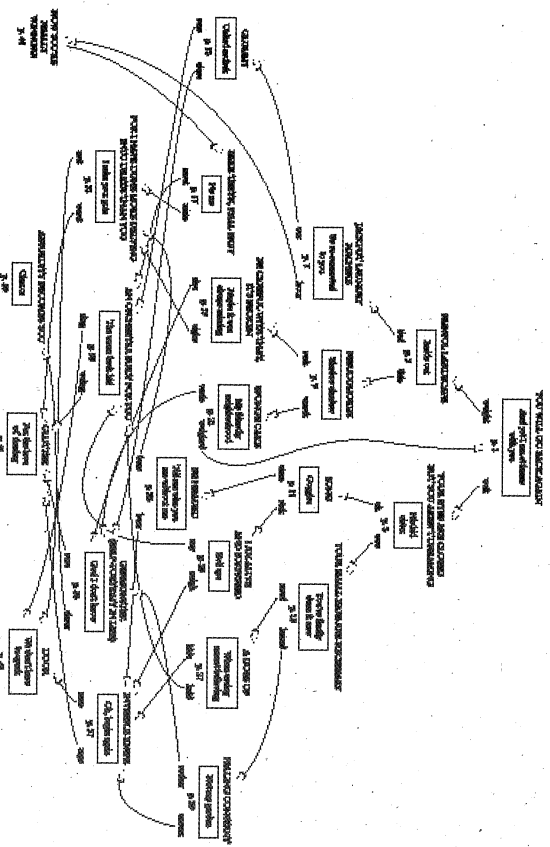


The title of this book project is "I Take Back the Sponge Cake"—and the name we call ourselves for this collaboration (also taken from a line of a poem we wrote together): Invisible Seeing Machine.

From the first page of "I Take Back the Sponge Cake"—

TO USE THIS BOOK:

Read each poem and image. Then choose one word from the given pair, using the provided sentence as a guide. Flip to the indicated page. Continue the adventure. If you become lost, or would like to return somewhere that you have already been, please refer to the map.



To view this project, please visit

www.washingtonsquarereview.com/washington_square_award.html

This Is One Way

LAURA KRUGHOFF

Winner of the 2010 Washington Square Fiction Award

Meet in high school, the Catholic kind. He is charming in that way boys can be, all hope and spirit and elbows. He is handsome enough, but not dashing. He comes from nothing. His father is famous for being a wonderful man who has never figured out how to keep his family fed. Keep company. This is the 1930s when people called it keeping company. Become bridge partners. Make a foursome with his best friend and your best friend who will marry right out of high school. Watch him fall in love.

Go away to college. Just for a year since it's all your father can afford. Get a glimpse of lives you'll never lead. Become popular. Learn that you are smart and beautiful and, though you can hide it well, cunning. Learn that these are all very good things. Go on adventurous dates with college boys. Let one take you up in an open cockpit airplane. Understand that the thrill is worth it even if the plane tumbles from the sky. Experience a sharp moment of disappointment when you land safely and have to continue with your own life, which will always feel quotidian after that. Date lots of boys. Date a few men. When you are home on weekends let him buy you sodas and ice creams on Saturday. On Sundays, after Mass, walk with him across town to the park on the river. Let him put a palm in the hollow of your back. Tell him about your other boy-friends. See the way he suffers.

Come home to your father's house and take a job as a clerk in a men's clothing store downtown. Love this job, the ringing of the cash register, the numbers in the ledgers, the feel of fine fabrics, the money rolled into tight tubes in your purse after you've taken your paycheck to the bank. Forget to think about all your college boyfriends. Forget to send them letters asking them to visit you out here in the sticks. Forget that your real job is the job of landing a

husband until all your old boyfriends have vanished or been landed by someone else, someone half as pretty and smart as you are. Someone not cunning in the least. Discover that you no longer have any boyfriends with equal parts horror and disbelief.

He has been in Pennsylvania. He does something in business, something with sales. He has prospects. He's come home with an automobile, looking terribly handsome in his hat. Smile when you pass his pew on your way to Communion during Mass. The sight of you still makes his color rise. Stand on the steps in front of the church after service and ask him how in the world he has been. Look at him through your eyelashes. Say something worldly and knowing when he asks about you, something about your job and how a girl these days has to learn to take care of herself. Say something about the terrible dearth of decent men. Laugh. Know that this makes your eyes flash.

