

Naomi and I were lying on the cool beach under the summer constellations when she asked me to marry her. I propped my head on my hand and examined her, her face silvered by the moonlight, sand sprinkled in her thin hair.

"You can say no," she said, brushing back the hair over my ear.

I told her to quit talking like that, of course I'd marry her.

"What will you tell your next wife?" she asked, her fingers interlocking with mine.

"I'll never remarry," I said.

"Don't say that. I want you to. Okay?"

Waves slapped the wet beach and foam hissed back into the dark ocean.

"You'll pull through," I said, wishing I could believe my own words. Since she'd volunteered to end her treatment, the doctors' prognosis was a year tops.

Running my fingers through her almost invisible hair, I told her that the cancer in her might, at any moment, vaporize into smoke. I told her she would she would grow old with me, outlive me, outlive the stars, hoping that by saying it out loud it might somehow come to pass.

"Liar," she said, kissing my neck.

"I'm being serious," I protested.

For the rest of the night we discussed plans for the wedding. It was to take place in the limestone Methodist church outside town, where her parents were married. The list of things to do was enormous: find a caterer, a photographer, a videographer, make invitations, find a baker. At least she already had a dress picked out. The veil she would make herself, a fine-meshed birdcage affair, topped with a circle of pearls and a plume of white ostrich feathers.

It would be one of those blow-out weddings, one for the record books.