



# Smokestack Story

A Full English translation is available.

煙囪的故事

**Author:** Hsu-Kung Liu **Illustrator:** Hsu-Kung Liu **Publisher:** Viking International

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**Adaptation:** Taiwanese Sign Language (TSL) digital picture book

**Rights sold:** Simplified Chinese

**BFT2.0 Translator:** Chenxin Jiang

Once upon a time, a rich man lived in a grand mansion with many smokestacks. The smokestacks powered many useful inventions and made his life very comfortable. But the smoke they puffed into the air smelled awful.

So the rich man decided to move the smokestacks far away from his home. He gave some money to poor families and built the smokestacks near their houses instead. Soon, the smokestacks spewed even more black smoke. Little by little, the pollution spoiled the poor people's drinking water, made the sea level rise, and caused landslides that buried their homes.

When the poor people saw how dangerous the smokestacks were, they decided to shut them down. But without the smokestacks, the rich man could no longer use many of his favorite things—and he could not buy what he needed either. Now he had a big question to answer: what should he do?

At the center of *Smokestack Story* is an invention that spread through cities after the Industrial Revolution. Told like a fable, the story reflects the environmental crises facing our planet today. It also reveals the widening gap between rich and poor, where those with the least suffer first while the wealthy enjoy the benefits and resources.



Author **Hsu-Kung Liu**

Born in Taipei in 1973, Hsu-Kung Liu graduated from National Taiwan University with a degree in civil engineering. He started to work in picture book illustration after taking part in the Lucy Chen Handmade Picture Book Classroom. His works have won the Hsin Yi Children's Literature Prize, China Times Openbook Awards, the Golden Tripod Award, Taiwan International Book Fair Exhibition award, and have been selected for exhibition at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. He has sold works in English, Thai, Japanese, French, Swedish, Korean, and Estonian.

# “We Chase After Material Desires, Yet Still Feel Hollow”: A Children’s Book About Our Shared Quest for True Fulfillment

by Yu-yin Tsung  
(originally published on [OKAPI.BOOKS.COM.TW](http://OKAPI.BOOKS.COM.TW))

When you first meet Hsu-Kung Liu, he may strike you as a soft-spoken, gentle, and somewhat shy person. But spend a bit more time with him, and you’ll also discover how thoughtful he is; myriad ideas move through his mind, and he quietly bursts with an abundance of stories.

Liu’s works are characterized by comforting colors, seemingly casual lines, and simple forms. Beneath this simplicity lies a childlike lens through which he observes the complexities of society, allowing him to convey the issues he wishes to discuss with his readers. In *Smokestack Story* a chain of events is

sparked by a single smokestack. Though the story appears lighthearted on the surface, it tells a profound story of wealthy people who always want more.

Still, readers who assume the book speaks only through its text may miss its true richness: the storytelling power of its images and the artist’s careful intentions. If we observe the illustrations with the attentiveness of a child, we quickly notice something. At the beginning, the rich man’s form is vague and undefined, and his body has no color—it is empty. Yet as the story progresses, and as he frees himself from the grip of material possessions, his shape changes, and

colors finally appear.

The rich man in the story may very well represent certain people in our own lives—or even ourselves. We chase after material desires, yet still feel hollow. As we demand more and more in hopes of filling that emptiness, we become much like the colorless rich man, seeking outward abundance to hide inward hunger. The smokestack puffing out dark smoke becomes a metaphor for a mind clouded by possessions. It may bring brief satisfaction, but it cannot reach the soul. True fulfillment comes from human interaction, mutual respect, understanding our own wants, and the continual search for meaning in our lives. This inner peace requires continuous practice—learning to let go, reflect, and clear the “smokestack” of the heart from time to time.

In everyday life, we often accumulate things we do not truly need—and, perhaps, things we do not even truly want. While they may provide momentary pleasure, over time they create waste, drain resources, and burden the planet. In today’s fast-paced world that overflows with information, I have come to realize deeply that a simple life is a kind of happiness.

