

A black and white portrait of Sarah Kain Gutowski, a woman with shoulder-length blonde hair, wearing a dark top. She has tattoos on both shoulders and is looking slightly to the left of the camera. The background is dark.

# MEDIA KIT

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2024

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Author //  
Teaching Artist

SARAH KAIN  
GUTOWSKI

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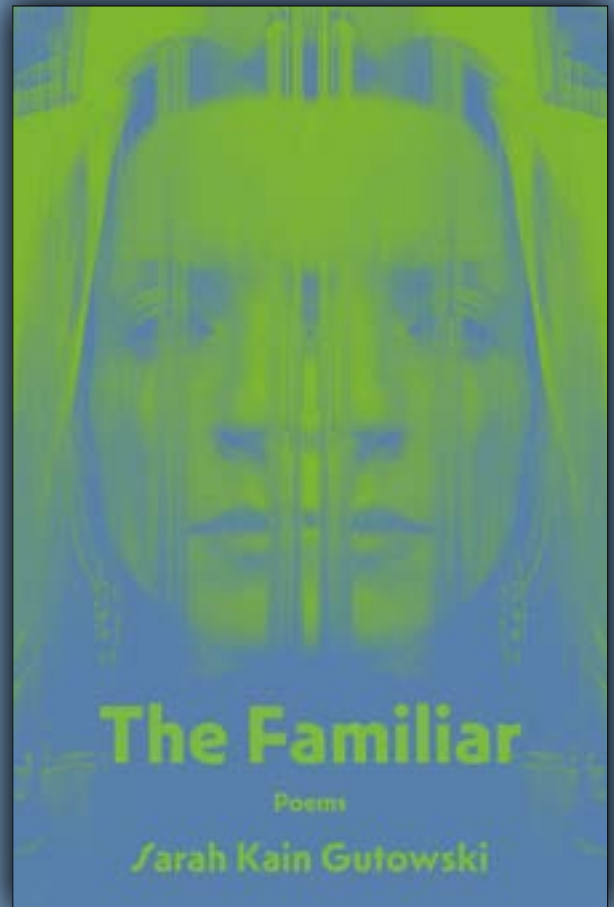
# THE FAMILIAR

Sarah Kain Gutowski

***"The feminists lied, she tells me.  
They said we could do everything /  
we wanted. Anything, I correct her."***

A book-length narrative in poems, *The Familiar* explores female mid-life existential crisis through two characters: the Ordinary Self and the Extraordinary Self. A true homebody, satisfied with routine and the comforts of domesticity, the Ordinary Self wakes one day to find that while she's been sleeping—for months? for years?—the Extraordinary Self has wreaked havoc in a blind, desperate attempt to accomplish something—anything—truly great. As the Ordinary Self works to reestablish harmony and order within the household, the Extraordinary Self must come to terms with her failure to meet both the ambitions

of her youth and the standards that society has set for her as a mother, as a colleague, and as a spouse. Fabulist and absurdist, *The Familiar* features a mix of high and low language, philosophy, and pop culture while exploring the effects of second and third-wave feminism. It's a book for anyone who's vacillated between dreams, desires, and ambition on the one hand, and on the other a deeply ingrained need for stability and calm. It's a book for anyone who may be approaching or going through mid-life and thinking, "Oh no. What have I done?"



**Title:** *The Familiar*

**Author:** Sarah Kain Gutowski

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(Texas Review Press)

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**"Gutowski's poems are  
breathtakingly smart —  
controlled, precise and  
exquisite as diamonds — and  
yet they vibrate dangerously  
from within, as if anticipating,  
as she writes in one poem,  
"so much broken glass."**

— Amber Sparks,  
author of

*And I Do Not Forgive You*

# PRAISE FOR *THE FAMILIAR*

"How well I know these forms of self-splitting, of self-reproach, of taking an endless self-inventory that only ever leads to recrimination and concern. I always think that I'm the only one who plays both parts in my head as I wonder why I'm not better, smarter, kinder, humbler, more generous—or simply put—why it feels like I'm never enough. I know I'm not the only one who will be grateful for Sarah Kain Gutowski's *The Familiar*. I know I'm not the only one who will feel less alone after reading these poems. I wish I could learn the lessons of wholeness this collection points the way towards, though I know I won't. But then again, I just might."

— Jason Schneiderman, author of *Hold Me Tight*

Sarah Kain Gutowski's richly-detailed *The Familiar* is divided into selves: the ordinary and extraordinary. With ruthless scrutiny, Gutowski makes the reader aware of the enormous, invisible labor of women and its attendant exhaustion. The ordinary self holds the world together and the extraordinary self contains desire and ambition — desires that are almost impossible in the world of familial responsibility. Yet, in the end, the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary is not so clear. Gutowski leads the reader to an unexpected liberation that made me laugh out loud, a rare pleasure in poetry. *The Familiar* is brilliant, witty, and unafraid to relentlessly question the sacred territory of family responsibility.

