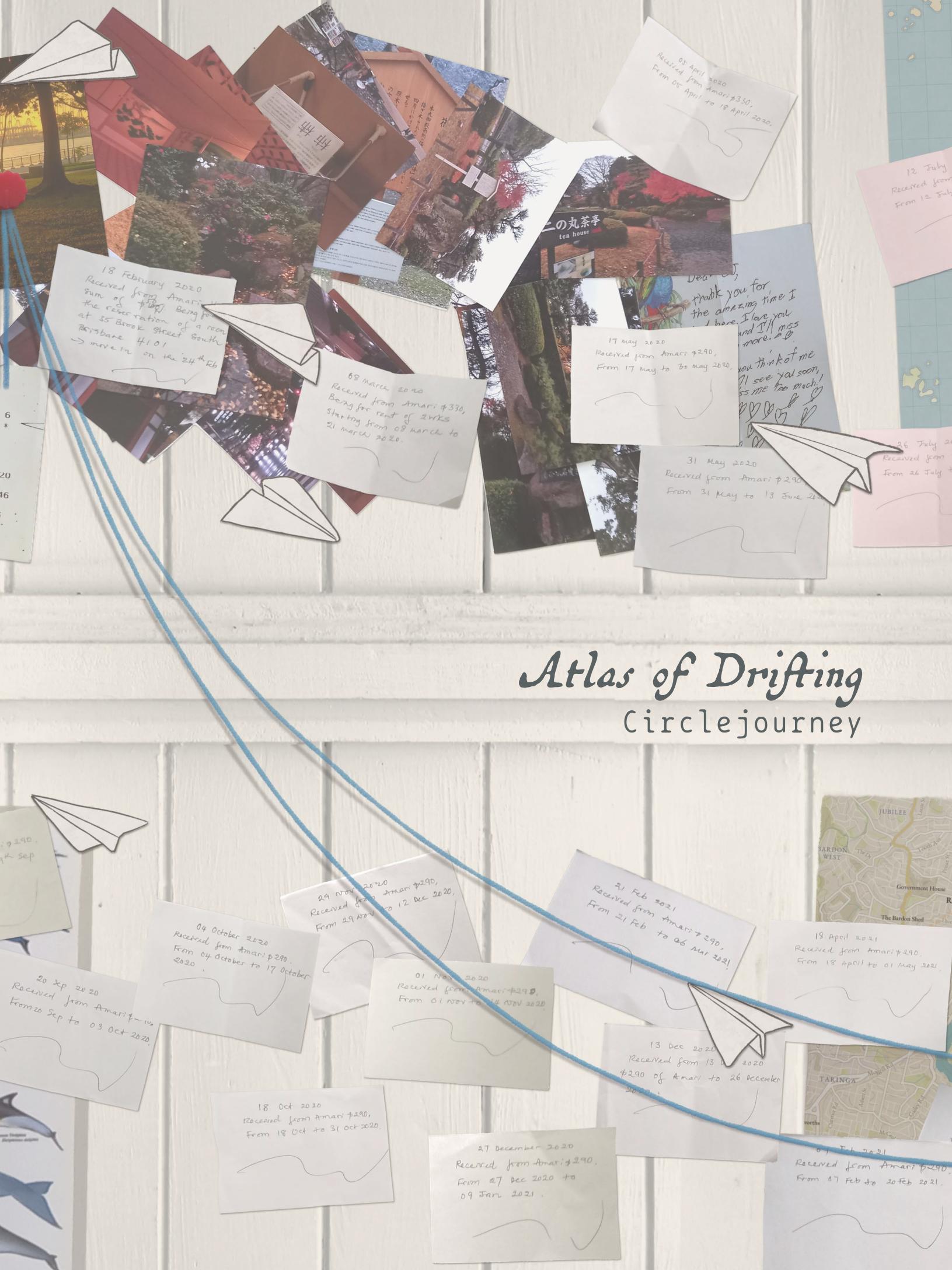


# Atlas of Drifting

## circlejourney



MARINE TRAFFIC AND AIRCRAFT  
BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND BRISBANE  
8 MAY 2021

This is for  
everyone who's  
felt lost

in a year of  
which no map  
can be drawn

This is a story about two cities.



