

YOU ARE A  
RAILROAD  
CHINESE

你是鐵路中國人

BY MONYEE CHAU

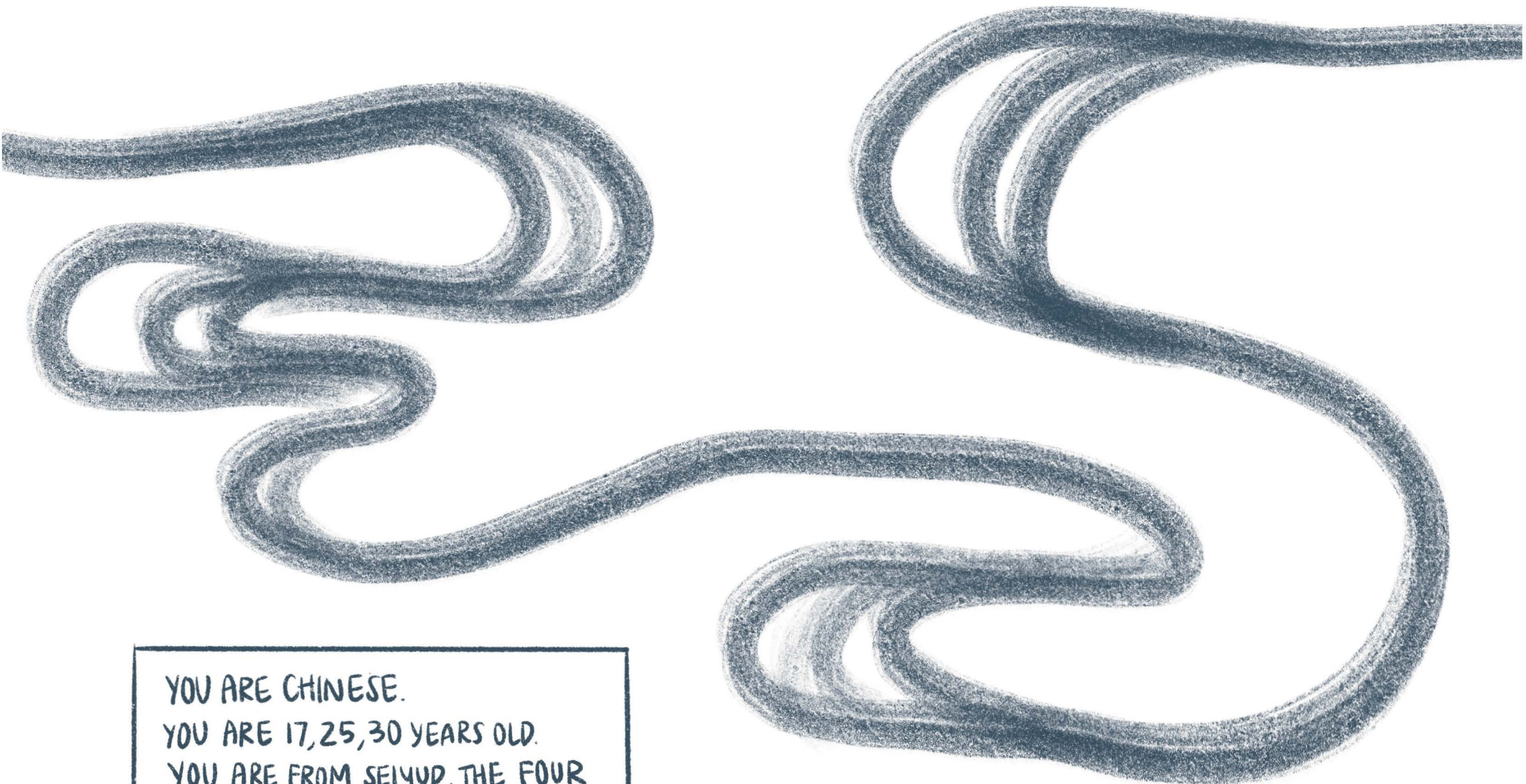
THANK YOU TO MY ANCESTORS FOR THEIR OWN LIFE JOURNEYS THAT EVENTUALLY BROUGHT ME TO A PLACE TO BE WRITING WORK LIKE THIS. TO THE OCEAN FOR ITS SPIRIT, MAGIC, SONG, AND LIVES IT CARRIES. TO JENNY KU FOR BEING MY 姐. TO LELE BARNETT FOR INITIATING THIS STUDY. TO EMILY GRAYSON, BILLIE BOYD, ABBY BASS, RICHARD VISICK, AND THE REST OF THE LIBRARY STAFF FOR MAKING THIS ZINE POSSIBLE. LASTLY, THANK YOU TO ALL THOSE WHO DID THE LABOR OF MAKING SURE THE STORIES OF RAILROAD WORKERS WERE RECORDED.

