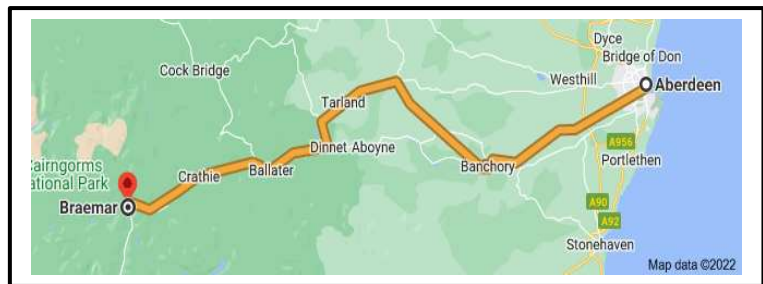




## *The man from Heaven Lake*

I was into my thirties by the time I travelled to Scotland in search of a man whom to that point I had never met: my father! My quest turned out to be fruitless ... records informed me he had succumbed to cancer the previous year.

The day after this revelation bore down on my soul, I took a bus up the Dee Valley, past Balmoral, to the small town of Braemar. It was a good day to get thoughts back in order: an Autumn Day with a clear blue-sky to enhance magnificent surroundings.



I sat near the single access door, at the front of the bus. Locals clambered up and down



the steps, chatting with the driver as if he was one of their extended family. They carried shopping bags, the more elderly walking sticks to help negotiate the steps, all speaking a broad Scottish dialect; so broad in fact that I could hardly understand what was being said. I enjoyed this immensely; it was as if I was in some non-English speaking land.



My Braemar stay included strolling around the small town, then late lunch – *Haggis and a local ale* – before it came time to reconnect with the bus back to Aberdeen. On the return journey I struck up a conversation with a young rock climber, who sat across the aisle. As day turned to night our discussion became more intense. I desperately needed someone to talk to, and he happened to be the nearest and most likely victim.

From the start this guy was so understanding, and as our discussion progressed, he began to give me snippets of heartfelt advice. There was an instant rapport between us. It almost seemed our time together was designed to guide me across some of the choppiest waters in my life ... back to dryland.

It transpired the rock climber had just finished reading the book *From Heaven Lake*, by *Vikram Seth*. He took time to explain the story: of the brilliant author living in China and travelling overland, through Nepal, back to India. At the end of it all he gave me the book, suggesting it would be good for me to read, at that juncture in my life. And of course, he was right; the tale was so full of obstacles and how to overcome them, it had an incredible resonance to my personal situation and gave me courage to move on. It was the perfect piece of writing for me.



We exchanged contacts, but unfortunately, I never saw him again. It was almost as if it was meant to be; as if this fellow (I can't even recall his name) had been parachuted in to deliver the book: a one-off rescue mission to help me deal with a difficult period of my life. And just like the swimmer a decade or so before - who saved me from the surf off an Australian beach, before checking my pulse and disappearing into the distance - I will be forever grateful to *The Man from Heaven Lake*, for just simply being there in the right place at the right time, to help put me and my crumpled mind back on track.

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