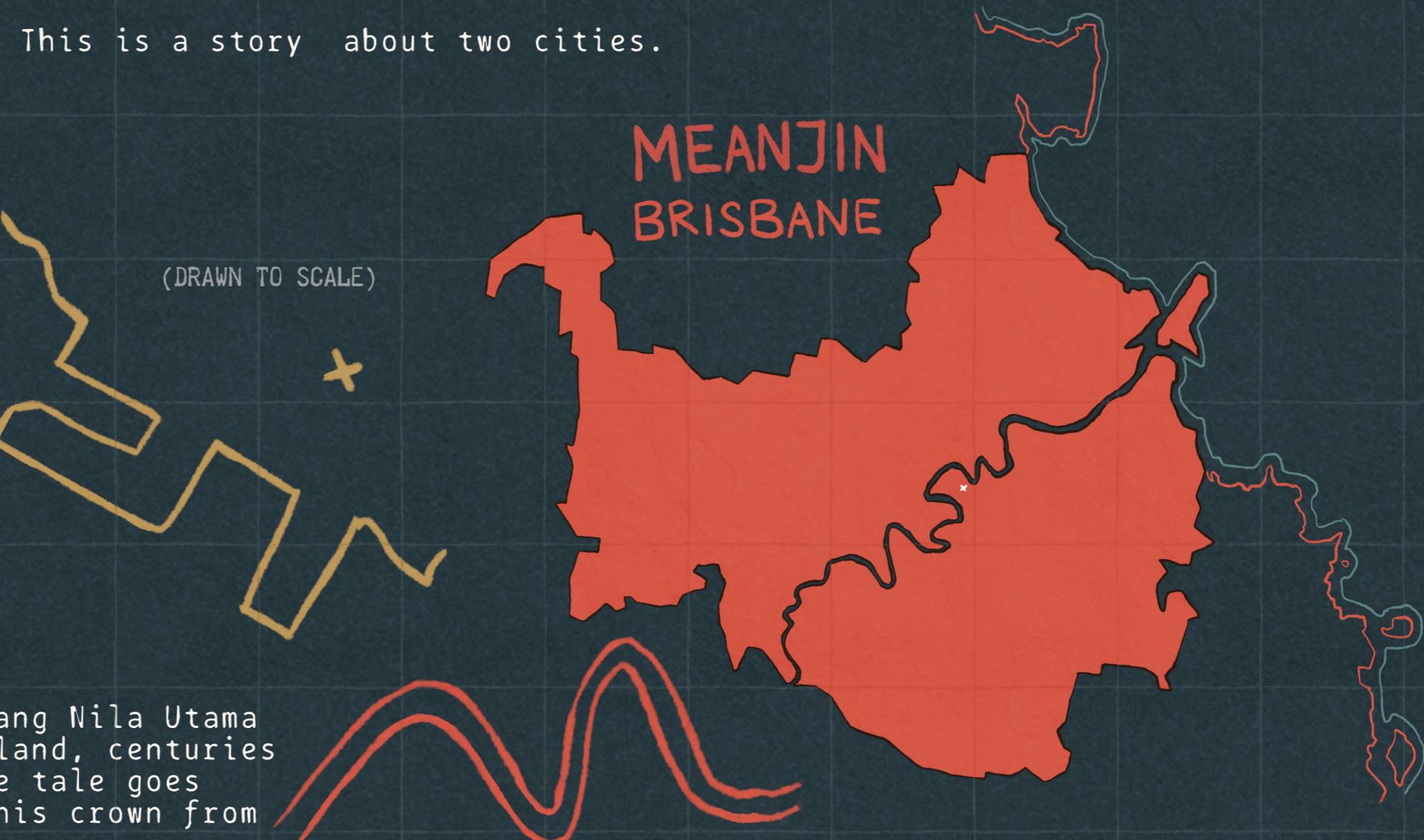
## SINGAPURA सिंहपुर SINGAPORE

Singapore was named for the lion that Sang Nila Utama saw the day he first set foot on the island, centuries before the British colonialists did. The tale goes that during his voyage there, he threw his crown from the ship to calm a storm.

Since time immemorial, the island has lain at the crossroads between Indian and Pacific oceans, growing as its people grew, jetties to wharves, new land raised from the sea.

My parents were among those who came here in search of something better. No doubt they had their own crowns to throw into the sea: that is the fare of starting life over. We lived by that fabled port, where container stacks block the view of the waters.