## HONESTY + LIMITATIONS

THIS IS A STORY BASED IN TRUE EVENTS. THIS IS MADE TO, AT ITS SIMPLEST LEVEL, CONVEY THE EXPERIENCE THAT HAS ONLY MADE AN APPEARANCE AS A SENTENCE IN US HISTORY BOOKS, YET ALTERED HISTORY AND THE U.S. ECONOMY. THIS IS IN HONOR OF ALL THE "SILENT SPIKES" WHOSE STORIES AND RECORDS WERE DESTROYED BY ARSON, PILLAGING, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF CHINESE BELONGINGS IN THE PATH OF ANGRY, XENOPHOBIC MOBS OF WHITE AMERICANS.

## THE TERM 'RAILROAD CHINESE'

WAS COINED BY AN IMMIGRANT NAMED LILY, WHOSE GREAT GRANDFATHER WORKED ON THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD. THIS TERM IS INTENDED TO CAPTURE THE INTERSECTION OF A UNIQUE ETHNIC AND CLASS IDENTITY.



YOU ARE CHINESE.  
YOU ARE 17, 25, 30 YEARS OLD.  
YOU ARE FROM SEIYUP, THE FOUR  
COUNTIES OF SOUTHERN CHINA.

YOU PLAN TO CROSS...

THE OCEAN OF UNCERTAINTY.



YOU ARE UNCERTAIN IF THEIR SOULS WILL EVER FIND THEIR WAY BACK HOME...

YOU PRAY AND GIVE OFFERINGS TO THE OCEAN, AND GODDESS MAZU FOR A SAFE VOYAGE. WITH \$30, YOU BUY TWO MONTHS OF A SEASICK JOURNEY TO WHERE YOUR FEET FEEL NO LANDING. YOU WATCH YOUR PEOPLE, YOUR RELATIVES, BEING THROWN SICK OVERBOARD, BUT STILL ALIVE.

FROM THE OCEAN OF UNCERTAINTY.

YOU STEP ONTO AN UNFAMILIAR LAND,  
SURROUNDED BY A LANGUAGE YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND.  
YOU ARRIVE IN SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA TO  
WORK FOR THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY.

YOU ARE A RAILROAD CHINESE.

YOU DO BACK BREAKING, FEET BLISTERING, HARD WORK.

