



# Aquamarine

*Carol Anshaw*

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## **Aquamarine** Carol Anshaw

Olympic swimmer Jesse Austin is seduced and consequently edged out for a gold medal by her Australian rival. From there, Anshaw intricately traces three possible paths for Jesse, spinning exhilarating variations on the themes of lost love and parallel lives unlived. Dorothy Allison, author of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, writes, "I found myself wishing I could buy a dozen copies and start a discussion group, just so I'd be able to debate all the questions this astonishing novel provokes." A Reader's Guide is available.

## **Aquamarine Details**

Date : Published November 14th 1997 by Mariner Books (first published 1992)

ISBN : 9780395877555

Author : Carol Anshaw

Format : Paperback 197 pages

Genre : Fiction, Lgbt, Glbt, Queer, Lesbian, Literary Fiction

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## From Reader Review Aquamarine for online ebook

### **rosamund says**

Jesse wins second place in 1968 Olympics for freestyle 100-metres swimming: Carol Anshaw then gives us three possible futures for Jesse, depending on choices she made directly following her swimming triumph. Each is believable, though the happiest, where Jesse is dating women and living in New York, feels the least grounded in reality. Perhaps this book hasn't aged well, or perhaps it simply isn't for me, but I found the premise trite -- because of course different choices we make define our lives in different ways -- and many of the references or plotlines felt ableist, classist or racist. It's a quick read, and Anshaw's prose style is assured, but I didn't enjoy this.

Also, did people really use the word "bogus" so much in 1990?

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### **Gabrielle de Cuir says**

Gorgeous book. The writing just flowed seamlessly between dialogue and narrative.

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### **Christopher Swann says**

3.5 stars. Cool exercise in exploring three possible lives in the aftermath of one person's shot at glory. Anshaw writes well and tellingly. I took a class with her in grad school and she was generous, honest, and refreshing--hard to be both candid and supportive at the same time when you read and critique someone's creative writing, but she managed to do it.

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### **Michael Armijo says**

Michael Cunningham (who wrote the fabulous book THE HOURS) recommended this book. I can see how he liked the stance of a woman who is a champion swimmer and takes a dive into three different scenarios of how her life could have been. I suppose it's up to the reader to decide which is the TRUE story (if one wants to go that route). Alas, the book didn't flow as well as I would have liked. There were some memorable lines though:

"I don't want you to think I'm after your secrets. I'm not. I'm just looking for a way in."

I would have rather it been ONE FULL STORY with her psychological feelings all wrapped together. I guess its just another author trying to be creative.

The writer wrote: THE NEXT MINUTE IS AN AQUAMARINE BLUR. I find that amusing now because most of the book will ultimately be a blur. I wouldn't strongly recommend this as it's easy to put down and NOT pick up again. It took some strain for me to finish. I like a book that I can't wait to read...try MEMOIRS OF HECATE COUNTY by Edmund Wilson instead--quite a literary find!

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## **Book.Journalism says**

„Was bedeutet eine Wahl, die wir treffen, für unser Leben?“

Auszug aus  
Aquamarin. Roman  
Carol Anshaw

Genau so lässt sich der Roman beschreiben. Jesses Geschichte wird aus drei unterschiedlichen Perspektiven erzählt. Und das Zitat von oben ist der Leitsatz zu allen drei Perspektiven.

Mich regte die Geschichte zum nachdenken an. Was bedeutet so eine Wahl für unser Leben ? Habt ihr euch darüber schon mal Gedanken gemacht ?

Auch wenn ich am Anfang etwas verwirrt war, fand ich das Buch perfekt. Es ist keine Unterhaltungsliteratur. Es regt zum nachdenken an und fordert einen auch. Aber dennoch eines der besten Bücher dieses Jahr

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## **Toby says**

Like a giant Ready Whip can. Delicious.

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## **treehugger says**

This book so deserves 5 stars! It was a super-fast read, because you just couldn't get enough of the story - you just HAD to know what kind of life she would live next, what kind of compromises she would make in the major decisions that make up a lifetime until she finally admitted her own truth to herself..

It's a story about an Olympic swimmer and the many paths (fleshed out) that her life could have taken after the fateful day in the Olympic pool when she competed for the gold medal..

I can't say anything more without giving away the story, but it was so well written, and the characters were so three dimensional, real, human.....it was a very touching story that almost made me flip to the end several times, which I NEVER do (and I was able to restrain myself this time too, but just barely!!).

just read it - it's so worth the time - I read almost the entire thing in one night..

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## **Jess says**

I read this book before I moved to Portland, before my life really started. In my sheltered, plastic world, this novel stood out for its authenticity, its daring. I picked it up for very superficial reasons: I liked the cover, I'd

been a competitive swimmer, and aquamarine is my birthstone. I nudged my paradigm ever so slightly. I realized that the path I was on was not the only path I could take. In fact, looking back the reading of this novel may have been a watershed moment. I took the reigns of life and from then on directed.