— Jessica Cuello, author of *Liar* and *Yours, Creature*

"In *The Familiar*, Sarah Kain Gutowski takes the fragmentation of self to a whole new level. This fabulist poetic narrative of midlife crisis pits the Ordinary Self against the Extraordinary Self—one attuned to the daily mundanities of housekeeping and motherhood, the other hysterical with ambition and adventure—as warring factions of identity. "We all house within our skin and brains," Gutowski writes, "another self or two, whole persons devoted to one aspect/ of twenty-first century life." And it's not too long before "shit hits the fan." It's all here: domestic life, travel, sex, even attempted murder. Both deeply analytical and a wild ride, both elevated in lyric language and peppered with lowbrow quips, *The Familiar* resists parable and acknowledges the inevitably multifaceted nature of selfhood, what is expected of women, and what women expect of themselves. Fierce. Vulnerable. Entertaining.

— Cynthia Marie Hoffman, author of *Exploding Head*

# PRAISE FOR *THE FAMILIAR*

"Sarah Gutowski's *The Familiar* exists as part haunting, part conjuration, and part poetic experiment in which the intricacies and intimacies of a poet's intertwined selves are revealed in triplicate. Thank heavens, given such a daunting task, that the poet's "inevitable self" possesses an existential wit and fortitude; these stanzas exude the grit of a "Sartrean grandmother," who supplants ego, and shadows this intriguing conceit, where extra and ordinary alternately lift off and land—at home in New York, inconspicuous in London, or even spontaneously in Italy. More than navigating shades of chaos and order, *The Familiar* is that rare collection that meta-captures the trajectories and disparate psyches necessary to the poetic mind. And these poems ordinarily feature extraordinary endings! Readers, you may just glimpse your selves' frugal, unreasonable, and even indomitable sheen in these dexterous tercets, where we're lucky enough to be surprised by ourselves, by the audacity of azaleas, by blandness (which is truly camouflage!), and by the wonders of the ordinary and everyday that keep us alive.

— Matt Schumacher, Managing Editor of *Phantom Drift: A Journal of New Fabulism*  
a

# PRAISE FOR SARAH KAIN GUTOWSKI

"Gutowski looks unflinchingly at the animal part of ourselves — our potential for harm — that we often refuse to acknowledge."

— *Tahoma Literary Review*

"The talent of Gutowski is demonstrated in her ability to transform storytelling from an exterior to an interior phenomena."

— Amelia Martens, author of *The Spoons in the Grass are There To Dig a Moat*

"What matters is this: Sarah Kain Gutowski has a voice in American poetry. It's a unique, finely tuned voice that does not rely on effects, and resonates with music that is unquestionably hers. She writes about being a woman, a mother, a lover, in ways that avoid all the common pitfalls of gender writing, of political angles, and the studied obfuscation of the prevailing style..."

— Stephanos Papadopoulos, author of *The Black Sea*

# Author Biographies

## Long (273 words)

Sarah Kain Gutowski (she/her) is the author of *The Familiar* (forthcoming 2024) and *Fabulous Beast: Poems*, which was a runner-up for the 2018 X.J. Kennedy Prize, a 2019 Foreword INDIES Finalist, and winner of the 14th annual National Indies Excellence Award for Poetry. With interdisciplinary artist Meredith Starr, she is co-creator of *Every Second Feels Like Theft*, a conversation in cyanotypes and poems, and *It's All Too Much*, a limited edition audio project.

Her poetry has appeared in various print and online journals, including *The Threepenny Review*, *So To Speak: A Feminist Journal of Language and Art*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Verse Daily*, and *The Southern Review*. Her criticism has been published by *Colorado Review*, *Calyx: A Journal of Art and Literature by Women*, and the *New York Journal of Books*.

She holds an MFA in poetry from New York University and a BA in English and Mass Communications from James Madison University. Post-graduate school, she has attended the Bread Loaf Writers Conference in Sicily, Western Michigan University's Prague Summer Program, and the Southampton Writers Conference Script Development Lab. She holds an MFA in poetry from New York University and a BA in English and Mass Communications from James Madison University. In 2022, she was awarded an artist's residency at Stiwdio Maelor in Corris, Wales.

She's taught poetry and mixed genre writing workshops at New York University and for Stony Brook University's MFA in Creative Writing and Literature Program. She is a full-time, tenured Professor of English at Suffolk County Community College.

She lives on the south shore of Long Island with her husband and their circus of children and dogs.

## Short (100 words)

Sarah Kain Gutowski is the author of two books, *The Familiar* (forthcoming) and *Fabulous Beast: Poems*, winner of the 14th annual National Indies Excellence Award for Poetry. With interdisciplinary artist Meredith Starr, she is co-creator of *Every Second Feels Like Theft*, a conversation in cyanotypes and poetry, and *It's All Too Much*, a limited edition audio project. Her poems have appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *The Southern Review*, and her criticism has been published by *Colorado Review*, *Calyx: A Journal of Art and Literature by Women*, and the *New York Journal of Books*.

