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Those Old Yellow Bricks

"There's no place like home."

My Granda has always had a fascination with the famous escapologist Harry Houdini. I vividly remember sitting on the kitchen floor, tracing the patterns on the carpet with one hand and holding a chocolate piece in the other, while listening to the stories of grand escape and illusion he'd enthusiastically tell me. Houdini was the best in his craft, and of all of his daring escapes my Granda's favourite was his initial 1912 attempt at the Chinese Water Torture Cell. This escape involved Houdini submerging himself upside down into a glass case full of water and then attempt to free himself from the binds at his legs and hands, all in the short period of time before he drowned. To this day I'm unsure what impressed my Granda more: the bravery to face death on a daily basis or the self-control needed to endure some punishment. Both lend themselves to a sort of physical asceticism he must have respected, but there was something more to his fascination and idolisation. My Granda, like many other people his age, must have somehow subconsciously related to the Escapology. His life was, after all, an exercise in escape. Leaving his village, leaving his family and leaving his life behind in the pursuit of prosperity must have been no easy tasks, but the rewards of the life he now lives were seemingly well worth it. His story, to me at least, seems to be a clear example of why escape is both important and worthwhile. This is good news, because now it is my turn.

I can picture myself walking on these streets again in ten years. I look up at the aged buildings and then down to the pavement cluttered with cigarette residue, chewing gum and smashed glass. How would I react? How much would this place have changed? How much would have I changed?

It is not unusual for young people to be fascinated with the idea of escape. Maybe it's because teenage life is inherently traumatic, or maybe it's simply because we're so used to the drive for something better. Regardless, it seems nowadays that life's soundtrack is like a choir of angry chants: a million voices all calling out for freedom. No longer are we satisfied with the glum procession of modern life, instead we look through mechanised screens to an impossible life much better than ours. Then human nature kicks in and we sprint towards it. It's an ideal we seem to be familiar with, but at the end of the day we're all just taking it on blind faith that there's something somewhere better than here. We run, but we never know what we're running to, or what we are running from.

The air is cold, but that only serves to remind me of long walks across the beach in the darkness. The streets are dark and deserted, but I don't miss the swarms of people buzzing in and out of the butchers or the chemists. I appreciate the isolation and I appreciate the empty streets, this is how I remember it.

But what's so wrong with here? Generations of my family have been born, lived, loved, worked and died here. Generations of fishermen who survived off the very heart of the

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place, men who woke up every morning, kissed their wives goodbye and then set sail to live off the sea. And looking back, it's hard not to be ashamed of the lack of parallels between my life and theirs. The hardship, the pain and the sacrifice that they endured are all something that I could never hope to match – but the success and victory they managed to achieve makes sure that retrospect doesn't dilute the worth of their actions. Looking back, it's also hard to tell what exactly the sacrifice was for: to enable me to get out, or to stop me from wanting to leave.

In my mind I relive events that happened while I was committing these very steps all that time ago. I shut my eyes and see myself reaching into my pocket, pulling out my phone, and seeing chapter and verse plastered across the screen. I shut my eyes and see a gallivanting mass of my friends stumbling along the streets in the early hours. I shut my eyes and see myself, staring out to sea, wondering what it'd be like to leave: I would finally have the answer.

But what about everything that I've learned to love here? What happens to the relationships I have with my family and friends when I leave? Everything's going to have to change. All the people that I've grown up with, all of my friends and all of my family I've known in the last seventeen years are going to be pushed to the back of my mind while a crowd of new faces fill in the front. Some people I will take with me, and some people I will leave behind. I suppose that's just one of the challenges of leaving.

*I would mark my improvement. I see myself sitting near the beach, both headphones in, studying *The Who's Quadrophenia* and I would be able to judge whether that had made me a better person. I see myself thinking, or I see myself deciding, and I'd be able to relate the thought process to the result. I see myself, contemplating escape, and I would be thankful I had made the right choice.*

If here is my home, what if I struggle to find somewhere like here again? Human nature shows that you are as much a product of your environment as you are your internal programming, so what if I simply couldn't fit in anywhere else? What if I was rejected? Being a pioneer of the move, with no close family examples of leaving here, there is no safety net. It's a leap of faith, really. It's a leap of faith that I'm not sure I'm ready to take.

And I can remember back to the crossroad: the point where the paths split off.

There's a lot of stigma I feel when the subject of leaving comes up. They will express pride, they will express excitement, but deep down I can tell they worry about what I'll become. But just like with illusionist and escapologist Harry Houdini, there will be both construction and damage in the wake of my escape. The judgement is not what will make me happy in the short run, but what will make me happy in the long run.

To the left is a path to here, the path I've been walking my whole life...

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Deep down I know that the stigma actually comes from me. I can't sense the direction my life is going to take, and that scares me. To stay here, is to live the same foundation of life laid down by my ancestors.

...and to the right is another. It leads into a fog, and the floor is littered with those old yellow bricks.

All the people I've come to know, and all the people I've come to love, whatever their opinion on what I do, will stay with me through the next transitional part of my life.

I make my choice. The curb of the path introduces feet, as standing on either side of the path are all the people I've ever loved. All of a sudden my journey seems more familiar, as if I'm simply walking down another hallway.

None of us know what lies ahead. I could die in the next few minutes, or I could live until I'm one hundred and five years old. The only thing certain is the power of my effort. This is a crossroads in my life, and I feel as if it's my duty to break the chain for not only my sake, but for the sake of the future of my family. But the values of here will always stay with me, and even if I am a million miles away, I will never leave in the truest sense, and that is no choice. Here will always be home.

And as I start to walk, I am comforted. Not only by the crowd of smiling faces to my left and to my right, but by those old yellow bricks at my feet.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

*Where ever this path may take me, the old yellow bricks will always remind me where I am to end up.
Home.*