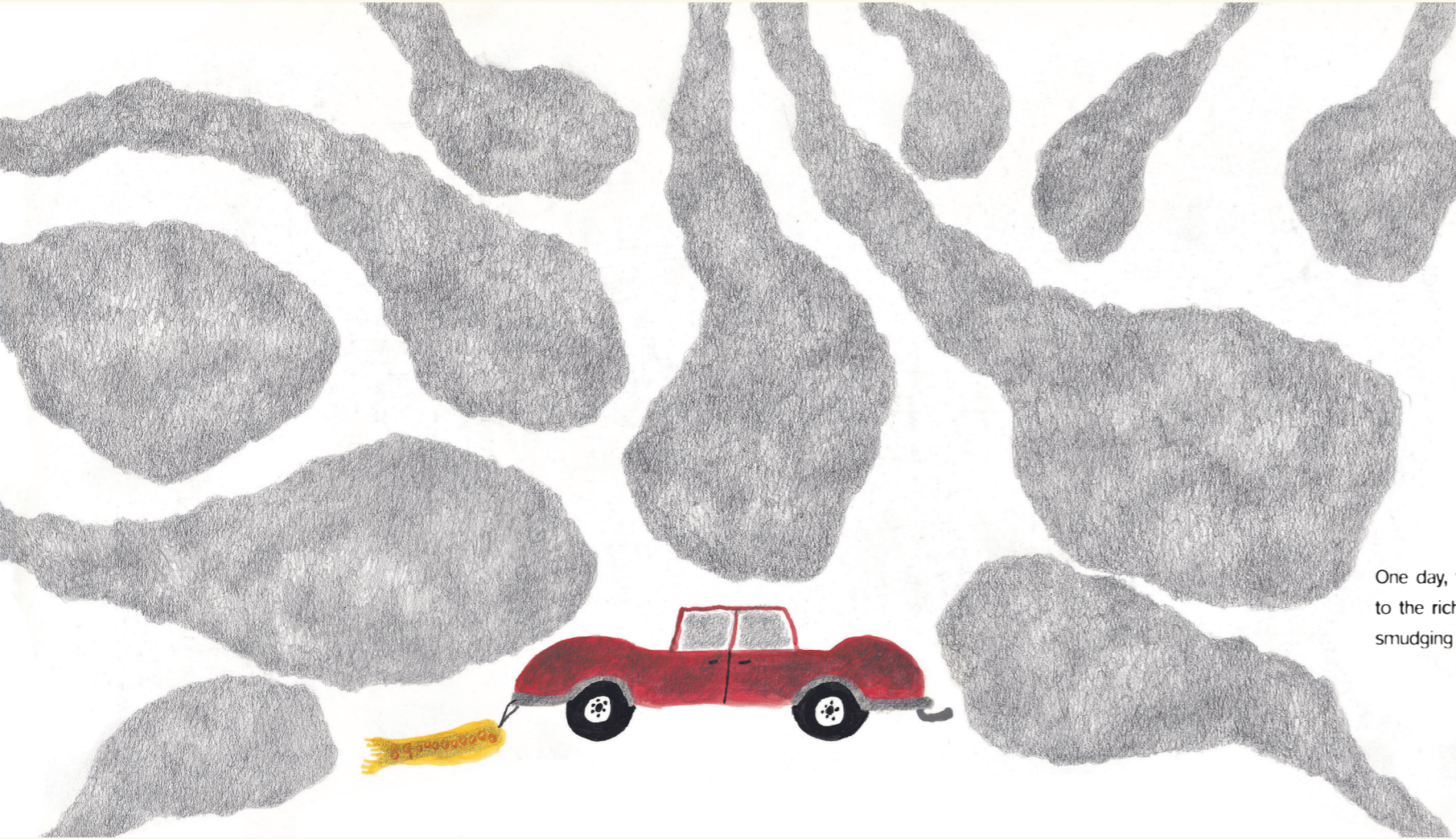
When I was a child, I loved drawing houses, and I always added a chimney. Without thinking, I would draw a few wavy lines rising from it to show curling

smoke. Looking back, I suspect that in my subconscious, that little puff of smoke symbolized the smell of cooking—a sign of warmth, comfort, and home. The smokestack in Liu’s work represents technological and industrial “progress”—that is, the smokestacks of factories. Yet when we return to the smallest unit of society—our individual homes—the chimney still points us back to the idea of family.