## Brief (50 words)

Sarah Kain Gutowski is the author of two books of poetry, *The Familiar* (forthcoming) and *Fabulous Beast: Poems*. With interdisciplinary artist Meredith Starr, she is co-creator of *Every Second Feels Like Theft*, a conversation in cyanotypes and poems, and *It's All Too Much*, a limited edition podcast and art project.

## Author Photos



**All author photos can be downloaded for media use:**

<https://sarahkaingutowski.wixsite.com/sarah-kain-gutowski/the-familiar#author-photos>

# Q & A

## ***The Familiar* is about mid-life crisis, and specifically female mid-life crisis. What prompted you to write about this topic?**

About four or five years ago, just after turning 40, my life began to feel like it was coming apart at the seams. I began to see how my ambition had worn all the other parts thin. Our house—which we'd been living in for over a decade—showed signs of wear and neglect: cluttered rooms, major appliances failing or in disrepair, paint on the walls chipped or faded or marked. My children were more independent than ever but also relied and depended upon me in new, complex ways (mostly emotional—teens are so much more work than toddlers). Even my relationship with my husband, which has always felt like my easiest relationship and also my most nurturing, became more difficult to navigate.

I think the most startling part was that for all of my ambition, for all of those attempts to *\*be\** something or *\*do\** something in my career, how little I had to show for it – apart from a lot of chaos and damage. It was frightening to realize, but it also made me angry. And for the most part, angry at myself. I needed a way to process that anger, so I began to write. And as I wrote, the anger melted away and I began to have fun – poking fun at myself, at the myths I grew believing, at the systems and institutions I worked inside (and that subtly and not-so-subtly worked against me).

## **Your poems investigate disillusionment and a lost sense of self, and yet they embrace humor, too, and often at the expense of the speaker. Can you talk about your decision to use self-deprecating humor, as well as pop culture references and informal language like slang, in poetry?**

If mid-life does anything, it humbles you and makes you take yourself less seriously. To some extent, that spilled over into the work. I stopped being as precious about my word choice—not less finicky (I could still agonize for days over the “right” word in a line), but less concerned with whether or not it felt smart enough, unique enough, poetic enough. I wrote from a language of my body—which was (and still is) betraying me—and from a language of my psyche, which is a wierd amalgamation of academic jargon, my adopted vernacular from Long Island, my deep and abiding love of profanity, and my sense of the ridiculous (or perhaps, just my genuine ridiculousness). *The Familiar* is a work of fiction, written with poetry, but I wanted that fiction and poetry to reflect my experience genuinely, which means it had to sound, for better or for worse, like me. Like all parts of me.



# Q & A (continued)

## How is this book different from your first collection of poems, *Fabulous Beast*?

Much of *Fabulous Beast* was written post-partum, and those poems focus on an experience of motherhood, leaving girlhood, and becoming a partner in a shared life. It was written at a different point, a different *decade*, in my life—and it shows. The voices of that book are very different than the voices in this new one.

*Fabulous Beast* feels, to me, like water rising behind a dam. Something lurks there, threatens to spill over, but never quite does. Possibly because I was also exploring the forms of fable, fairy tale and myth with that book, and so my experience with motherhood and love and life were being expressed far more obliquely.

The tone of *The Familiar* is far less veiled or difficult to pin down. I think it's irreverent, brash, full of rage, full of sorrow, and far more direct—and also far more appreciative of the comedy/tragedy binary that so often happens in life. Even though I believe its philosophical bent is a little more grim than *Fabulous Beast*, it's far more likely to make you laugh.

## Where did you come up with the idea for your characters, the **Extraordinary Self** and the **Ordinary Self**?

I've often felt like I've had two careers, that of writing teacher and that of writer (which honestly don't often go together as well as one would hope), but as I entered mid-life I felt like I also had two selves—one that was setting metaphorical fires and another that was putting them out. I saw that career-focused part of me as the part that wanted to be extraordinary, to do something exceptional, something outside of routine and the everyday; but I also felt acutely the part of me that was satisfied with being present with my loved ones, with the calm and measured happiness of routine, who values the sanity of the ordinary.

I felt such a push and pull between these sides of myself. I wondered who would win in a winner-takes-all battle—like in the movie *Highlander*, but with an unfortunate lack of Queen's soundtrack, and an even more unfortunate glut of bad hair. Extraordinary Self vs. Ordinary Self: *There could only be one*. But even I didn't know: who would win in that battle? I had to write the story to find out.

