以達縮減開支之目的。一開始，大家都不以為意，畢竟，他們躋身的可不是甚麼荒郊野嶺，而是國際金融中心地帶佔地5.6公頃、超過150年歷史的公園哪！誰不是挾著「瀕臨絕種」、「世界級保護」之類的頭銜而來？再說，公園由始至終都是以促進科學觀察、推廣保育工作、令居民活得更健康快樂為宗旨，哪能一百八十度大調頭，膚淺地追求起「外表」、「技能」？這顯然是目光短淺、急功近利者散播之謠言，大可不必當真。

話雖如此，大家心裏還是蒙了層陰影。留心觀察，的確感覺到公園氣氛異於往日，來的人少了不說，最奇怪的是所有人都把大半張臉遮起來，有的還戴了帽子、架了墨鏡。公園的保安也神秘兮兮的，拿一把「槍」指射來客額頭，威脅著甚麼。遊客不像以前那樣趴在欄杆上看他們了，偶爾舉起手機拍一兩張照片，更多時候是指指點點，跟旁邊的人竊竊私語。

合趾猿阿鳳見了，氣囊鼓得像足球，大喝道：說甚麼呢？鬼鬼祟祟的！遊客身軀一顫一顫地笑了起來，聽不見聲音、看不見表情。阿鳳更為生氣，氣囊快要脹裂。坐在樹幹上搔癢癢的維特不耐其煩，鉤著鐵絲網蕩過去，挨著阿鳳掛著，勸她息怒。阿鳳哪裏肯聽，轉而遷怒維特，說他看不起她、不在乎她，因為她年紀比他大、因為她來自印尼而他來自德國……翻來覆去的話題。維特也生氣了，說解釋過千萬次了，不跟她生小孩，是深思熟慮後的決定，跟愛不愛毫無關係，怎麼說才明白呢？兩個互不相讓，吼得地動山搖，方圓幾里都聽得見。遊客的手機對著他們，久久沒放下。阿鳳又怪維特：怪他被拍下「罪證」，怪他趕走遊客，哪天真被「裁員」，無家可歸或被「遣送」回原居地，可如何是好？維特反倒不生氣了，說「原居地」不錯啊，他一直夢想到阿鳳的故鄉看看，再說剛才不是成功令遊客「駐足」了嗎？阿鳳回神一想，也有道理，不禁笑逐顏開，在籠子裏甩來蕩去好一陣，方坐到維特身邊，幫他梳起毛髮。

維特跟阿鳳吵架的戲碼上演了幾十年，園內無論是新生兒、還是剛搬來幾年的狐獴，都已見怪不怪。

只是這次，大家突然打了個激靈：寧可信其有，不可信其無啊！當務之急，是想辦法施展魅力，增加曝光率，以保住「家園」。具體如何操作，又都無從下手：除了「做自己」，他們從不知該如何取悅人類。各自揣摩人類喜好，一見來人，所有猴類都上躡下跳、飛來躍去；紅頰黑猿揸著金色的孩子當「空中飛人」，白臀長尾猴則不斷把裝食物的塑料盆搆到高處再摔下，發出「眶啣」聲，引人注目。就連與世無爭的樹懶父女——阿讓與珂賽特——也不敢掉以輕心，時不時出來亮亮相——在窗台上展示睡姿。

小松鼠猴瑪格麗特也沒空理漢斯了。第一次見漢斯時，她正蕩著鞦韆，一瞄到籠外的漢斯緊盯著地上的花生，立刻飛身躡下，撿起來往嘴裏一塞，再淘氣地抬頭望漢斯，不料捕捉到他眼底的一抹失落。仍是孩子的瑪格麗特心生不忍，到食物盆叨來果仁，吐到漢斯面前。漢斯二話不說，「咔嚓咔嚓」啃起來，吃完抖抖鬍鬚，滿足地嘆口氣，才向瑪格麗特道謝。從此，他們成了好朋友，每天黃昏，漢斯來找瑪格麗特，跟她講「外面的世界」——狐獴姐妹吵架啦、保安貴叔中午吃了豉椒排骨飯、餵養員霞姐抓了兩把零食給長尾猴BB、

