

BookMarks

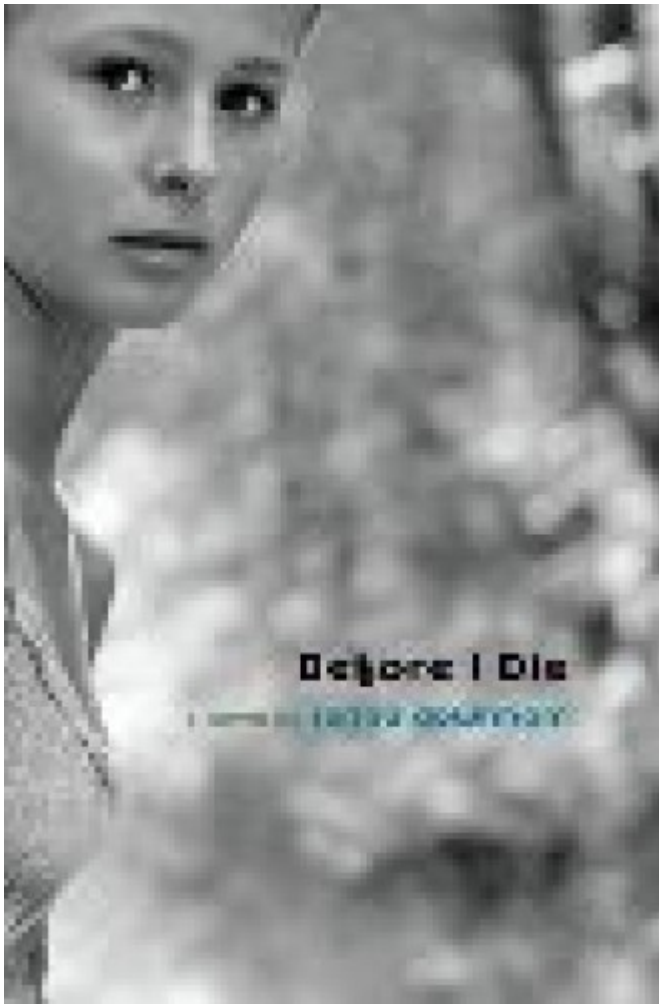
Books in the [January 15, 2008](#) issue

In Review



Dwelling Places: A Novel

Vinita Hampton Wright
HarperSanFrancisco



Before I Die: A Novel

Jenny Downham

David Fickling

The Iowa farming community where this novel is set is in deep pain. Family farms have been lost to hard times. A way of life passed on from generation to generation can never be lived again. And the Barnes family in particular is coming apart at the seams. Its members live in the same house, yet dwell in separate worlds that others do not know or can't comprehend: father Mack has a mental breakdown; mother Jodie has an affair; son Young Taylor is drawn into the Goth lifestyle; and daughter Kenzie finds comfort in the certainties of fundamentalism. It takes a middle-aged, divorced Methodist pastor, who herself has lost a teenage daughter in an accident, to name this community's pain and give the people who suffer in silence a chance to voice their deep losses. *Dwelling Places*, named by *Publishers Weekly* one of the best books of 2006, has just been released in paperback.

Tessa, age 16, is dying of leukemia, and she has only months to live. So she makes a list of the ten things she wants to do before she dies, starting with having sex. Some of the items on her list could get her into big trouble, but, as she says, "I want to die in my own way. It's my illness, my death, my choice." In trying to squeeze as much life as she can out of her dying days, she discovers that she needs to add more items to her list. She also comes to the realization that she's been dying all her life. Although *Before I Die* has a teenage protagonist, it is not necessarily a book for teens. However, it has great potential for teen-adult conversation.