# Links to Past Interviews & Readings

**@taylorswift\_as\_books IG Live! June 2022 Reading** (Instagram Reel)

**Pier-Glass Poetry Spotlight 8: A Discussion of "A Mother Shifts Her Shape"** (YouTube)

**Reading "A Shared Relief" at the inauguration of the 7th President of Suffolk County Community College** (YouTube)

**Front Porch Chat on IG Live! with @flagpolegallerystpete March 20, 2022** (Instagram Reel)

**Monday Night Poetry at KGB 10/26/20: Sarah Kain Gutowski + Matthew Thorburn** (YouTube)

**Poetry Goes Viral** (YouTube)

**Texas Review Press Q&A: An Interview with Sarah Kain Gutowski** (TRP Blog)

**Handful of Wheel: Season 2, Episode 5** (Podcast)

**Painted Bride Quarterly's The Slush Pile: Episode 19: The Dinosaur-Robot Episode** (Podcast)

**Lyric Essentials: Sarah Kain Gutowski Reads "The Armadillo" by Elizabeth Bishop** (The Sundress Blog)

**Speaking of Marvels: Interviews about Chapbooks, Novellas, and Books of Assorted Lengths** (Blog)

**The Best American Poetry Blog: Sarah Kain Gutowski interviewed by Lawrence J. Epstein** (Blog)

# Interview & Speaking Topics

- **FEMALE MID-LIFE (GENX & ELDER MILLENNIAL)**
- **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY FEMALE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS**
- **BURNOUT (AS A WOMAN) IN ACADEMIA**
- **THE WELL-MEANING BUT GRAVE MISSTEPS OF SECOND- & THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM**
- **THREE-HEADED MONSTER: MOTHER, TEACHER, WRITER**
- **CONTEMPORARY FABULIST & SPECULATIVE POETRY**



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FOR ALL INQUIRIES.**

# Author Talk, Reading, and Workshop Offerings

Programming is offered by a writer and professor of English with two decades of lecture and teaching experience. All programs can be custom-tailored for audiences ranging from high school and college classrooms to libraries, bookstores, and literary communities and organizations.

## **Talk: Decide to Be an Artist: Creativity is a Process and a Practice**

Author Sarah Kain Gutowski discusses creativity as a deliberate problem-solving act, disputing myths surrounding inspiration and writer's block, and outlining a series of practical steps toward establishing one's unique and consistent creative practice. The talk can be followed by a multi-genre writing activity, and ends with an informal question and answer session.

## **Author Reading: featuring Sarah Kain Gutowski, the author of *The Familiar* and *Fabulous Beast***

Poet Sarah Kain Gutowski reads from her latest book, *The Familiar*, a darkly funny narrative-in-poems about female mid-life existential crisis, as well as *Fabulous Beast: Poems*, which was a runner up for the 2018 X.J. Kennedy Prize, a finalist for the 2019 Foreword INDIES Prize, and winner of the 14th annual National Indies Excellence Award for Poetry. The reading can be preceded by a multi-genre writing activity, and/or followed by an informal question and answer session.

## **Workshop: Write It Weird: Our Ordinary Experiences Made Fantastic and Meaningful Through Metaphor and Imagery**

Sometimes engaging with the strange, unusual, and unexpected can result in poignant, invaluable insight about our everyday lives. In this writing workshop, Teaching Artist Sarah Kain Gutowski leads participants of varying levels of experience through a series of examples and exercises designed to encourage associative thinking through metaphor and image-building.

**Ostensibly these are three different segments and may be combined and/or ordered differently than above. (i.e. The artist talk can be followed by a reading or the writing workshop can be followed by the author reading or craft talk.) Additionally, this can be constructed as a two-day program, with an artist talk and/or workshop on day one and the reading on day two. I am happy to accommodate the particular audiences of the venue according to your need and interest.**

Please contact Katy Pultz at [pultzmarcom@gmail.com](mailto:pultzmarcom@gmail.com) for all inquiries.

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- Guest Teaching and Workshop Facilitation

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# The Familiar

Poems

Sarah Kain Gutowski

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"The boundary between the imaginary and the real is even less distinct in this troubled period than during puberty. One of the most salient characteristics in the aging woman is the depersonalization that makes her lose all objective landmarks. People in good health who have come close to death also say they have felt a curious impression of doubling: when one feels oneself to be consciousness, activity, and freedom, the passive object affected by fate seems necessarily like another: *I am not the one run over by a car. I am not the old woman the mirror shows me.*"

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

"We aren't here to make things perfect. The snowflakes are perfect. The stars are perfect. Not us. Not us! We are here to ruin ourselves and to break our hearts and love the wrong people and die. The storybooks are bullshit."

— Ronny Cammareri, *Moostruck* (written by John Patrick Shanley, directed by Norman Jewison)