美洲紅鶴鬥了一場舞、橘貓跟蝸牛僵持一上午了、荷花擊了枝花骨朵，蓮霧掉了一地……漢斯邊說邊吃，回答瑪格麗特沒完沒了的問題。這天，漢斯興沖沖跳躍到她籠前，正待像往常一樣分享見聞，剝著堅果的瑪格麗特推了幾顆核桃給他，眼睛看也不看他說忙死了，一會兒還得蕩鞦韆、上下高低跑至日落。說完雙手捧著花生，縫紉機般的利牙「嚓嚓」切開外殼，小腮幫鼓鼓地飛快咀嚼著，雙手又捧起另一顆果仁。漢斯站起身子，來回踱了兩步，見瑪格麗特啃完果仁跳上半空蕩來蕩去。他也抓起核桃往嘴裏一塞，再次扭頭望她一眼，一縱一跳離開了。

漢斯是松鼠孤兒，他相信松鼠猴是遠房親戚，因此常來找瑪格麗特。雖無法一起玩，可看她跟家人追逐、搶食、蕩鞦韆，聽她抱怨家人如何麻煩、自己如何忙碌勞累……漢斯感到羨慕，他希望自己也能夠發類似的牢騷。他渴望「家」。只是，如何擁有「家」？他不大清楚。

漢斯常聽人類講「回家」，指的是回到一個固定的居所。有時候，他們也「搬家」，因為買了一個更大更好的房子。人類講「家」的時候，強調的是「交通方便」、「鬧中取靜」、「坐北向南」、「升值力強」等，又按著房子的大小、地理位置等因素，分為「豪宅」、「公屋」、「劊房」、「籠屋」等十幾種。漢斯不大明白這些分類，不過他聽出來了，有很多錢的話就可以住「豪宅」，錢少的話就「劊房」、「籠屋」，完全沒錢的就當流浪漢——漢斯不想再流浪了。他也想住豪宅，可是沒錢，怎麼辦呢？

「一大早唉聲嘆氣搞甚麼鬼？」漢斯感到腳底震了一下，彈跳開去，原來自己想得失神，錯把盾臂龜福爾摩斯當石頭，坐到他背上了。漢斯連聲道歉，見福爾摩斯並無責怪之意，想到他年紀老邁，想必見多識廣，於是向他訴說煩惱，希望得到寶貴的建議。福爾摩斯半閉雙眼，頭一伸一縮地，抿著嘴聆聽。漢斯說完，見福爾摩斯毫無動靜，以為他睡著了，正待悄悄溜開，卻聽福爾摩斯問：「『家』是甚麼？」漢斯錯愕地望著他，茫然無語。福爾摩斯說，「『家』是甚麼？」漢斯驚奇反問：「『家』是甚麼？」「我？我就是家，家就是我。

家？『家』是甚麼？問你自己……」福爾摩斯唸叨著轉身爬走。

「『家就是我，我就是家』，說甚麼呢？『家』是甚麼，『家』是甚麼？不是屋子嗎？確實，該搞清楚——」漢斯停下來，撓撓腮幫子，眼珠一滾，主意來了：問其他動物，大不了被笑一頓就是了。先從德高望重的阿鳳開始——她在這裏三十六年了——可大老就聽到她跟維特又在吵架，顯然不是訪問的好時機。漢斯繼續往前跑，經過婆羅洲猩猩華華的住所，見她坐在樹幹上，翻著肚皮找甚麼。漢斯正待開口打招呼，略一猶豫，決定先聽聽猩猩媽媽的意見。

