Upon Hearing Amy Winehouse at St. James’ Church in Dingle

By Partridge Boswell

Grief without song could be any stone chapel built of loss packed with aging villagers lulled reticent as rue by a rote bell’s tongue, hemmed by iron gates and a yew tree lurking mirthlessly beside a burial ground where moss-patinaed saints and earth angels gather round relic icons of threadbare hand-me-down faith. You sit/kneel/stand on your misericord, an eaten Job in the organ belly’s drone, sorting your parents’ hoarded aggregate—clothes pawn and charity shops won’t take, sewing kits, boxes of old Polaroids of anonymous sepia-people you wouldn’t be here without, file drawers of past taxes, uniforms from the war, wedding dress, unworn shoes unfit for a holy soul…

—and that’s just the tip, to say nil of unspeakable sins in attic and basement. Macular shorebirds scan whitecaps for questions the mind’s eye can alight: dim synapse of a candlelit nave, musty kneelers, a deacon’s chair from Suriname. Grief without song is wasted pain. According to patron James, faith in works—in real acts of creation—amplifies our part in salvation’s soundtrack louder than wafers, wine or words of mumbled expiation dissolved on penitent tongues. In your rusted anechoic husk, your veins blood-thrum a rushing river-hymn, an electric fence of nerves ticking in your cerebellum—until silence clears its throat…and from her first chthonic tremolo it comes as no shock: how from Galway to Summerhill churches are being repurposed as concert halls by clergy who swear love’s lost call note still lingers, runic under the moored murmur of all those services you sat unmoved through, the supernal flatulence of organ bellows at last revised in fidelity rare as a black velvet angel with spindly legs and mental hair, her aqueous blues beguiling as the B-side of prayer beside an ocean we couldn’t hear but always knew was there.