# The Familiar

Poems

**Sarah Kain Gutowski**



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Huntsville, Texas 77341

familiar  
fuh-mil-yer

— noun

8. a familiar friend or associate

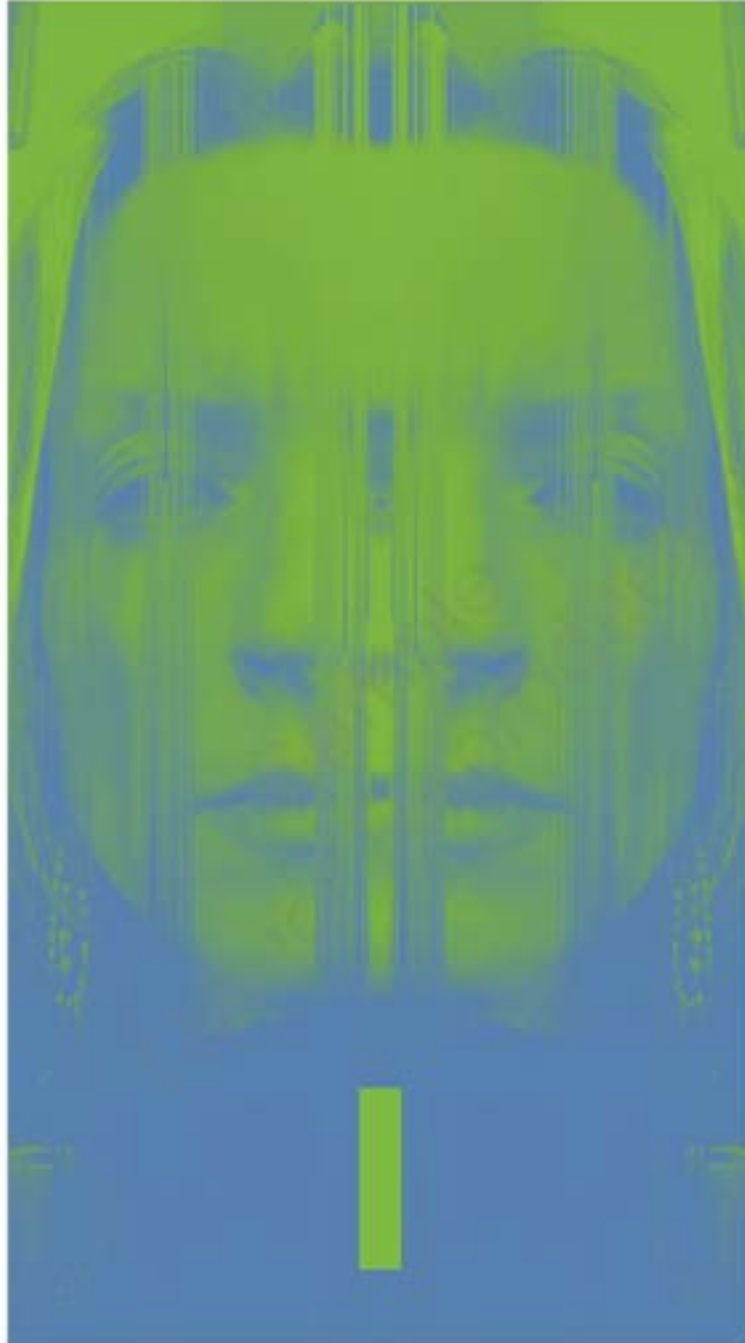
9. Also called familiar spirit. Witchcraft and Demonology. A supernatural spirit or demon, often in the form of an animal, supposed to serve and aid a witch or other individual.

10. Roman Catholic Church:

a. an officer of the Inquisition, employed to arrest accused or suspected persons.

b. a person who belongs to the household of the pope or of a bishop, rendering domestic though not menial service.

*from Dictionary.com Unabridged,  
based on the Random House Unabridged  
Dictionary*





## We Want for More

Among the garden's weeds my extraordinary self sits,  
wondering how she came to this: banishment, but gradual—  
an exile by degrees. One day, praise like sun in June; then

shadow: not so much reprisal as silence, stretched long  
as overcast sky. Now, squatting near the mute watermelon  
and cucumber hills, ornamental leaves that don't belong

catch her eye. She marvels at the weed's tenacity, how it  
clings to the other plants, how much precision and time  
it takes to remove tendrils of bad from good. Despite

the low clouds, my extraordinary self is a burnt mess,  
and between the pain peeling her shoulders and soil  
that coats her teeth, she cannot help but feel self-pity,

2

watching her image distort in the weed's glass then  
disappear when she removes the vine. It seems  
a shame to waste such ambition, such determination,

but the purslane—flowering, delectable when consumed—  
threatens the cultivated vegetables and fruit. It's beautiful,  
but wrong for this patch of earth. She slices its roots

with her spade and scatters the knors and emerald stalks  
and gorgeous vine into the compost heap. *Little sister,*  
she thinks. *It's time to leave. We want for more than we should.*

## A Great Damage

My ordinary self wakes but can't remember when  
she fell asleep in this room: The sheets, slick with damp,  
feel unfamiliar; grit rims her eyelids and even

the mattress feels foreign, like something loaned  
from memory's recesses. We haven't seen her for years.  
She hasn't been allowed to visit. Now she's here

suddenly, as if summoned by a spell, and welcomed—  
coaxed and flattered by our pleas. Desperation's humidity  
rises from the bed. Daylight, dishwashers, doctor's offices—

my ordinary self must become reacquainted  
with ordinary living. She wanders the rooms. Her feet sink,  
make light depressions in the carpet and brief, dark splotches

on the hard wood. She thinks about making an appointment  
for an oil change. She consults the kitchen's calendar, but its  
coded loops of pen and cross-outs confuse, refuse to clarify.