華華的哥哥雲雲、媽媽Raba及姨媽住在相連的三個籠裏，他們住的是「豪宅」吧？那他們是「一」家還是「四」家呢？漢斯邊想邊抬頭找Raba，卻見她正蹲坐著，手裏捏著乳酪杯，注視著他。漢斯低聲問安，支吾著：「請問你，對你來說，『家』是甚麼啊？」良久，才聽見Raba回答，出乎意料地，正經而溫柔：「後生的啊，下次記得先自我介紹喲，這樣人家才樂意回答你問題知道嗎？你問『家』是甚麼對吧？要我說啊，『家』是養兒育女、一起製造美好回憶的地方。

你看這乳酪，」她揚揚手裏的杯子，「孩子他爸——他回匈牙利去囉——以前一拿到乳酪啊，總會先餵我吃一口。所以呢，『家』啊，是一連串美好事件的組合。」

「呸呸！騙人！虛偽！騙人！」隔壁的雲雲連連吐口水，手指鉤著鐵絲網直跺腳，「講甚麼『養兒育女』，你根本沒盡過母親的責任，華華跟我不都是人類養大的嗎？你！」他指著漢斯，「我告訴你，別犯傻，聽我說，『家』是牢籠、是剝奪你自由、壓制你發展的地方！」漢斯嚇了一大跳，望望Raba，又望望雲雲，不知如何是好。「不信嗎？不信你問她，讓她親口回答，我跟華華是不是吃奶粉大的啊？她有盡過母親的責任嗎？」雲雲冷靜下來，盯著漢斯道。漢斯左右為難。Raba說話了，「你說得沒錯，我沒哺育你們，因為我——我還沒準備好——但是，生下你們，依然是我這輩子最美好的事！」雲雲沒再說話，抓起一條吊繩，狠狠摔出去，繩子來回甩動，在半空中蕩了好一陣子。另一邊的姨媽出聲了，「小傢伙，嚇到了吧？『家』就是這樣子的，甚麼情緒都接得住。」漢斯似懂非懂，點頭道謝，退了出去。

「『家』是美好回憶的組合、『家』是牢籠、『家』是承載各種情緒的地方。」漢斯趴在樹上，咀嚼著。太深奧了，有「家」的人才說得出這種話吧？漢斯更加確定自己對「家」的渴望。回頭瞥見阿讓和珂賽特正仰躺在窗台，立即飛身過去，說明來意，期待這對相依為命父女的回應。珂賽特好奇地摸摸他的尾巴，又拿了些好些水果過來，看漢斯能裝多少。漢斯笑著撐開嘴皮子填東西，腮幫子瞬間鼓了起來，橫躺在肩膀上。珂賽特大笑望著父親，阿讓慈愛地點點頭，讓她回答問題。珂賽特慢慢說道：「家——就——是——爸——爸——」阿讓笑得更歡，道：「『家』——是——學——習——愛——與——被——愛——的——地——方——」他們動作、說話速度都特別慢，漢斯卻很享受跟他們相處。

一連幾天，漢斯走遍公園，收集了更多動物對「家」的定義。紅頰黑猿說一定要有孩子，一家三口終日蕩鞦韆的畫面就是最完美的「家」的解釋；來自巴拿馬和日本的美洲紅鶴都說自己只是過客，他們的家在遙遠的美麗的國度；十七歲的丹頂鶴阿哲說她的祖輩來自冰天雪地的北方，可她生於斯、長於斯，這片土地就是她的家，七歲的妹妹阿歷在一旁附和著；

維特說，阿鳳在哪裏，哪裏就是他的「家」。阿鳳開心得大叫起來，整個園裏誰都知道了這「愛的宣言」；華華強調，一方面跟家人保持聯繫，同時擁有「私人空間」，就是她心目中理想的「家」；狐獾三姐妹則認為骨肉至親一起生活、分工合作、守望相助，才是「家」的真諦。當然，每個家族都有一兩個叛徒——她們指的是住對面的阿木，他孤僻又冷傲。更多動物不把漢斯的問題當回事，他們說，「有奶便是娘」，哪裏有免費食宿，哪裏就是「家」。

