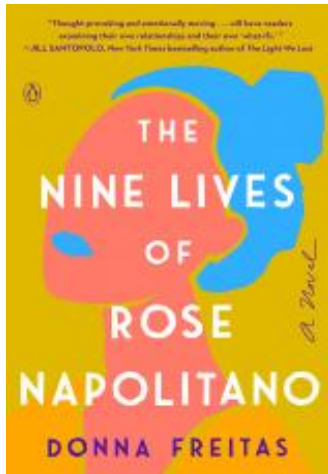


# The Nine Lives of Rose Napolitano

by Donna Freitas



## About the Book

**A deeply moving novel about a woman who thought she never wanted to be a mother --- and the many ways that life can surprise us.**

In every woman there are many stories.

Rose Napolitano is fighting with her husband, Luke, about prenatal vitamins. She promised she'd take them, but didn't. He promised before they got married that he'd never want children, but now he's changed his mind. Their marriage has come to rest on this one question: Can Rose find it in herself to become a mother? Rose is a successful professor and academic. She's never wanted to have a child. The fight ends, and with it their marriage.

But then Rose has a fight with Luke about the vitamins --- again. This time the fight goes slightly differently, and so does Rose's future as she grapples with whether she can indeed give up the one thing she thought she knew about herself. Can she reimagine her life in a completely new way? That reimagining plays out again and again in each of Rose's nine lives, just as it does for each of us as we grow into adulthood. What are the consequences of our biggest choices? How would life change if we let go of our preconceived ideas of ourselves and became someone completely new? Rose Napolitano's experience of choosing and then choosing again shows us in an utterly compelling way what it means, literally, to reinvent a life and, sometimes, become a different kind of woman than we ever imagined.

A stunning novel about love, loss, betrayal, divorce, death, a woman's career and her identity, *THE NINE LIVES OF ROSE NAPOLITANO* is about finding one's way into a future that wasn't the future one planned, and the ways that fate intercedes when we least expect it.

## Discussion Guide

1. THE NINE LIVES OF ROSE NAPOLITANO takes up the question of whether to have children --- with Rose insisting that it *should* be a question, even though people assume it is a given for women. How does this assumption affect a woman's identity? Have you always assumed that you would have children?
2. Rose and Luke's marriage hinges on a fight that repeats about something relatively small --- vitamins. Why do you think the author chose a fight like this one to be the turning point in this marriage for everything that happens next? Have you ever had a fight like this with a partner?
3. Rose and Luke agreed before they got married not to have children. Is it unfair to Rose that Luke changed his mind? Or is it understandable --- and forgivable --- for a partner to change his or her mind about something as important as a baby?
4. Rose experiences a lot of rage during this novel. She is angry at her husband for changing his mind about having children. She is angry at the pressure to have a baby that she experiences from everyone around her. She is angry that people want her to put children over her career. Are you able to relate to Rose's anger? Do you think it's justified, or does it bother you?
5. Rose's life goes in nine different directions over the course of this novel. How does this structure affect your understanding of Rose? Is there one version of her life that you liked or related to the best? Why?
6. The novel is about the decision to have a child, but it is also about the choices we make in life in general. Besides the issue of children, what major life decisions have you made that affected all that came afterward? Looking back, are there different choices you wish you'd made that you didn't? How would your life have looked if you had?
7. Rose does a lot of things that might make people feel uncomfortable --- she resists having a baby, she has an affair while pregnant, she has an abortion. Did you feel that her actions were justified, or were there things that Rose did that you feel are unforgivable, no matter what? What would you have done in Rose's position?
8. In the versions of Rose where she has a baby, she worries that because she had a child reluctantly, she'll end up being a bad mother. What do you think of Rose as a mother?
9. This is a novel about whether to have a child, but it is also about marriage and divorce. In the end, no matter what Rose and Luke decide to do --- have a baby or not --- they can't save their marriage. Why do you think the author made this choice? Were you rooting for Luke and Rose to work things out? Were you glad they ended up divorced?
10. This is not only a story about whether Rose will become a mother, it is also a story about Rose's relationship with her own mother. What do you think of how Rose's mother handled the child question with Rose? How was Rose's mother an influence on her life?
11. Jill and Frankie both provide important support for Rose. How does Rose's friendship with each woman differ? Is there a need for both women in every iteration of Rose's life?
12. After Addie's birth, Rose writes an essay about her complicated feelings toward motherhood. She is proud of her writing but struggles in deciding whether to publish it, and wonders what Addie will think when she's old enough to

read it. Do you think Rose should have published the essay? Or should she protect Addie from her feelings?

**13.** What did you think of how this story ended? Is there one version of Rose that you believe is the real Rose at the end? If so, which one? And who does Addie belong to?

## Author Bio

THE NINE LIVES OF ROSE NAPOLITANO is Donna Freitas' first adult novel. She is the author of CONSENT: A Memoir of Unwanted Attention, as well as books for young adults. Donna has written for *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and has appeared on NPR and the "Today" show. She's on the faculty at Fairleigh Dickinson University's MFA program and lives in Brooklyn and Connecticut.

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### **The Nine Lives of Rose Napolitano**

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