*There's too much to undo here, she thinks. A great damage  
has been done. Panic beads her skin. As if on cue  
from our bedroom's shadows, the clock shrieks in alarm.*

## A Little Push

My extraordinary self turned out to be less extraordinary than we'd anticipated. She wasn't even good at packing up her things: she kept removing, then replacing, her tap shoes

and favorite sequined gowns—glitter escaping cellophane to coat her fingers, the bedspread, all surfaces inside and beyond her suitcase. Now we find reminders of her

everywhere. My ordinary self lifts the shades in the morning and frowns—sunlight refracts off tiny squares adhered to the nightstand, the hamper's wicker rings. This will take

hours and days to remove. Her personal items sit tossed in a corner, what we found after she'd left: wads of foreign paper currency; a camera leaking acrid batteries;

4 the loose ephemera of a brief photography career. She left not in a rush but in a cloud of disarray and tears, the melodrama that marked her too overwrought

for the stage. She didn't want to stay but didn't want to go, didn't want to make the decision to separate. My ordinary self gave her a little push: nothing too

vicious, just pressure along the shoulders that said: *This is your direction*. It was the tree leaves grinding like teeth that whispered: *It won't do any good to look back*.

## Gooseflesh

If she'd been around for those missing years,  
my ordinary self wonders, would our life now be this  
sad collection? She surveys the disrepair and marvels

at the neglect: The splintered cabinetry. Scratched  
floorboards. Sheetrock nails pushing ghostly thumbs  
through thinning, spectral paint. She pulls open

the closet door, looses its demon: hot breath spews forth  
coats and boots and mittens. *We need a priest, not a maid,*  
she thinks. Down the road, inside a motel room

or the car she's made her home, my extraordinary self's  
skin crawls with a flush of cold. Hairs stand on end  
like someone walks—no, stomps—across her grave.

## Naming

My ordinary self insists -- from doctors, to teachers,  
to butchers, to the crossing guard by the funeral home—  
*Names are so important.* She has the children look up

everyday birds in the garden: Catbird. Grackle. Starling.  
Together they create tags for the plants and shrubs:  
Cyclamen. Hydrangea. Rose of Sharon. She even helps

the clerk identify herbs at checkout: *This, oregano. This,*  
*sage.* She writes everything down. *Everyone prefers*  
*the correct label to the wrong, she says, and most prefer*

*a label even if they insist out loud they don't.* My ordinary self,  
for instance, takes pleasure from hers: Proficient. Able.  
Steady. On her arm, tattooed in script: *videlicet incorruptum.*

## Time to Clean

She wasn't extraordinary, my extraordinary self,  
for the measure of her accomplishments. Rather,  
her visions were operatic, symphonic, and robust.

It was her effort's tenor, its deep vibrating notes  
that made those plans appear unique. And yet  
so much broken glass, so much mess in endeavor.

So many busted enamel shards, rusted cables,  
antique lamps collecting dust. The unused spools  
of twine, boxes of glue, parts for builds abandoned.

Piles of books, face-down and dog-eared,  
then forgotten. So much everything  
and so much nothing—enthusiasm multiplied

and left to mold in humid air: A warehouse  
for unrealized dreams. Simply put, it was time  
to clean. But it was difficult for her to let go:

We were crows chasing each other from the trees—  
clarion in our anger. All around our home,  
broken spider silk drifted in the breeze.

## The Rational Optimist

The consummate wife, my ordinary self helps my husband  
pack when he needs to leave on business, a checklist of items  
in her back jeans pocket, her knack for rolling clothes

and using shoes for storage such a boon. When there's time  
she leaves notes folded inside his shirt pockets, or tucked  
within his cufflinks box. Such a difference from when

my extraordinary self would see him off—her petulant silence  
a lock to which we'd all forgotten the combination. Sometimes  
I think she hid his passport just to keep him home extra

minutes, each one tense as stand-by. How patient he was,  
back then, to withstand this torture because he was leaving,  
supporting his family; all the while his wife resentful,

- 8 her jealousy slender but sharp as a new moon. My ordinary self  
is far more rational, and an optimist. Awakened for a pre-dawn  
send-off, she kisses him softly, says she'll see him soon.

## They Sing Her Praises

In something of a paradox, my ordinary self is rather extraordinary. My ordinary self has follow-through. Not all of the natural world—or the unnatural—has this

persistence, the dogged will to see a thing done to its very damn end. That's why she's so good at laundry. She remembers how important it is

to keep the clothes from pressing too far into one another, creating canyons of wrinkles. She avoids embarrassing piles of socks and thongs

and linens from forming new terrain on the furniture. She hangs when delicates need drying, folds when the cycle is finished. She itemizes by type,

material, color and care. These days no one ever goes without matching socks, unless by choice. My ordinary self is tireless albeit weary

of fitted sheets and their stubborn, imperfect corners. In the basement laundry crickets keep her company. They sing her praises in the dark, though no one listens.