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When he asks you to marry him, say yes, but only after he has finished paying for the automobile. Think, even in the moment you are walking down the aisle, that you would have chosen differently if you'd known it was time to choose. You're twenty-four and had hoped for years yet of enjoying yourself. Have a nasty row—not a lovers' spat—when he tells you you won't be able to keep your job at the clothing store. Say you love your job, you will not quit, it's absurd and there's no way he can make you. Listen, shocked, when he tells you that business here at home has dried up and you'll be moving back to Pennsylvania. Sit up all night, awake by a window in the living room of a house you rent in a town you'd never heard of in a state you'd never intended to live in, a cold, hard fear lying in your belly after having had a peek at his bank book. He has no money. You have no money. You have absolutely nothing and he refuses to allow you to have a job. Cry in fits of rage and frustration when you are alone. Sew your own clothes and even some of his. Tend his good suit as if your life depended on it. Invest in good gloves and treasure them. Be sure, always, that no one would ever know how poor you are when you attend Mass. You are beautiful and he is not bad looking, especially since you take special care to have his hat blocked, and good looks can conceal a lot. Pinch and save and stretch and do without. Resent that he never thanks you for the way you have sacrificed.

Have a baby. Watch in a postpartum stupor as he is drafted into the Navy. Go home to stay with your father. Feel dazed by your husband in his blindingly white dress whites when you see him off at the train station for his deployment. He's off to the Pacific. You've never seen the ocean. You do not understand this war. Tend your baby. Tend your father's house. Save every penny of the money he sends you. Recognize that he is sending you almost the entire sum of his monthly government check. Read his letters that speak of things you do not understand happening out on the vast ocean that spreads around him as empty and fearful as a desert. Try to compose letters to him but fail to. Fail utterly. Send a photograph of the baby when she turns one. Send another when she turns two. Go two and a half years without seeing him before he returns to the States for shore leave. You have plans to see him in New Orleans, but there is some absurd stroke of luck and the train he's traveling on will be passing through a town some seventy miles away en route to the south. The train will stop for forty-five minutes in the middle of the night. Go with his sisters, who adore him and who do not adore you, to meet him for a moment on that train. Take the baby who is not a baby anymore. Paint a big sign on a ruined sheet that says "Hello Vincent!" since you cannot think of anything else to say. Feel your heart in your throat when the train finally pulls into the station. It is a strange hour. People should not be awake, and yet the platform is teeming with women who have come for a glimpse of their men, just like you and your daughter and your husband's sisters have. You all hold up your sheet, but he doesn't come to greet you. His sisters shout for him. You drop your end of the sheet and board the train, moving from car to car, asking all these interchangeable men in their woolen blues if they know your husband. Some of them do. No one knows where to find him. Hurry from one car to the next. When the whistle sounds, run. Burst into compartment after compartment, no longer saying anything, just looking for your husband. When the whistle sounds again, hand the bottle of your husband's favorite bourbon, a bottle that cost you more than you spend on rationed flour and sugar and eggs and coffee in a month, to a boy you've never seen before and will never see again. He is so much younger than you. Step down onto the platform and find his sisters who are still standing with their slack sheet.

A week later, leave the daughter with his oldest sister and take the train to New Orleans. Feel like you are looking at a stranger when you see your hus-

band. Something has happened to his teeth. They have rotted and begun to fall out. Tell him about the trip to the town seventy miles from your own and the baby and the sheet with "Hello Vincent!" written on it and his sisters and the bottle of bourbon. Refuse to cry. Smile and laugh when he tells you he fell dead asleep and slept right through it. In a hot hotel room in a strange and foreign city let him take your clothes off once you've gone to bed. Turn your face to the wall because of the way his ruined teeth affect his breath.

When the war is over, surprise him with all of the money you have saved. It is enough for a down payment on a house. You know the one you want. It is painted yellow and sits at the top of a hill. He has had his teeth pulled out and now has a good pair of dentures. He has a G.I. bill. He is home from a good war and is offered a good job, a job that makes good money. Have another baby, a second girl. Wait to feel something. Expect to feel something that you don't. Have another baby, a boy this time, who is born too early and cries weakly for two days and then dies. Bury the third baby and wonder if this is what real grief feels like. It feels like being wrapped in yards of cotton batting and then being thrown down a well. Continue to save money carefully even though now you don't have to. Put aside money from your food and clothing budget to buy yourself luxuries—a silver tea set (which your children will eventually sell at a garage sale before you're even dead), calfskin boots, a fur coat (muskkrat rather than mink, but it's better than just a stole). Shout at your husband when you're angry with him, which is most of the time. Slam cabinets and kick doors until he leaves without saying anything and takes his dinner and several glasses of bourbon down at the Knights of Columbus. Feel blinding fury when other women at church praise your husband and go on about how lucky you are. Conceal this. Bury it. Embalm it, at least. Have a fourth baby, another boy. This one lives. Tell your husband that's enough. He respects you. You count the days and pay attention to your cycle and if you say that he can't, then he doesn't. Spend a great deal of time feeling cheated, feeling denied, even though you are not sure of what.

