

The man who lost a sheep and found a tune

A poem relating to *bollan bane* by Annie Kissack

What is the truth of a tune you find on a mountain?
Three attempts to stick to his bow,
to enter the rough surface of his fingers, get them shifting.
But he nearly has it now.
An odd lilting thing, a wanderer, no centre to it.
He lifts the fiddle to his chin,
shuts his eyes, imagines clambering cloudy tops,
damp soil seeping into boots,
the hard jab of stone in his back
from the wall against which he'd laid
out of sight but not of earshot.
Themselves knew of course ...
that he'd be back for more.

So here he is pacing round the kitchen
to get at its essence again.
And is it the goading of the smug-faced clock
that drives his feet to tread such curious pathways,
or the blood rhythms of the restless?
He summons a long holding note,
the steady one, tries to ignore for now
its skittish little companions,
shaking their seed heads in the breeze,
thin voices hissing, *Thief, thief!*
Or is that his fear of getting it wrong?

Deep breath. A bold bow hand. A hill.
The far sea calm and showing lights.
Yellow dusk, with the dog darting up and down
and himself skirting heather dub and grey rock
till he comes to a sudden drop like a waterfall
where the deep notes drone:
Bollan Bane, Bollan Bane, Bollan Bane.

Something like that, he says
to the rosy bowl and the herring crock,
his back to the press of mocking faces
up against the glass.