漢斯沒想到，收集了這麼多看法，他對「家」的概念卻更加模糊，更加無從下手去建立「家」。他趴在百年老樹福木身上，聽著阿鳳又在逼維特講「愛的宣言」；看瑪格麗特及她的鄰居環尾狐猴都努力「表演」，尖聲叫喊，希望引來遊客駐足；雲雲對遊客吐口水……他們都努力保護「家園」，他卻無所事事，因為他「無家可歸」。

「你看過水嗎？」不知哪裏傳來的聲音，漢斯直起身來，東張西望。

「是我，福木，」漢斯依然分不清聲音發自哪裏，似乎整棵樹都在發聲，卻又輕柔如腹語。漢斯不明所以，福木也不解釋，只是不斷說

「去看看水吧！看看水說甚麼。」

漢斯想，福木跟公園一樣老，見證過無數興盛衰亡，他讓自己觀察水，必定大有學問，於是直奔小賣部外之噴水池，躲在樹叢中細細觀察：底座的顏色、形狀、噴泉水柱的高度、水流的速度、水花飛濺的樣子……他看得很仔細，甚至偷聽了遊客對話，了解水池曾多次修建，知道噴水池下的儲水庫，供應食水予中環商業區。漢斯回去向福木一一報告，福木不斷問：還有呢？還有嗎？漢斯再也想不出甚麼，福木說，天黑了，明天再說吧！

第二天一早，衝去噴水池途中，漢斯突然急煞車——教育中心對面的獸籠外，有一小汪水池，飄著水草、荷花，站著日式石燈籠。漢斯爬上水池邊的銀杏樹，看天空、獸籠、欄杆、樹木的倒影交映其中，分不清真假。一隻水蜻蜓飛來，叮一口花骨朵，水面輕輕顫了一下，倒影也抖彎了身子，把水蜻蜓嚇飛了。他趴在水池邊，水裏映出自己的臉。他伸出前爪，想觸摸一下自己，卻弄碎了臉。他嚇得縮回手，再望向水中，水中的影子晃蕩著，慢慢成型，自己掩著嘴，眼神恐慌又好奇……漢斯換著位置觀察，看小小水池清晰映出萬物、

孕育生命，充滿無限可能。他看得著迷，直至晌午，才回到福木那裏，述說他的所見所感。福木發出「嗯嗯」的聲音，微微頷首，枝葉拂動。

「你看到甚麼？」福木問。

「呃？」漢斯愣住，剛才全白說啦？

「噴水池跟水池的水，你看到甚麼？」福木又問。

食水跟死水的分別？一個動、一個靜？一個高、一個低？一個——「啊！一個有水花，一個有倒影！」漢斯感覺捕捉到一點神髓了。

「倒影？為甚麼？」

「靜！」漢斯突然大叫，「水靜止的時候才會映出倒影。你的意思是，要靜止才——」

「哦哦，不不，」福木打斷他，「我甚麼也沒說，甚麼意思也沒有。」

漢斯閉上眼睛，感受風吹拂樹梢，維特跟阿鳳在私語，環尾狐猴吱吱尖叫著，盆子掉在地上的「啞啞」聲……他回想起跑遍公園每個角落的日子，每一棵樹枝丫的伸展、每一種花開放的季節、氣味、每一個籠子裏動物的性情、每一個飼養員的習慣、每一個樹洞……他都瞭若指掌。他真的願意放棄這樣的生活，住進「豪宅」？他所住的，難道不是最高級、

