

Above the Treeline

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I stared so long at the shadows of cypress knees and crape myrtles that the conifers that cooled the summer air were but towering monuments in comparison to my local biome. I spent so many hours watching films set in the cool forests of England, both old and new, wishing for a bit of respite in a lake or winding river flanked by impressive mountains. In those dreams I could kayak, meandering around the bends of a river swiftly flowing towards the Atlantic Ocean. I was ashamed, for a time, of sawgrass, of thick stalks of St. Augustine grass that covered our yard as if it were the paragon of all undergrowth. Up north in New England, grass was thinner, provided less coverage of the soil, and proved far less comfortable for sitting. I admonished myself for thinking less of swampy Florida, of the love bugs and the cicadas, of the alligators lounging on the banks of most bodies of water. These ecosystems were my summer camp, an education in percolation and the Florida aquifer, of the times when people lived in this hot, muggy state without air conditioning. I traced palm fronds and hid in piles of pine needles, making nests in playgrounds until getting poked by a pinecone or two in the heap. Every language I speak holds its signs and signifiers, the quintessential house and Carolina blue sky, and in my mind, trees are pines, birds are red cardinals singing the morning, and time is measured in hurricanes and afternoon thunderstorms. Now that I am gone, I dare not replace these words in my vocabulary, I dare not move my gaze from beyond the tree line.