(DRAWN TO SCALE)



## MEANJIN BRISBANE

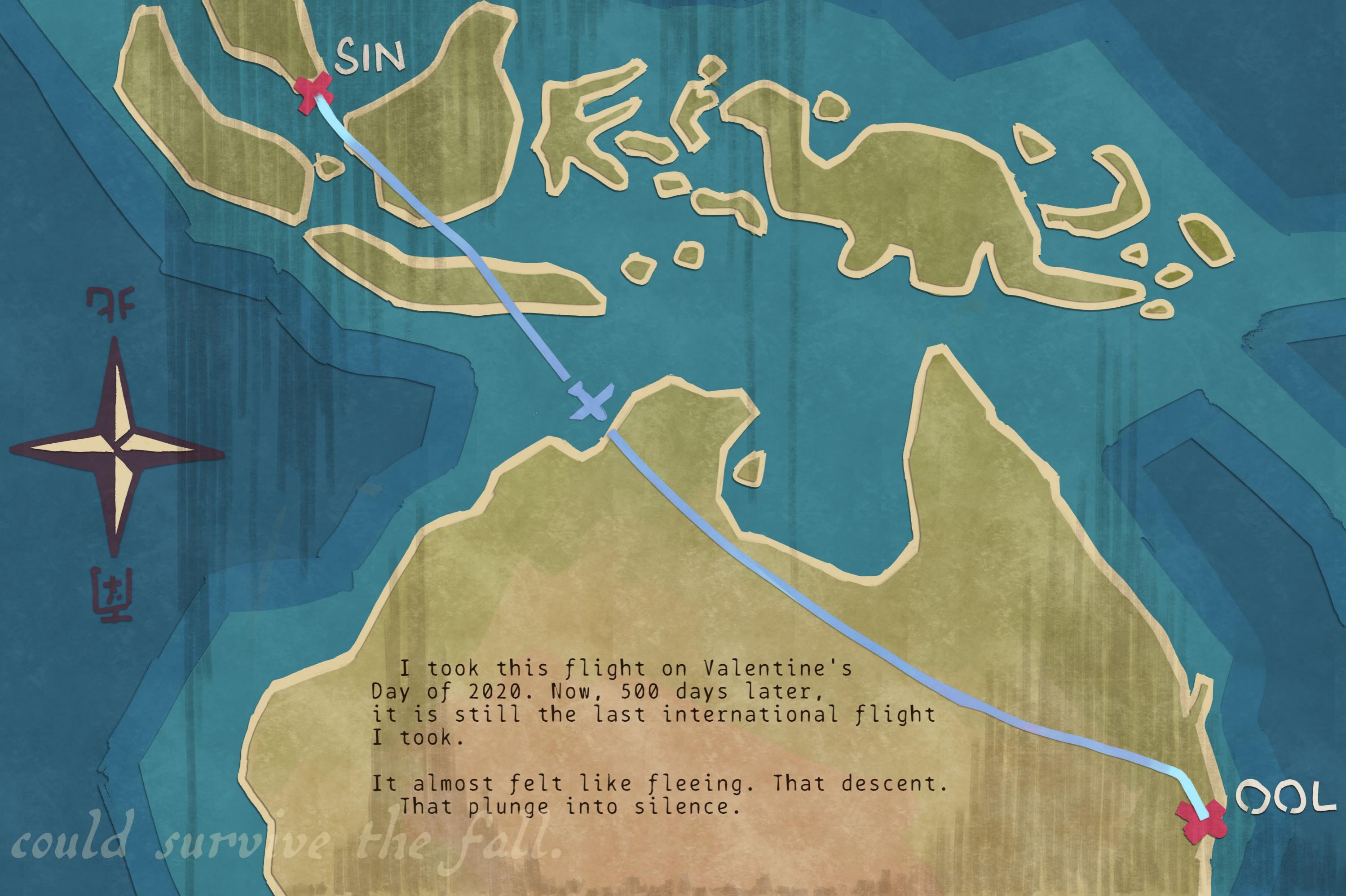
Situated in the lands of the Yugara and Turrbal peoples, the downward-pointing bend of the river is known as Meanjin, a Turrbal word for "spike".

It was colonised by the British in 1824, who called it Brisbane, violently claiming it as a purgatory for their convicts.

Like my parents and their parents, I left home seeking hope and escape both. Like many before me, my internal map of this city began with its riverbends.

*We once thought we could fathom the vastness of the sea from the lap of an island shore. Watching ships tilt*

across the horizon, we laughed knowing nothing



Then, you know how the story goes. The gates slammed shut behind me. If I went home, I would not be allowed to return. I had to choose between keeping my new life and returning to my old.

