

FAMILIES AMONG US
STORIES
BLAKE KIMZEY



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A Family Among Us

Four of them, a family, crawled naked from the sea clutching plastic suitcases. Like a brass section in an orchestra they drew breath into their lungs for the first time in days, months, years, decades. They were ageless, the mother and father, boy and girl. Slowly, the gills on their necks flattened and disappeared into skin, leaving only faint watermarks that suggested long forgotten scars or birthmarks. It hurt at first, their lungs rising and falling, rising and falling.

The decision to leave the sea was permanent, a unanimous vote to abandon the fuselage that had been their home, for how many years they could not count. On shore, among the smooth rocks and wet driftwood, they dressed. They stood on uncertain legs. Out of the water their arms seemed to move too fast, cutting through the air without resistance. For the first time the children heard waves crashing, birds overhead, and felt the warmth of the sun on their bare skin. A multitude of smells swirled about the children, and they smiled and dripped dry for the first time in memory.

The mother helped her daughter fasten a training bra and select a matching outfit from her suitcase. The father showed his boy how

to button a shirt, how to be precise with his small hands and fingers so that he could make bunny ears with the shoelaces. Their clothes came from the 1970s and suggested disco, roller skates, horizontal stripes, primary colors, and brown corduroy. They had been underwater for some time, and emerged like lost luggage from a downed PAN-AM flight.

It was days, maybe weeks, before they spoke. They stayed in the forest, close to the shoreline. They returned to the water for food, and took turns gathering wood a short distance from camp. At night they huddled by a fire where they taught themselves coordination, and dredged their minds for language, parts of speech, agreement. The father cleared his voice over and over, as if to ease his chords into waking life. The mother started to hum, suggesting a beautiful voice, light and airy. For years they had been underwater, using only eye movement and waterlogged faces to suggest emotion or directions. The family had created shorthand in the fluid world of the sea and was trying to begin anew on land.

Nightfall was easier on the eyes and soothing to their souls. The murkiness of the woods at night made them feel at home. Muted sounds, animals crying in the distance comforted them. Sunrise was startling, a brutal start to each morning. The clarity of daytime was difficult to comprehend, and the waking hours meant work of all kinds, collective re-schooling on everything they had left behind when they fell from the air those many years ago into the sea.

This new life wasn't as easy as the father and mother thought it would be. The boy had nightmares, and would scream in his sleep, scared of arboreal silhouettes and their vertical push skyward. Gravity provided no comfort, and weighed on them all. The daughter was the first to refuse her clothes. First her bra, then her pants, and within the week she was naked and running from the woods to the water as soon as she was allowed. She refused to speak, and used



Photo: Danielle Huey Kimzey

Blake Kimzey grew up in small-town Texas. He is a graduate of the MFA Programs In Writing at UC Irvine. Blake is the recipient of a generous 2013 Emerging Writer Grant from The Elizabeth George Foundation. His work has been broadcast on NPR and published by *Tin House*, *Five Chapters*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Short Fiction*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Lifted Brow*, *PANK*, *Juked*, *Keyhole*, *Monkeybicycle*, and *Surreal South '13*, among others. Blake is currently writing his first novel, and lives in Dallas with his wife and two children.