



On Earth As It Is

2011

A Prayer for Babe

Aaron Burch

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Recommended Citation

Burch, Aaron, "A Prayer for Babe" (2011). *On Earth As It Is*. 24.
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on earth as it is

prayer as story, story as prayer

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A Prayer for Babe

Aaron Burch

*"There were giants on the earth in those days."
—Genesis 6:4*

My memory had always been fuzzy. Dull. Furry? For a long time – years; miles, maybe – I knew not what to do with it, how to manage. I tried cleaning it, petting it, running my fingers through the fur. Attempts at acceptance, at making peace with. Tried squinting my eyes, tried glasses, used mirrors.

And then, roaming the roads as any and every other days, I found this, some kind of sharpener. Had I found it by accident, coincidence? Did you leave it for me; was it there that day, special, or had it been there always, waiting for me to find? I wouldn't have known what it was, what its purpose, had it not looked so familiar. Had it not sparked something in my memory that added a weight to my hands, pulled at the muscles up and through my arms, as I recalled things I hadn't known I'd lost.

What I recalled: an axe. The heft of it in my arms, weightier even than my memory. And sharpening it on this tool that now lay ahead of me. And walking the woods with it, great strides taking me from one side to the other and back. And sharpening again. Sharpening both sides so meticulously that I could have shaved the taste buds from my own tongue. Or even hers. Were I so inclined. Were I so uncareful, so absent of sense.

For ____ days thereafter, I've walked the woods, talking aloud to myself, to the forest. Asking: father, where to next? Asking: Father, what now? Asking: Father, why? Asking: Father?

What else I recalled: a companion. A purpose.

What else: A swinging motion. A repetition. A chopping.

What else: A burden. A loneliness. A sadness.

What I can not recall, or have trouble making clear to myself A distinction between the three: burden, loneliness, sadness. Whether or not they are connected, whether or not they may be one in the same.

Whether I avoid towns and people without realizing it or they avoid me, I seldom see anyone else. When I do, I only want to ask questions but they never have answers. Do they no know or are they withholding? Is there a difference? Does it matter? All they will give me are stories, stories they say are about me, though they never sound familiar. Have I forgotten them or are the stories wrong? Is there a difference?

What else I recall: The weight of the sadness, on and in my shoulders, my hands, in the tool I carried, below and behind me.

What else I did not: The mass. The difference between mass and weight.

So I walk. I keep moving, retracing my steps, finding new ones. Show me where to go next? Tell me? Give me new clues to find, to stumble upon, to trigger old memories that may or may not be real. More people with more stories about me so I may continue trying to piece myself together.

What else?

Continue.

Asking:

Aaron Burch is the author of *How to Predict the Weather*, and recent stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Barrelhouse*, *New York Tyrant*, and *Monkeybicycle*. He edits *Hobart*: another literary journal.

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