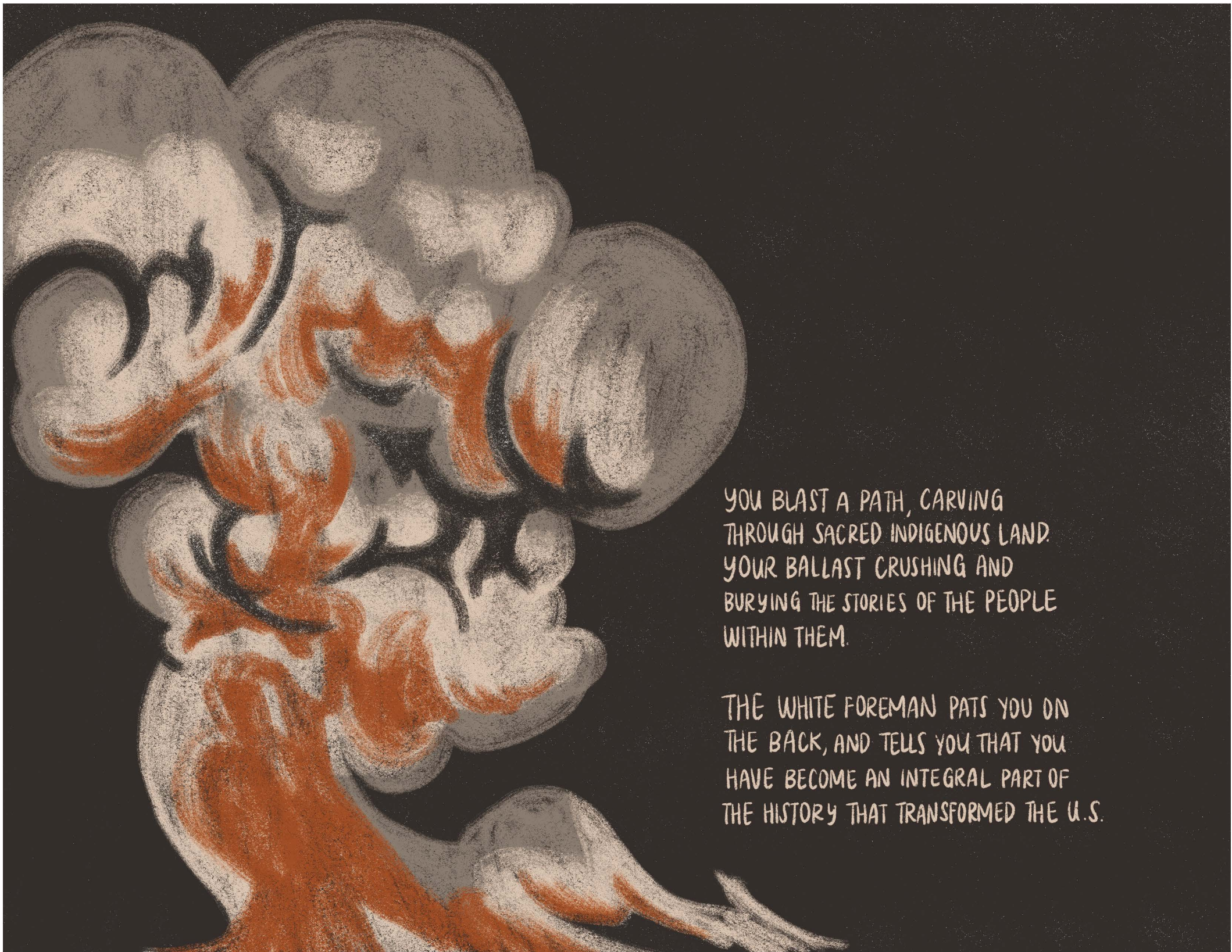


YOU ENDURE

SUMMER HEAT, HIGH ALTITUDES, DIRT,  
DUST IN YOUR LUNGS, FUMES FROM  
CONSTANT EXPLOSIVES, ISOLATION, WINDS,  
WINTER BUZZARDS, FALLING TREES FROM  
SNOW SLIDES, AVALANCHES, CAVE-INS,  
BROKEN LIMBS

SO THAT YOU COULD

CUT THROUGH DENSE FOREST, PUT DOWN  
ROADBED, SHOVEL SNOW, BLAST TUNNELS  
THROUGH GRANITE, LAY TRACKS OVER THE  
TREACHEROUS SIERRA MOUNTAINS IN WINTER,  
CROSS THE DESOLATE DESERTS OF NEVADA  
AND UTAH IN THE SUMMER



YOU BLAST A PATH, CARVING  
THROUGH SACRED INDIGENOUS LAND.  
YOUR BALLAST CRUSHING AND  
BURYING THE STORIES OF THE PEOPLE  
WITHIN THEM.

THE WHITE FOREMAN PATS YOU ON  
THE BACK, AND TELLS YOU THAT YOU  
HAVE BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF  
THE HISTORY THAT TRANSFORMED THE U.S.

WITH A CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE IN HAND,  
HE GUIDES YOU AWAY FROM THE CELEBRATORY  
PHOTO OF THE FINAL GOLD SPIKE.

YOU HEAR MUMBLES  
ABOUT YOUR FRIEND LING SING:  
SHOT IN THE BACK 18 TIMES BY A MAN  
NAMED GEORGE W. HALL.