最適合他的「豪宅」？縈繞不去的困擾被一絲絲抽走，他感到心境澄明：

「天下之大，何處不是『家』？」

福木笑說，「這境界，成了！」

漢斯回道，「多得您『百年老樹』的智慧啊！」

福木惱道，「在樹木界，我只是個青少年，都被叫老了！」

「相對而言嘛，算起來，你跟我的太太太高祖同輩了。」漢斯道，「喂，分享一下你對『家』的看法嘛！」

「可以啊，不過，」福木賣著關子，「是不是該先跟瑪格麗特說，並沒有甚麼『淘汰』，你覺得呢？」

「嗯，我立刻去向她道歉。」漢斯有點忐忑，「你說，她還願意跟我做朋友嗎？」

「應該，也許，當然，肯定，可能——誰知道？」福木說，「想聽『百年老樹』的叛逆答案？快去快回吧！」

Nobody knew who spread the words, when or where. We all heard the reason for the park's renovation was not as high-sounding as what they said, "improving animals' life quality"! They were taking the opportunity to remove redundancies—without special skills, common-looking, boring, and dull—in short, no visitors would pause and look at them. All about the budget cut! In the very beginning, we didn't make much of it. After all, we weren't in the remote wilderness, but in a 5.6-acre park with history more than 150 years right in the middle of the international financial centre. None of us had come settling here without a title like "Critically Endangered Species" or "World-Class Protected Species" in our hands. And facilitating scientific observation, promoting animal protection, and constructing local residents' welfare had always been the missions of the park. How in the world could they turn it all upside down all of a sudden? How could they become as shallow as pursuing appearances and skills? Whoever spread such a rumor must be myopic people fantasising a meteoric rise.

That said, we all had to live with one more piece of shadow in our minds. One would notice the atmosphere had changed. Though in no small number, the visitors tried to mask a large part of their faces, some even wearing caps and sunglasses. Even the security guards were acting funny; they pointed a *gun* to the visitor's forehead as though posing a threat. The visitors didn't lean on the rails and take photos like they had done in the past but pointed to this and that while whispering to others nearby. Siamang Phung was angry. Her throat pouch was at the size of a football: "What did you say? Furtive bastards." The visitors' bodies shook to suggest laughter with neither sound nor expression. Phung was even angrier as if her throat pouch was going to explode. Werther was scratching his body on a tree branch. He climbed over by the wire fence. He tried to pacify Phung's rage but only managed to shift it to himself. She scolded him for looking down on her and not caring for her because she's older and she's from Indonesia, and he's from Germany... All old scores! Werther became angry, too. He had explained ten million times! Not having a child was a decision out of thorough thinking. It wasn't about love. How could he make her understand?

The couple's fight erupted in full force, and the whole cage trembled in their screams, which could be heard miles away. Visitors held up their cell phones all along. Phung blamed Werther for letting visitors take photos as *evidence* and for scaring them away. What would they do if they got *laid off*, homeless, or *repatriated* to their original countries? Hearing the question, Werther calmed down and said the original countries would be fine. He always dreamed of touring around Phung's hometown. Besides, hadn't they just succeeded in making the visitors *pause and look*? Phung heard some sense in Werther's words, and her face blossomed a smile. After swinging around the cage for a good while, she came to sit beside Werther and comb his hair.

Werther and Phung's drama had been going on for decades. Even newborns and newcomers like the meerkats were very used to it. But this time, their fight sparked wisdom: Better safe than sorry! Urgent was to protect our *home* by exuding charm and increasing exposure. How to do it? Where should we start? We had no idea. We had only known being ourselves and had the least care for humans' likings. Each of us tried to figure out what humans would like to see.

Whenever a visitor came near, all the monkeys started jumping and swinging around the cage. Red-cheeked gibbons played acrobats with their children on the back. De Brazza's monkeys brought their plastic fodder tray to the height and cast them to the ground. They thought the deliberations would attract visitors' attention. Even the reclusive sloths, Jean the father and Cosette the daughter, had to care about the situation. Every once in a while, they came to the window platform to show their sleeping positions.