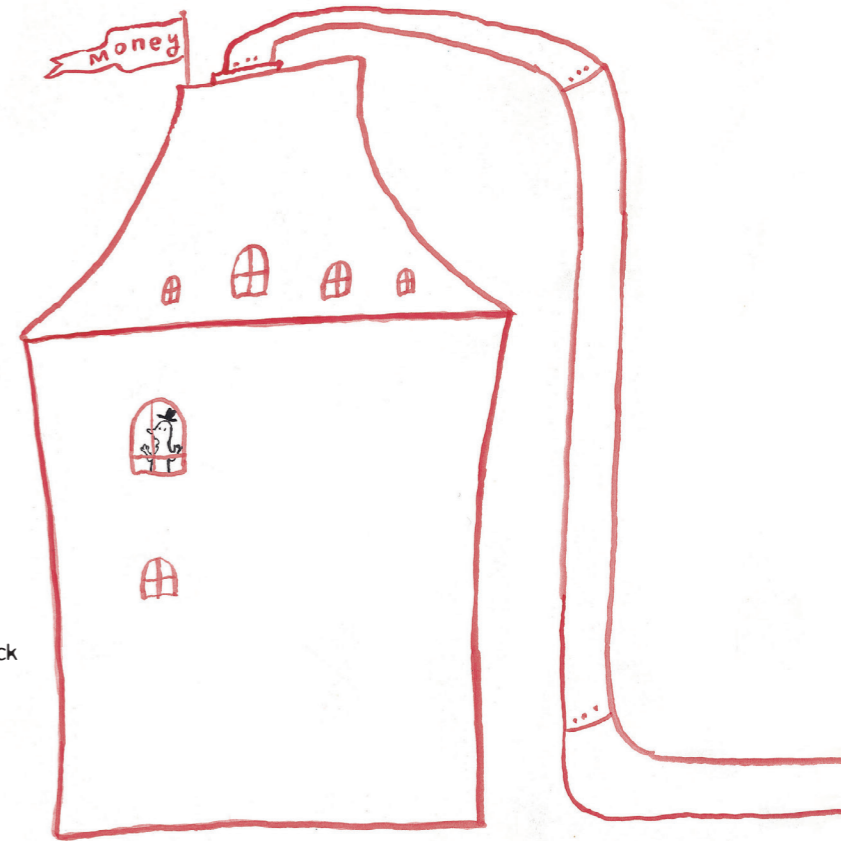
And so, through this book, I hope each of us can begin with our own homes, reducing unnecessary consumption and easing the load we place on the world. May the smoke rising from our personal chimneys carry the fragrance of content: warm, gentle traces of shared meals, togetherness, and the simple joy of being enough.

*This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.*

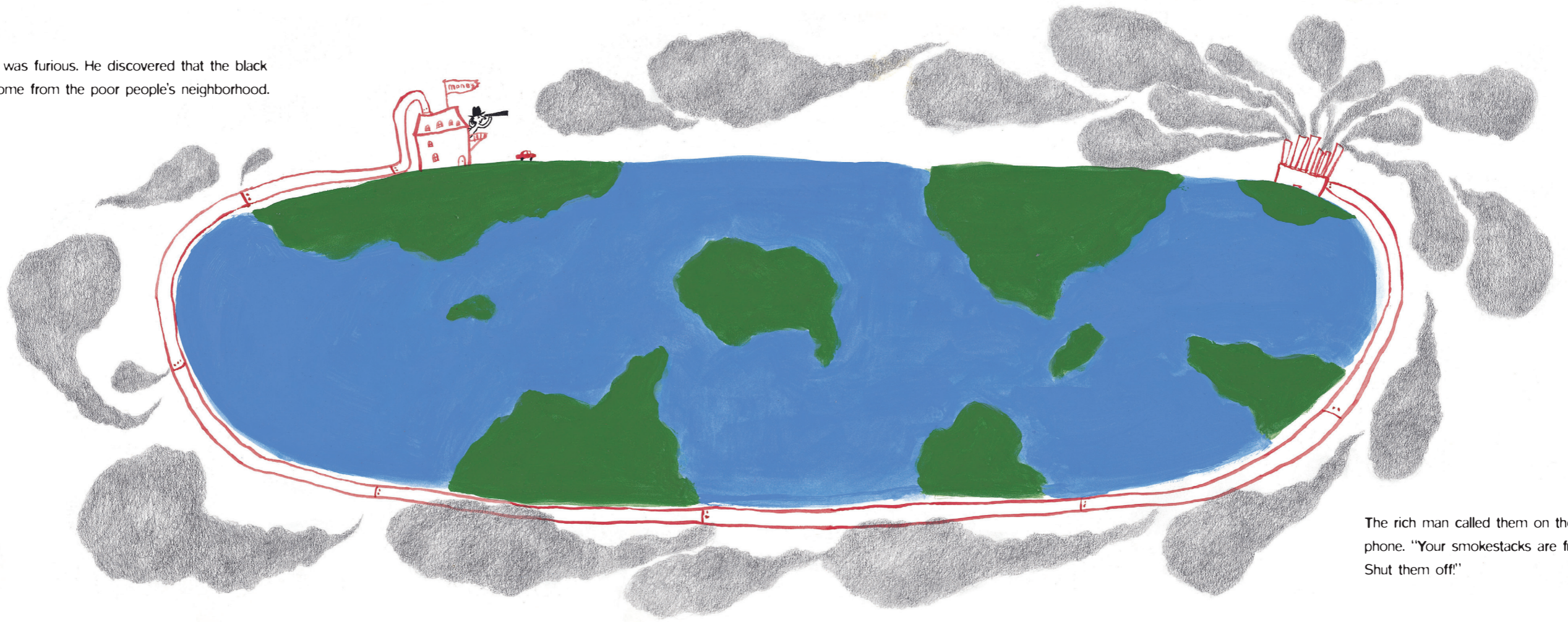
*Yu-yin Tsung, chief editor at Viking International and the editor of this book, has worked in publishing for over twenty years. She loves reading and buying books, and even more enjoys discussing ideas and sparking creative possibilities. She believes that being able to connect with readers through books—sharing, exchanging, and inspiring one another—is both meaningful and a true source of happiness.*