## Climate of Destruction

When she reenters the office, my ordinary self recognizes signs of storm and stress, my extraordinary self's chaotic occupancy. She flicks the computer on. It groans in protest,

slicks blue light across every object beneath the monitor's patient face. She searches for the keyboard, but a label maker's all she finds under last quarter's financials.

Piles of drop-and-run litter the desk: leather portfolios crowded with legal pads, accordion files spilling receipts, torn staples, chains of paper clips, pens without caps

buried like shallow land mines and blooming red wounds across take-out napkins. Underneath the desk, where her feet should rest, boxes of yellowed paper files decamp.

10 A cricket carcass dries to dust beside them. On the shelves manilla folders buckle like a collapsed bridge beneath stacks of books. She moves aside a dead plant and types

a memo: *To the occupant(s): Please remember the company cannot sustain growth in a pervasive climate of destruction and disorganization.* She hits Print. Across the hall

paper jams and another machine complains. She turns on the overhead fluorescent lights. The whole room hums with stark dissatisfaction. Her pupils shrink to pin pricks.

## Dreaming and What-ifs

Overwhelmed by all she has been tasked to do,  
my ordinary self calls a meeting. We sit down  
and brainstorm a way to make her transition manageable.

We bullet-item lists and create spreadsheets. We draft  
mission and vision statements and action plans, and when  
our eyes begin to glaze, fingers cramped from note-taking,

my ordinary self stands and says, *All right. Let's get  
to work.* This is crucial, this difference between my two  
selves: my ordinary self's literal movement away

from the pens and pads of planning. She doesn't  
mess around. Somewhere—not too far away, but removed  
from here—at a similar table, my extraordinary self stares

at a lamp's glass bell as if she could read our future.  
Yet she's naught but dreaming and what-ifs—under her,  
so little came to fruition. She played us: all glad-handing

and misdirection, and wouldn't admit failure, even  
when smoke alarms sounded and ash flitted through  
the air like kitchen moths born from the stale and fetid.



# The Familiar Book Tour 2024 (WIP\*)

## JANUARY

Thursday, January 11

Wild Precious Life (Podcast Recording)

## FEBRUARY

Thursday, February 8

**AWP: Booksigning for *The Familiar* with Texas Review Press**

**11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. CST**

Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference and Bookfair  
Bookfair,

Kansas City Convention Center

**Brown Bag Lit's Fake AWP: How Did We Get Here? Poetry Drafts Unseen featuring Melissa Fadul, Majda Gama, Sarah Kain Gutowski, Meg Leonard, and Amanda Shaw**

**12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. EST**

via Zoom

**AWP Offsite Reading: As if Conjured: A Poetry Reading Celebrating Publication of *THE FAMILIAR* & Her Extraordinary Friends: Featuring Jessica Cuello, Sarah Kain Gutowski, Cynthia Marie Hoffman, Vincent James, Hyejung Kook, Ananda Lima, Eugenia Leigh, and Marcus Myers**

**6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. CST**

Bliss Books & Wine

3502 Gillham Rd, Kansas City, MO 64111

Friday, February 9

**AWP Panel: Women of New Fabulism and Speculative Literature: A Reading: featuring Nic Anstett, Sarah Kain Gutowski, Carolyn Oliver, Aimee Parkison, and Chloe Chun Seim**

**10:35 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. CST**

Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference and Bookfair  
Room 3501AB, Level 3

Kansas City Convention Center

\* Please visit author web site for most recent calendar of events

# *The Familiar Book Tour 2024 (WIP\*)*

## **Friday, February 9 (continued)**

**AWP Bookfair Stage Reading: (More than) Crisis and Loss: Writing Female Mid-life: A Poetry Reading with Julie Brooks Barbour, Mary Biddinger, Sarah Kain Gutowski, Cynthia Marie Hoffman, and Michelle Whittaker**

**12:15 - 1:30 p.m. CST**

Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference and Bookfair

Bookfair Stage

Kansas City Convention Center

## **Saturday, February 10**

**AWP Offsite Reading: Placing Words, Part 2: The Writers Place Presents Six Writers featuring James Bengel, Beth Gulley, Sarah Kain Gutowski, John Moessner, Joshua Robbins, and Patrick Stockwell**

**7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.**

The Writer's Place

31 W 31st St, Kansas City, MO 64108

## **Monday, February 12**

**KGB Bar Monday Night Poetry Series featuring Anthony DiPietro and Sarah Kain Gutowski**

**7 p.m. doors open; 7:30 p.m. start time.**

45 E 4th Street (2nd Floor)

New York, NY 10003

## **Saturday, February 17**

**King Street Gallery Poetry Reading**

**2 p.m.-4 p.m.**

King Street Gallery

Montgomery College

Takoma Park/Silver Springs Campus

Silver Spring, MD

# *The Familiar Book Tour 2024 (WIP\*)*

**Tuesday, February 27**

**Podcast Episode Airs: I'm A Writer But**

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/im-a-writer-but/id1541871983>