Squirrel Monkey Margaret couldn't spare time to care about Hans. The first time she had seen him, she was playing on the swings, and Hans was staring at a peanut on the ground. She had swiftly bounced down and thrown the peanut inside her mouth. She had acted mischievous but only to see Hans disappointed. Still a child, Margaret had been sorry and fetched some nuts from her fodder tray to Hans, who had started munching right away. Finishing up, he had shaken his whiskers and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. He then had said thanks. They had become friends on that day. He came to chat with Margaret every day at sunset and told her about the *world outside*. The meerkat sisters had a fight.

Security guard Uncle Kwai had black-bean pork-rib rice for lunch. Feeder Auntie Ha gave the baby hanuman two handfuls of snacks. American flamingos gave a dance show. A ginger cat and a snail were at a deadlock for the whole morning. Lotuses unfolded their leaves and petals. All the wax apples fell to the ground... Hans kept retelling the day and answered Margaret's endless questions as he ate. This day, Hans came to Margaret's cage as usual and was ready to share what he had seen. Margaret cracked open some walnuts and pushed the kernels to Hans, but she didn't lay an eye on him. She had been busy playing the swings and bouncing up and down from sunrise to sundown. She took over a peanut, cracked the shell with her sharp teeth, and munched on the kernel as fast as possible. When she took another one, he stood up and paced about. As he saw her go back to the swings, he ate another walnut. He turned to look at her and bounced away.

Hans was an orphan squirrel. He believed squirrels and squirrel monkeys were distant relatives, so he often came to chat with Margaret. Although they couldn't play together, he liked seeing her being chased by her family, fighting for food, and playing the swings.

He also enjoyed listening enviously to her complaint about her family and her daily chores... Hans wished he could make the same complaints. He yearned for a *home*, but he didn't know how to have one.

Hans often heard people say *go home*, which meant going back to a place they lived. Sometimes they moved to a new home because they bought a bigger and better flat. When humans talked about *home*, they attached importance to things like *convenient traffic, peaceful in the busy, facing south, upside potential*, and so on. They categorised home into *mansion, public housing estate, subdivided flat, bedspace unit...* according to their sizes and locations. Although Hans didn't quite understand the categorisation, he knew the rich lived in the mansions, the poor in subdivided flats or bedspace units, and the penniless on the street. Hans didn't want to be homeless anymore. He wished to live in a mansion, but he had no money. What could he do?

"What the hell are you sighing for on such a beautiful morning?" Hans felt a movement under feet and jumped away. Absent-minded, he had mistaken Holmes for rock and sat on the African spurred tortoise's shell. Holmes didn't mind at all, although Hans kept rattling apologies. It came to his mind the

ages-old Holmes must be very wise. He told Holmes what had been upsetting him, hoping to get some precious advice. Holmes was listening, eyes half-open, head stretching in and out, lips pursed. Holmes didn't respond at all when Hans finished. Hans thought Holmes had fallen asleep. When Hans was just about to leave, Holmes asked him: "What is *home*?" Dumbfounded and wordless, Hans looked at Holmes. Holmes asked again: "What is *home*?" Hans replied with the same question: "What is *home*?" "For me? I am my home. My home is myself. Home? What is *home*? You shall ask yourself..." Holmes turned around, muttering away to himself.

"*I am my home. My home is myself.* What was he talking about? What is *home*? What is *home*? Isn't home a house? Indeed, I should find out—" Scratching his cheeks, he felt out of his depth. The eyeballs rolled out an idea. Ask other animals! At worst, I would only get laughed at. No big deal. He started with Phung, who had been living here for 36 years. But Phung and Werther just had a big fight in the morning. It wasn't the best time to interview her. Hans went on to Hominidae Wawa's place. Wawa was sitting on the branch and trying to find something on her belly.

When Hans was just about to utter his question, he had a second thought and decided to hear what her mother had to say.