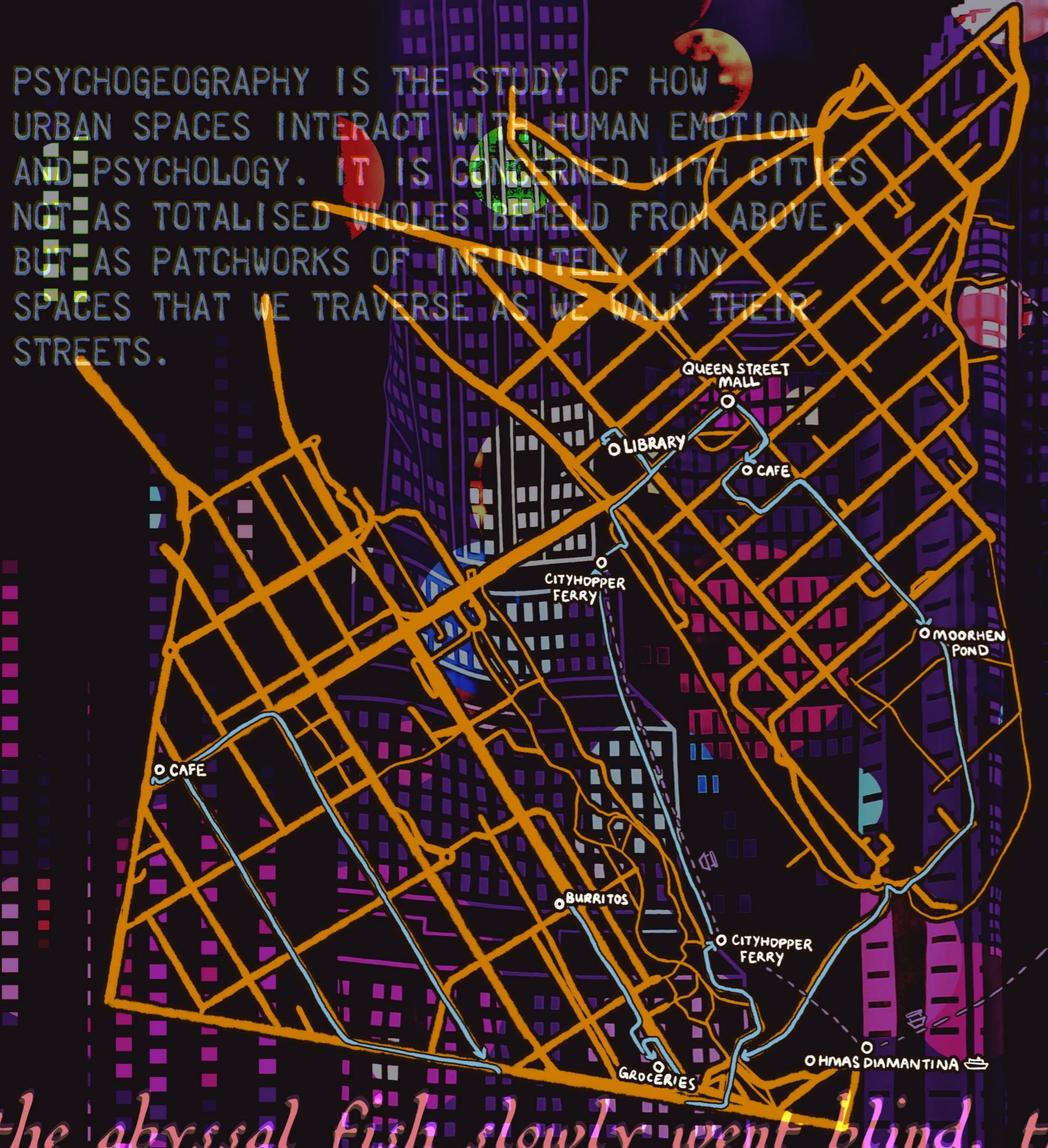


So began  
the year  
I lost contact  
with the sea.

We did not see how, beyond continental margins, submarine canyons channeled secret rivers onto underwater plains, or how



PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY IS THE STUDY OF HOW URBAN SPACES INTERACT WITH HUMAN EMOTION AND PSYCHOLOGY. IT IS CONCERNED WITH CITIES NOT AS TOTALISED WHOLES BEHELD FROM ABOVE, BUT AS PATCHWORKS OF INFINITELY TINY SPACES THAT WE TRAVERSE AS WE WALK THEIR STREETS.



The Brisbane CBD has the postcode 4000, designating it the centre of Queensland. I barely noticed as my life rapidly aligned itself around this new world axis.

It was small, smaller than home, but walkable, in a way home never was: glowing in colours, a lotus on the river at night.