**Wednesday, February 28**

**Virtual Artist Talk // King Street Gallery, Montgomery College**

**11 a.m.-12 p.m.**

Virtual over Zoom

## MARCH

**Saturday, March 9**

**Poet's Enclave**

**All-Day**

Bridgewater College

402 East College Street

Bridgewater, VA

**Thursday, March 28**

**The Feminists Lied: The Extraordinary vs. Ordinary Self in Poems  
from *The Familiar***

**4:45 PM - 6:15 PM**

Purdue, 6th floor

Popular Culture Association Conference

Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile

540 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL

## APRIL

**Saturday, April 20**

**A Workshop and Reading feat. Sarah Kain Gutowski & Cynthia Hoffman**

**3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.**

Porch Light Literary Center

1019 E Washington St, Iowa City, IA

\* Please visit author web site for most recent calendar of events

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# *The Familiar* Book Tour 2024 (WIP\*)

**Sunday, April 21**

**Sunday Reading Series: Poetry, Prose, & Cocktails**

**6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

Hungry Brain

2319 W. Belmont Ave, Chicago, IL

**Friday, April 26**

**Women in Midlife: Reading *The Familiar***

**Online Class Visit with Politics & Prose Bookstore, DC**

1 p.m.-2 p.m.

Virtual over Zoom

## MAY

**Wednesday, May 1**

**Disquieting Muses Quarterly Virtual Salon**

<https://www.dmqreview.com/salon>

**Saturday, May 4**

**Finding Your Community: Identity-Based Writing Groups**

Washington Writer's Conference

Bethesda North Marriot Hotel and Conference Center

5701 Marinelli Road, Rockville, MD

**Saturday, May 18**

**Gaithersburg Book Festival**

10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Borher Park, Gaithersburg, M.D.

# *The Familiar Book Tour 2024 (WIP\*)*

## AUGUST

**Saturday, August 17**

**An Inconvenient Hour:**

**Feat. Sarah Kain Gutowski, Cynthia Marie Hoffman, and Ananda Lima**

**5 p.m.**

Metropolis Cafe

1039 W Granville Ave, Chicago, IL

**Wednesday, August 21**

**Poetry Reading Feat. Lisa Bernstein, Sarah Kain Gutowski, and Jason Schneiderman**

**7 p.m.**

Unnameable Books

615 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn, NY

\* Please visit author web site for most recent calendar of events



Coming soon from

(front)

TRP: The University Press of SHSU (Texas Review Press)

# THE FAMILIAR

Sarah Kain Gutowski

***"The feminists lied, she tells me.  
They said we could do everything /  
we wanted. Anything, I correct her."***

A book-length narrative in poems, *The Familiar* explores female mid-life existential crisis through two characters, the Ordinary Self and the Extraordinary Self, who send a single household into chaos as they vacillate between the siren call of ambition, the necessity of the workplace, and responsibility to love and family. Engaging with philosophy and pop culture, bouncing between high and low diction, *The Familiar* considers the effects of second and third-wave feminism through an absurdist and fabulist lens, wrestling with the notion women can truly "have it all."



*Available for Print, Radio, and Podcast  
Interviews; Speaking and Reading  
Engagements; Guest Teaching and  
Workshop Facilitation*

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**Texas Review Press:** [trp@shsu.edu](mailto:trp@shsu.edu)

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Absurdism, Fatalism

**Sarah Kain Gutowski** is the author of *Fabulous Beast*, winner of the 14th annual National Indies Excellence Award for Poetry and a 2019 Foreword Indies Finalist. With interdisciplinary artist Meredith Starr, she is co-creator of *Every Second Feels Like Theft*, a conversation in cyanotypes and poetry, and *It's All Too Much*, a limited edition audio project. Her poems have appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *The Southern Review*, and her criticism has been published by *Colorado Review*, *Calyx*, and *New York Journal of Books*.

Early Praise for **THE FAMILIAR** by Sarah Kain Gutowski

"Gutowski's poems are breathtakingly smart — controlled, precise and exquisite as diamonds — and yet they vibrate dangerously from within, as if anticipating, as she writes in one poem, "so much broken glass." —Amber Sparks, author of *And I Do Not Forgive You*

"I know I'm not the only one who will be grateful for Sarah Kain Gutowski's *The Familiar*. I know I'm not the only one who will feel less alone after reading these poems." —Jason Schneiderman, author of *Hold Me Tight*

"Gutowski leads the reader to an unexpected liberation that made me laugh out loud, a rare pleasure in poetry. *The Familiar* is brilliant, witty, and unafraid to relentlessly question the sacred territory of family responsibility." —Jessica Cuello, author of *Liar* and *Yours, Creature*

"*The Familiar* resists parable and acknowledges the inevitably multifaceted nature of selfhood, what is expected of women, and what women expect of themselves. Fierce. Vulnerable. Entertaining."

— Cynthia Marie Hoffman,  
author of *Exploding Head*

"Sarah Gutowski's *The Familiar* exists as part haunting, part conjuration, and part poetic experiment in which the intricacies and intimacies of a poet's intertwined selves are revealed in triplicate."

—Matt Schumacher,  
author of *Ghost Town Odes*

