**My Bowland – Helen Shaw.**

The beck roars through the night, sweeping before it the alder leaves and twigs from the ash trees, pushing the rushes flat. I lie awake, the darkness absolute, hearing the wild night exercising the trees in the wood, rain slashing the windows, and I am safe inside my Bowland sanctuary.

Above and around the huddled stone house the fells stand firm, solid, sheltering. Only on their tops does the wind tear the breath away, the squelchy peat sponging up the rain to squeeze out again in rich brown liquid and drown an unwary step. A trickle from the mosses drips out and down, coursing with others until they reach the beck, rushing headlong down the clough to form and join the river below.

In the morning, all is quiet. As I slept the west wind shepherded the clouds east and the noisy beck subsided as quickly as it rose. It has a happier, less urgent note now, the water clear, and as I look out a bird lands on the stones and bobs, bobs bobs its white chest as if in a dance with the water. It’s a dipper, searching out its breakfast.

On the bank behind the house the new lambs are daring to discover their world now that the storm has passed. The farmer will be by soon to check that no tiny body was snatched by the raging water in the night. If the weather is cold and wet the lambs may be given colourful little raincoats to wear: strange to see the bright pink dots chasing about on the green terraces above the beck.

A couple of walkers pass the house, enjoying the pale spring sun that has now appeared. Only a few pass this way, through our secret valley, for although the narrow road leads up over the tops to the towns beyond this is still a hidden place, to be discovered and loved by those who take the time to stop and look and listen. There is a particular point on the top of a hill when the little valley is finally revealed and I know I am coming home, dropping steeply, past the wood, over the beck, down the track, greeted only by the silence, or the sheep.

Just three of us share this quiet valley - on either side of our house but sufficiently distant that we cannot see or hear each other, there are two farms. **We** are ‘off come’d uns’, and always will be, but after more than a decade we are just about accepted as belonging, I think. We support each other, when needed, during illness, floods, snow, and tragedy. We laugh together at the antics of the lambs, admire the genius of the working sheepdogs, and sometimes, during a “gather” when I get the chance to help with shepherding duties, I feel at one with the life and the land of this most special of places.

We are our own tight community, yet I know that across Bowland the people in the remote valleys are the same.

And for those visitors who come to walk or cycle or simply sit and stare, the fells wait with a quiet welcome.

And no matter where I go in the future this place will be held forever my heart; a sanctuary, my Bowland.