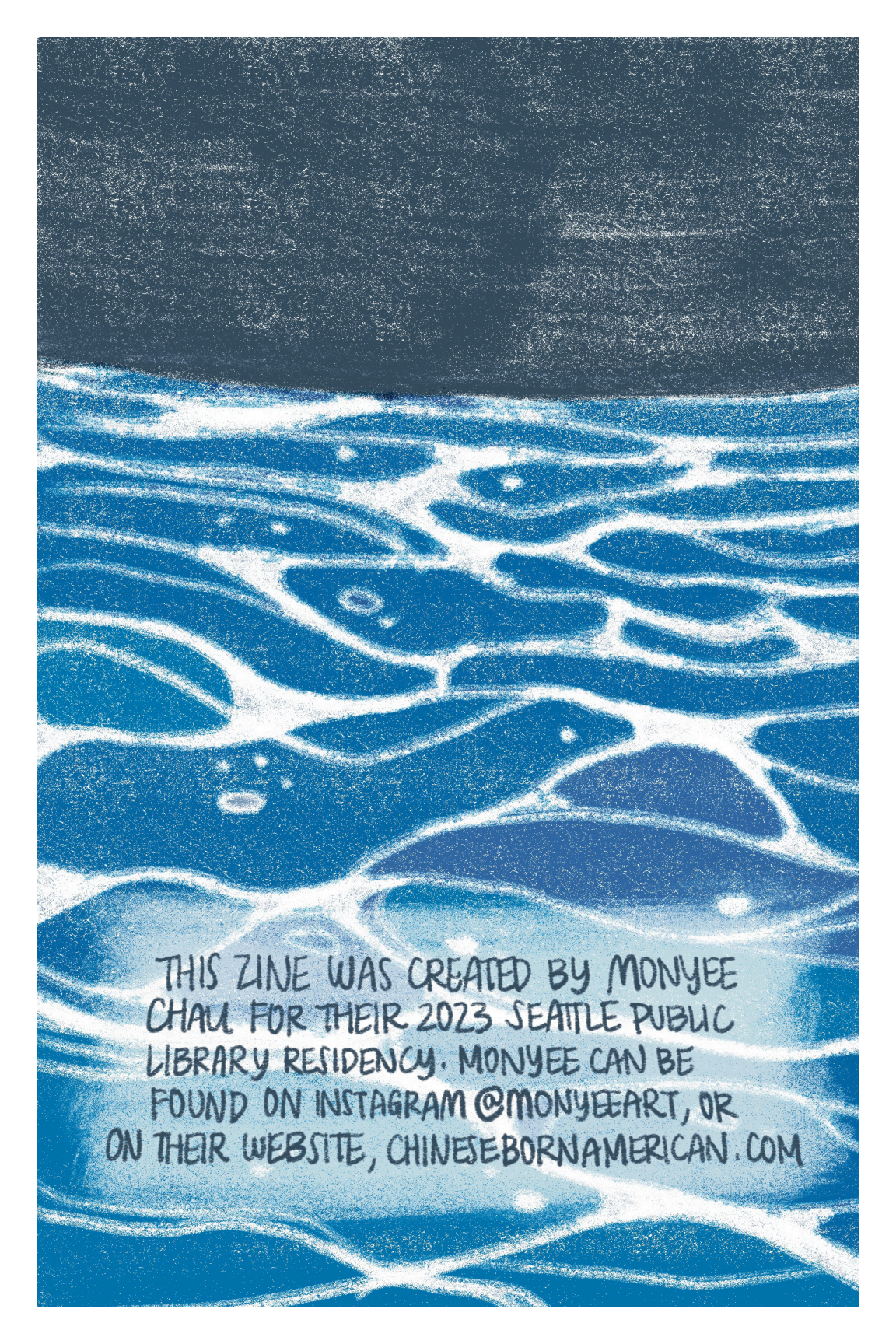


YOUR STOMACH FEELS  
WAVES OF UNCERTAINTY,

YOUR MOUTH TASTING OF SALT.







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FOUND ON INSTAGRAM @MONYEEART, OR  
ON THEIR WEBSITE, CHINESEBORNAMERICAN.COM