

the short brutish life of Samantha Smith as control

That summer we went into the woods w/shovels, a few feet of twine. We picked the spot mnemonically—a lichen-stained boulder, a surge of poison sumac, the two birch saplings thin & ductile.

I said, “I could be the first person ever to stand right here.” It was early afternoon, the sun slipping through the canopy in long strips.

Then we began.

Like an archer you pulled one of the saplings toward the earth—the young wood bowing smoothly, & I held it in my arms while you lashed it to the other. “This will be my roof,” I said.

We spent that afternoon leveling the ground, transplanting smaller things w/the intention of training them to be walls, to grow up & over. “Next summer I will have a house,” I said, & we finally stepped back and looked.

That night on the TV news a girl my age met the Soviet premier. Three summers later she was dead.

This is a story of childhood, of a girl & her mother playing in the forest. This is a story of something they built & promptly forgot. This is the story of an instance.

Last winter I walked into the woods to look for that arch we strapped together. But there was nothing, just the boulder capped w/snow.

& the moral?

Imagination? An appreciation for the earth? How I too could be dead, my small body burned in that military plane filled w/babies? Or is it grafting? The accumulation of instances? Or is it the memory of a single afternoon? Of not taking anything for granted?