Like I had eaten its petals, I lost every need and want to leave.

*the abyssal fish slowly went blind, their unseen lights speckling the cavernous dark.*

Trapped inland with only the internet  
and my thoughts for company, I wrote.

Tales of journeys and wandering.  
Tales of navigating the unknown.  
Tales of the sea.

On the surface, I felt well  
enough. But something deep  
within me cried out to be heard,  
again and again.

as if my soul felt the absence  
of ocean waters, a stagnant hollow  
where they used to move

with the weight of her shipwrecks.



While I hid, isolated

on this waterless isle



that I learned

to call a home.

Here I chance upon the sparkling clasp of a coral reef

In my dreams I drifted among  
a thousand missing things.  
The birdsong. The pressing  
humidity. The stars.

By the fluke of its position  
upon the equator, Singapore always  
had a vast vantage of space,  
spanning both hemispheres.

In exchange for the heat, we saw  
the Great Bear, the Argo,  
Orion and Centaurus,  
Orihime and Hikoboshi,  
dancing across the sky  
as the earth swung through  
its orbit.

Here, the constellations I know are gone.

It is the surest sign  
that I am far away, so far away  
that the stars have changed.

But here, among bright strangers,  
lies the Southern Cross.

On the school parade square in  
the year 2012, we watched it skim  
the southern horizon like an omen.  
It is here too, pointing silently in  
the same direction it always has.

tracing the chain from one atoll to the next.



To map a place is to know it.  
To map a place is to own it.  
To map a place is to tame it.  
To map a place is to subjugate it.  
To map a place is to render it powerless.

How do I map this distance?  
How do I map this waiting?  
How do I map this?

As summer returned, trips were cancelled. My distance from the sea remained. I found myself lost in the pursuit of reading all that I could find about whales.

*I leapfrog dashed borders, beginning*

I first saw a whale when I was six years old. I have lived by the sea all my life, but it was in that moment, when a humpback whale lifted its tail from the water, that I felt its vastness unfold in me.

EVERY YEAR FROM MAY TO OCTOBER, HUMPBACK WHALES OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE MAKE ONE OF THE LONGEST MIGRATIONS KNOWN IN THE WILD.

HUGGING COASTLINES, THEY SWIM FROM ANTARCTICA TO THE WARMER WATERS OF THE TROPICS, RETURNING YEAR AFTER YEAR TO THE VERY SAME BAYS AND BEACHES WHERE THEY WERE BORN, TO CALVE AND RAISE THEIR OWN YOUNG.

*to contrive an idea of you  
from the contours of these countless coasts.*

It amazed me that they would travel these vast distances, always finding their ways back to the bays of their birth.

Now I'm starting to understand that inexorable pull of home.

It isn't joy or need that brings one back time and again. It's something you can't put words to: the song it sang to you before you knew south from north, before you knew your name.



Sometimes, it comforts me to know  
that scientists have mapped the shapes  
of the continents a hundred million years  
ago. It was an alien world, one where  
the Himalayas, the Andes and the  
Rockies did not exist.

In another million years,  
we, too, will be nothing but imprints  
and bones buried in kilometres of silt  
in a world we do not recognise.

Compared to that, this wait  
is nothing.

ABOUT 100 MILLION YEARS  
AGO, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA WAS  
SUBMERGED BY AN INLAND SEA. FOSSILS  
OF OCEANIC REPTILES HAVE BEEN  
FOUND HERE.

And yet  
I think

A year of yearning  
is much longer than  
an eon of silence

*The geological record says we are five centimetres closer  
every year. In geologic time—perhaps  
if you were a reef and I, an archipelago—we'd meet  
at a faultline in the next eon and crumble together, leaving  
a new continent where we were before.*

Today, we stand knee deep in the shoals,  
losing ships

THIS WAY HOME(?)

Truth is, everything about  
this strange new world  
profoundly terrifies me.

But who wouldn't be  
terrified?

and I feel my body settling, sinking  
deeper into this new city's loam  
and I'm still afraid to let it become

to the horizon between us. Salt sifts  
between our toes.