Raise your children. The oldest marries young. You warn her about this. You caution her about marriage in general and her choice of this man in particular, but she'll hear none of it. She marries poorly and suffers for it, but it is out of your hands. Try to take pleasure in grandchildren but discover that you

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feel little for them. They are so messy and so sticky. You don't remember your own children being so sticky. Try to understand your second daughter. She is pretty and popular and plays the piano. But she is unhappy. She seems desperate and miserable most of the time. She graduates from high school and leaves home. She studies acting and literature and visits rarely. She becomes a hippie, or something like it. She wears her hair wild and dates all sorts of men. One of them is named Louie. Another is a black man. Eventually she comes home with one who rides a motorcycle and wears his thick, black, curly hair grown out in a bush around his head. He wears dark glasses, but at least he is white. You think he is white. Your husband likes him inexplicably. Your husband calls this daughter Butch, has since she was a small child, and the girl loves it. She calls him Pops. She calls him Daddy. Your husband has developed this close relationship with this daughter to spite you. She and her motorcycle-boyfriend sit out on the back patio with your husband, the three of them mixing drinks and laughing, while you cook. A dark part of your heart hopes this motorcycle-boyfriend will turn out to be a terrible person, just to teach your daughter and your husband a lesson, but he doesn't. He is a fine man and they eventually marry and they raise a passel of children who run wild and express themselves. The girls never learn to wear makeup. They play sports instead of the piano. You have long ceased trying to understand.

Somewhere along the way your son becomes an evangelical Christian. He comes home one day with his Bible and tries to convert you. You tell him you are Catholic and your mother and father were Catholic and everyone in your family and your husband's family has always been Catholic and you don't need him coming into your kitchen telling you about Jesus Christ. He gets married and moves away and raises his children as far from you as possible. You have been refused almost everything you have ever desired. You tell yourself this in the dark at night. You nurse this wound. You come to love it.

The years pass. You are old now, but you don't know when that happened. You don't remember when it was that you lost your looks. You laugh with everyone else when one of the granddaughters finds a photograph of you from 1936 and says, "Grandma, you were beautiful," but it wounds you to the marrow. You are fat now. You are still exceedingly well dressed and never step foot out of the house without your makeup, but it has been decades

since you were beautiful. Your husband ages, too, but men age differently. He still loves you. He still looks at you the way he did back in high school. You don't know why he still feels this way but he does. You wish, really, that he wouldn't. It makes him better than he deserves to be, and it makes you worse.

Your health fails first. There is a fall, of course. A stupid fall. You go down on the sidewalk in front of a restaurant like a dottery old fool and break your hip. It is humiliating to lie on the sidewalk until the ambulance comes. There is a rehab center and exercises, but you are never again as strong as you were once. You struggle in and out of chairs and even though you outweigh him, your husband learns how to lift you. He stands over your chair and you put your arms around his neck and he lifts you. "There you go, Billie," he says, using your family name. Your real name is Lucy Wilhelmina Josephine, but he has never in his life called you that. He brings you things you ask for. His sight is failing, but he counts out your pills every evening. After the hip, there is the Parkinson's and the high blood pressure and what your doctors call anxiety. You are probably dying, who wouldn't be anxious? He goes with you to every doctor visit. He holds doors open. He helps you in and out of the car. He is so accustomed to the habit of dressing well that he continues to even after you've ceased pressing his things and setting out which the looks best with which shirt. Doctors and nurses praise him. Now that you are ill, he tends to you patiently. He tends to your every wish. Something wells within you when he bends over your chair and puts your arms around his neck. Something surges inside, filling your chest, compressing your heart, when you watch him counting out your pills and checking twice with the sheet the doctor gave him, which explains which pill is supposed to be taken when. Something happens when he guides you to your usual pew at Mass and then wheels your walker out of the way and helps you out of your coat. People see the way he takes care of you. You see the way he takes care of you. For the first time, you see him the way others seem to. He makes your heart flutter. You want nothing more than for him to sit next to you. You are flooded with something you've never in your life felt before.

You try to explain this to your second daughter one day. You say, "You know, I don't think I'd ever loved your father before now. I'd never truly loved him, but I do now."

"I don't want to hear that, Mom," your daughter says. "Good grief. What kind of thing is that to say? If that's how you feel, you can keep it to yourself." She walks away.

You are shocked. You want to explain, but she's not coming back to listen to you. She is thinking about all those years that have gone by, all those years and years and years since the two of you first met in high school, and she's thinking of them bitterly, and only with sympathy for her father, of course, but you're not talking about all those years. You're not talking about how you felt then. You're only talking about how you feel now. It is remarkable. You've never felt anything like it. That is all you'd wanted to say. You're not talking about then. You're only trying to talk about now.