Hop Aboard! The Blessing of a Great Escape

O Q. Rauf, Pause for Thought on the BBC Breakfast Show (Aired 30th July 2025)

Anyone who knows me will know that embarking on my very own versions of The Great Escape is the perpetual ambition of my life.

I don't mean the kind of escape that involves digging my way out of the clutches of Nazi forces whilst looking as cool as Steve McQueen in a leather jacket.

I mean acting on an endless desire to escape from works and deadlines by booking A Ticket to Anywhere – the farther away, the better!

This perpetual form of restless leg syndrome is one which took root in me long before I knew legs could even have syndromes.

And I believe it all started with a single book, gifted to me by my childhood's librarian: Mrs Dixon.

Mrs Dixon was akin to a powerful queen in my child's eye, granting me stamped access to adventures, countries, worlds and universes through the domain of the printed page – like passports gifted on borrowed time – every Friday when Mum would take me to the library.

On the Friday of my tenth birthday however, Mrs Dixon finished stamping my chosen books, and suddenly handed me a beautifully wrapped package.

I hungrily opened it up to find the cover of a book depicting a steam train, and three children waving at it.

E. Nesbit's masterpiece, *The Railway Children* was consumed by me within three nights, and whilst Bobby, Phyllis and Peter became firm lifelong friends, the story opened my eyes to the magical realm of trains too.

These giant machines of smoke and iron that carried souls to lands afar, soon became the stuff of my travel dreams.

Dreams that led me to embark on the bullet trains of Japan, the steam trains of Scotland, the Eurotunnel to the refugee camps, and as yet unrealised dreams of the Khyber Railway…

The Qu'ran reminds me that 'It is God who enables you to travel by land and sea…sail on…and rejoice...'

Whilst in *The Railway Children*, Mother tells Peter, 'Don't you think it's rather nice to think that we're in a book God is writing?'

Be they high speed or delayed, real or in a book, a universe of trains continue to connect people and stories on tracks both new and old.

And whilst I go on escaping my own life's story by boarding these great wonders of creation, I do so knowing that to step on a train is to step into a far greater tale, written by a far greater hand.