

Rinse Cycle

Doretta Wildes

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"Unemployment, a blighted career, a failed marriage, venereal disease, the hysterectomy, a shrunken social calendar. Besides happy endings, she lacked middles. Like the knitting project she had taken up last winter, she had only several long, laborious beginnings with gapes and knots she couldn't see until it was too late." Such is the life of *Rinse Cycle's* Marigold Asher.

She is stuck in a rut, heading nowhere, when she and her sisters take on the care of Marilyn, their dying aunt. Marigold's razor-sharp awareness of her physical surroundings provides clues to her personality traits and the way she handles stress.

Marigold thinks and relates to her world through prime and primordial numbers. When her marriage ends and her career skids and crashes, she remembers and associates in numbers. She uses this trait to whitewash her problems and failures. Her sisters, Daisy and Poppy, believe that they know what's best for her. Both are successful; Daisy runs a shelter for battered women and Poppy sells real estate. Their careers are constant reminders of Marigold's failures.

Their Aunt Marilyn had been estranged from her sister, Marigold's mother, for forty years. Now the nieces must rekindle that relationship. Marilyn talks of past transgressions and bitter feelings: "Your mother was a jealous, spiteful person, that's all...Unlike me. I snuck out. I danced on the boardwalk naked. But it was your mother who committed the real crime...."

The book's characters are charming, original, and realistic. Most readers will be able to identify with their idiosyncrasies. For example, Marigold's interaction with her family, as well as Marilyn's cat, Muse, and her caregiver, Anya, covers a full range of emotions.

Author Doretta Wildes gives readers a view of the human condition through the narrowly focused eyes of one woman who watches herself move in a downward spiral through the remnants of her life. Wildes' story is saturated with the minute details of time and place. The reader looks through a peephole as Marigold retreats into herself, stretches out of her comfort zone, and retreats again. As her aunt moves closer to the end of her life, Marigold's awareness of her own needs and goals slowly takes form.

At times, the story moves slowly, but overall the reader gets to share the characters' process of rebirth and regeneration. The book will appeal to women and to those who have fought against their own failure and depression. It's a story of survival and new beginnings.

Wildes earned her master's degree in English from Brown University. *Rinse Cycle* is her first novel.

PAT AVERY (July 14, 2011)

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