Wawa's brother Wanwan lived with his mother Raba, and his aunt in three connected cages. The place they lived in could be called a *mansion*, couldn't it? But did they count as one household or four households? Hans raised his head, searching for Raba sitting with a cup of yogurt in her hand. Raba was also looking at him. Hans mumbled, "May I ask you a question? For you, *what is home*?" After a long while, Raba gave her answer, which was surprisingly serious and tender, "Young man. Remember to introduce yourself first so others will be willing to answer your questions. You were asking me 'what is *home*?' For me, home is the place where I raise my children and where we create happy memory together. Look at this cup of yogurt," she shook the cup, "the father of my children, before returning to Hungary, he had always given me his yogurt whenever he had got one. So, for me, home is a combination of happy events."

“Pah! Liar! Hypocrite! Liar!” Wanwan shot his saliva from the cage beside. He grasped the wire and stomped his feet. He spluttered, “How dare you say that? Raising children! You had never been a responsible mother. Hadn’t Wawa and I been raised by humans? Not by you!” He pointed at Hans, “Let me tell you. Don’t be fooled. Listen to me. *Home* is a cage that takes away your freedom and restrains your growth!” Hans was shocked. He looked at Raba, and then to Wanwan, with no clue what to do next. “Hard to believe? Ask her! Let her tell you that Wawa and I grew up sucking formula. Had she been a responsible mother for even one day?” Wanwan calmed down and stared at Hans, who found himself in an impossible position. Raba said, “You’re not wrong. I didn’t breastfeed either of you because I—I wasn’t ready—but giving birth to you was the best thing that happened in my life!” Wanwan didn’t say a word. He grabbed a rope and swung about fiercely for some time. Here came the aunt’s opinion, “Young man. Scary huh? This is *home*. You got to put up with all the emotion.” Hans only got half of it, but he nodded, thanked her, and left.

“*Home* is a combination of happy events. *Home* is a cage. *Home* is a place where you put up with all the emotion.” Hans lay down on a tree and chewed his walnuts. It was all too deep. Only those who had a home could’ve said such things, but Hans confirmed his desire for *home*. He glimpsed Jean and Cosette were leaning on the platform. He hurried over and laid out what he came for. He was expecting some good answers from the sloths, father and daughter living with each other. Cosette stroked her tail with curiosity and brought up some fruits. She was testing Hans’s patience. Hans smiled and gorged himself with the fruits. His mouth was so full that his cheeks reached down to his shoulders. Cosette burst out laughing and looked at her father. Jean nodded his kind consent for her to answer the question. Cosette said slowly, “Home—is—father.” Jean laughed even harder and said, “Home—is—the—place—we—learn—to—love—and—learn—to—be—loved.” Although they moved and spoke slowly, Hans enjoyed their company.

For a few days, Hans visited all the cages in the park, collecting more and more definitions of *home*. Red-cheeked gibbons said there must be a child, and a scene of a family playing the swings all the time was the perfect definition of *home*. The American flamingos from Panama and Japan said they were sojourners and that their homes were in the beautiful countries far faraway. The seventeen-year-old red-crowned crane Chit said their ancestors came from the icy and snowy north, but she was born and raised on this land, which she considered her home. Her seven-year-old sister Lik agreed. Werther said home was wherever Phung was. Phung was so happy that she started screaming to let the whole park know about Werther’s *declaration* of love. Wawa emphasises her ideal *home* was the place where she could enjoy her *private space* while keeping in touch with the family. The meerkat sisters believed the essence of *home* was a family living together, working together, and helping each other. Still, every family had one or two prodigal children. They were talking about Muk, who lived right across. He was reclusive and snotty. But most animals didn’t take Hans’s question seriously. They said whoever has milk is the mother; *home* was wherever free food and safe roof were.

What Hans hadn’t expected was that his idea of *home* became even vaguer. It became all the more difficult for him to build his *home*. He lay down on the century-old false olive tree Fortune. He listened to Phung compelling Werther to make his *declaration of love* again. He saw Margaret and her neighbors, ring-tailed lemurs, making efforts to giving their *performance* and screaming to attract visitors to *pause and look*. Wanwan spat to the visitors... They were all doing their best to protect their home, but he had nothing to do because he was homeless.