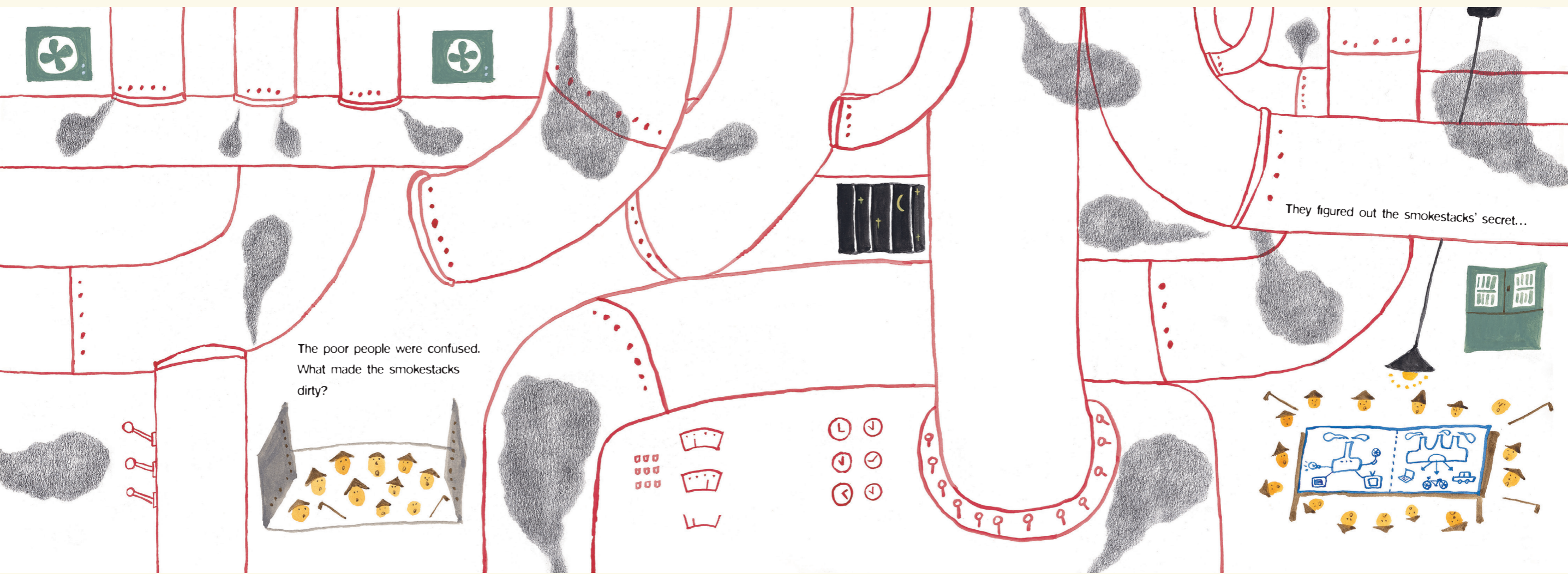
One day, the smoke wafted back to the rich man's house, smudging his car.



The rich man was furious. He discovered that the black smoke had come from the poor people's neighborhood.



The rich man called them on the phone. "Your smokestacks are filthy. Shut them off!"



The poor people were confused.  
What made the smokestacks  
dirty?

They figured out the smokestacks' secret...