O SAW A FRIEND'S CONCERT

O BIRTHDAY  
PARTY

OLIVED  
HERE

O DIVULGED MY DEEPEST SECRETS

O CROSSED

O LUNCH WHEN MY DAD VISITED

O PARTICIPATED  
IN A PROTEST

O DEBATED A STRANGER

O BOARDED MY  
FIRST FERRY

O GOT DRUNK

O MADE A REGRETTABLE PURCHASE

O HAD A BREAKDOWN

O GOT OFF A

O STOP EARLY

O OLIVED  
HERE

O ATTENDED MY HOST FAMILY'S CHURCH DINNER

O SPRUNG A BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

O BOUGHT ELECTRONIC PARTS

O PICKED UP A BLANKET

O WROTE A STORY

O GOT CAUGHT IN

O THERAIN

O SAW PLESIOSAUR

O BONES

O D&D

O CRASHED OVERNIGHT

O ON NEW YEAR'S

O HAD A HAIRCUT

O MADE FRIENDS

O OVER CARD GAMES

O PLAYED JENGA

O HAD  
MY FIRST

O GP APPOINTMENT

O OLIVED  
HERE

O EXPLORED TREES

O WATCHED DOGS PLAY

O GOT LOST

O DRANK & TALKED

O TILL 4AM

O GOT WASTED



And I won't be here to see the continents drift.  
The mountains form. The rivers shift around them.

So I must choose someday,  
between one land and another.  
And I don't know how I could give one up.

But  
I know  
and it  
comforts  
me,

that  
time and tide,  
sun and stars,

magnet  
north,

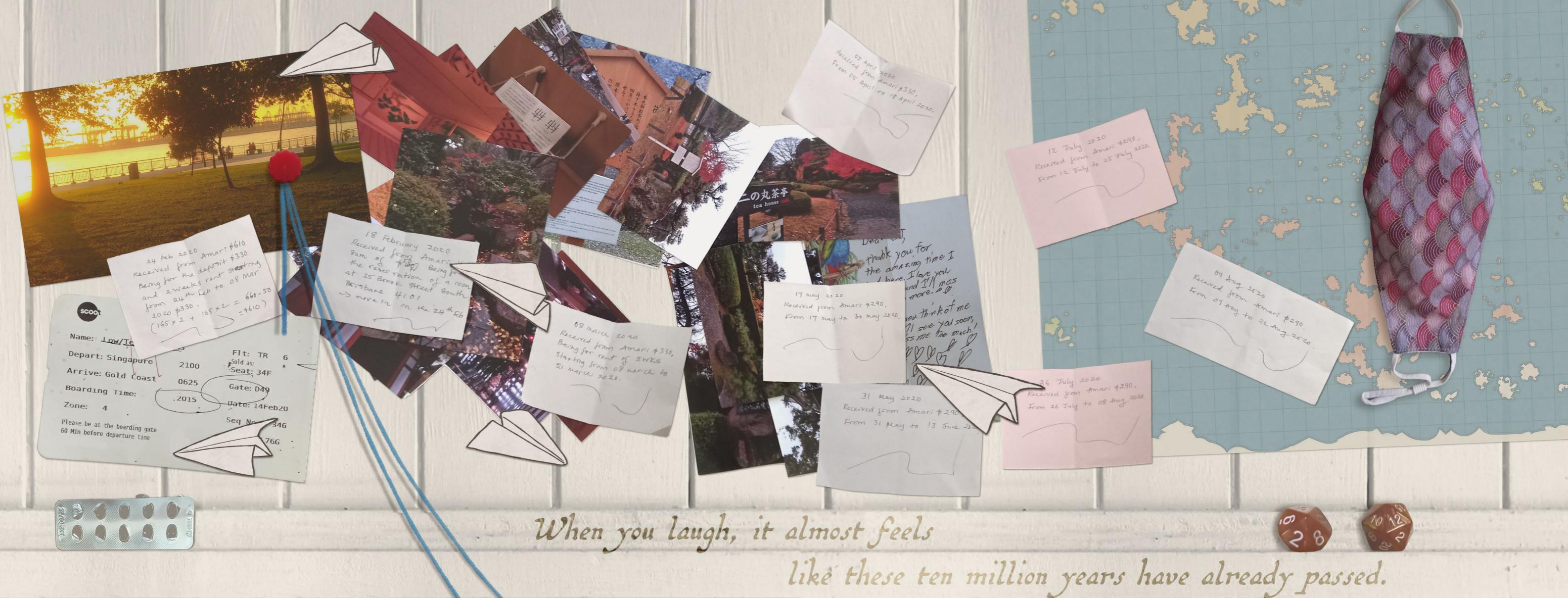
southern  
cross,

labyrinth,  
neon sky,

ancient stone,  
sheltered bay,

will guide my way  
like gravity  
draws a river  
to the sea.

HOME



When you laugh, it almost feels  
like these ten million years have already passed.