“Have you seen water?” Hans didn’t know where the voice came from. He stood up and looked around.

“It’s me. Fortune.” Hans still hadn’t a clue. The whole tree seemed to be speaking but as tenderly as ventriloquism. Hans couldn’t understand. Neither did Fortune explain, but kept saying, “Go to look at the water. Listen to what it has to say.”

Hans thought Fortune was as old as the park itself. It had witnessed posterity and decline many times. Since Fortune suggested he should watch the water, there must be great wisdom.

He went straight to the fountain just outside the food store. He hid himself in the shrub and observe carefully. He saw the color of the basin, the shape and height of the jets, the speed of the current, and how the water splashed... He was meticulous. He overheard the visitors' conversations and learned that the fountain had been renovated many times. Under the fountain was a reservoir that supplied fresh water to the business district in Central. Hans went back to report his observations to Fortune, who only pressed, "More? More?" Hans couldn't think of any. Fortune said it was dark, and they would return to the topic tomorrow!

The next morning, Hans was on his way to the fountain. He suddenly paused to look at a small pond just outside the cage across the Education Centre. On the pond floated weeds and lotuses and stood a few Japanese stone lamps. Hans climbed up the ginkgo tree beside the pond. He saw the reflections of the sky, cages, rails, and trees on the pond's surface. He couldn't tell which were real. A dragonfly flew to bite a flower bud. Their touch trembled the surface of the pond. The reflections rippled and scared the dragonfly away.

Hans came to the pond and saw his own face. He stretched out his front paws and wanted to touch it. But he only destroyed it. He was so scared that he pulled his paws back. He looked at the water again and saw his face gradually taking shape on the rippling water. Frightened and curious, he covered his mouth with his paws... Hans changed his position and continued to observe. He saw the pond contained the reflections of all things as if sustaining their lives and bore infinite possibilities. He was both curious and obsessed. He didn't come back to Fortune until midday. He told Fortune about his observations. Fortune nodded with approvals. His branches and leaves vibrated.

"What did you see?" Fortune asked.

"Er?" Hans was speechless. Hadn't he just told Fortune everything?

"What was the difference between the fountain and the pond?"

The difference between freshwater and dead water? One moving; the other staying still? One high; the other low? One—"Ah! One splashes; the other reflects!" Hans felt he had grasped the essence.

"Why did it show reflections?"

"Because it stays still!" Hans shouted, "Only when it stays still does it show reflections. You meant, only when it stays still..."

"Oh, no, no," Fortune interrupted him, "I neither said nor meant it."

Hans closed his eyes. He felt the breeze stroking the branches; Werther and Phung were whispering to each other; ring-tailed lemurs were moaning; the food tray fell to the ground... He thought of the days he had been running around the park. He remembered how each branch stretched, each season what flowers bloomed and their scents, the characters of each animal of each cage, the habits of each feeder, each tree hole... He knew them like the back of his paw. Was he really willing to give up such life and move into a mansion? Wasn't the place he lived in the fanciest, the most suitable *mansion* for him? The once haunting worry was wisping away. He felt his mind was clear like water, "The world under heaven is so vast that home can be anywhere."

Fortune smiled, "Enlightenment right here!"

Hans replied, "Thanks to you and your century-old wisdom!"

Fortune was annoyed, "As a tree, I'm still very young! Your words make me sound old."

"It's all relative. You know. You're the generation of my grand grand grandfather." Hans said, "Oh, you know what? Could you share your idea about *home*?"

"No problem, but," Fortune left Hans hanging, "you should first tell Margaret that no one is redundant, shouldn't you?"

"Yes, I'm going to apologise to her." Hans was nervous, "Do you think she still wants to be a friend?"

"Maybe, perhaps, of course, sure, possibly—who knows?" Fortune said, "But if you want to hear this century-old tree's rebellious idea, you apologise to Margaret and come back as quickly as you can. Off you go!"