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### **Grey says**

I wouldn't call it timeless, but I would call it marvelous.

I did a little Reader's Advisory work for my friend A-, a very finicky fiction reader. In reading about this book, I was enamored with the premise: Three possible futures are woven for a woman who narrowly missed winning a swimming gold medal in the 1968 Summer Olympics. The tales -- as a small-town wife, a cosmopolitan lesbian returning home, and a single parent of troubled teenagers -- are wonderfully consistent and richly original on their own.

The brilliance is in the details.

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### **Lily Mason says**

I can't believe I wasn't familiar with Carol Anshaw until now. What a talent she is! She writes very realistic, beautifully crafted stories about characters so real they could live next door. This book was a special experience for me because the multiple reality premise was similar to a book I wrote a few years ago, only this was much more concise. I'll definitely be reading more by this author.

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### **Elaine Burnes says**

When I finished *Carry the One*, I was curious about Anshaw. I looked up this book, figuring I might read it some day. Well, the plus side of clearing out the basement is that I found a box full of lesfic I thought I'd given away, including this! (Though in retrospect, this is not lesfic.) The narrator tells three possible versions of her life after competing in the Mexico City Olympics as a swimmer. There, she has an encounter with a gorgeous swimmer from Australia. I don't quite see how these three scenarios directly relate to that moment. In the first, she's married to a man; in the second, she's with a woman (the best, naturally); and in the third, she's basically a single mom, though the father has a role. It was OK. Nicely written. It has a litmag feel to it that I think works better for short stories than novels. The narrative felt distanced; not sure how to explain. Maybe it's because there isn't much action or dialogue. A lot of background and scene setting. I liked the last part where she takes on the other swimmer, but the last couple of lines left me wondering. What just happened? What does it mean? I'm not sure and I'm not sure I liked that. The main character's kind of a sad sack, lumbering through life, like many of us are. Her success as a swimmer seems out of character for the family she grew up in, but it was the 1960s and not the uber trained, genetically freaky athlete it takes to succeed today.

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## **Lissa says**

In 1968, Jesse Austin took the silver medal for the hundred-meter freestyle in Mexico City. After the Olympics, Jesse has to make some quick and tough decisions that will shape her life in numerous ways. The author depicts three of these potential lives: giving up swimming completely and staying home, becoming a literature professor and a mostly-out lesbian in New York City, and being a single mother to two children in Florida.

It was interesting to see that, no matter how different the lives, how many similarities amongst them there are. I don't want to give too much away, but I must say that the second life described is the one that is preferable to me, although I feel that the first one is probably more likely than the second.

I know that this book has a lot of great reviews, but I had a hard time getting invested in the stories. It took me almost a month to read this book, and it's not even two hundred pages. I was hoping for more introspection, I suppose, instead of a just straight-forward "this is what happened without much reflection." And some of it simply didn't make sense. (view spoiler)

To be honest, I don't see what the fuss is about when it comes to this book. It was okay, but not memorable.

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## **Hubert says**

Very sensitively written novel centered around Jesse Austin, whose second place finish in Olympic swimming decades ago (lost against a friend) manages to haunt her very existence to current day. The novel is structured so that we witness three possible "continuations" of her life 20 years afterwards; one as a lesbian academic living in NY, one as a divorcee living in Florida, and another as still living in her hometown in Missouri. The veritable likeable godmother character shows up in various guises in all renditions. One tends to feel compassionate towards Jesse's situation, but not overly melodramatically so.

I recommend looking into Anshaw's work; doesn't seem like she gets much attention in the popular and literary presses.

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## **Julie Ehlers says**

I initially gave this book three stars, but upon further reflection I'm bumping it up to four. This novel gives us a brief snapshot of Jesse, a teenage Olympic swimmer, and then goes on to show three vastly different portrayals of her life, based on what might've happened if she'd made one decision or another once her swimming career was over. We've seen this idea in other books and movies, but this book, published in 1992, may have actually been first.

I loved many things about this book. The characters and settings were vivid, and each of Jesse's "lives" was fully realized and convincing. I was initially skeptical of her third "life," believing that the Jesse of the first two sections would have never settled for what she had in the third, but then I remembered that those Jesses didn't exist in this world--in each life, she is the product of her choices. It made me think about the various ways I might've been different if I'd made different choices; the book does a very effective job of getting this point across. I loved, too, the way Anshaw plants little clues about which life Jesse is actually meant to have

... just a subtle sign in the other two lives that Jesse's real life is going on without her.

So why did I give this three stars upon marking it "read"? The ending! I just wasn't happy with the way things went down in the last few pages of the book. Having said that, the ending was ambiguous enough to leave me with a lot to chew on, and once I calmed down I realized that I appreciated that ambiguity. I read Anshaw's *Carry the One* a couple years ago and would have to say that novel is more accomplished than this one, but for a first novel *Aquamarine* is an impressive achievement and a fun read.

5/19/2015: ...? I don't know how I feel about this. Ambivalent, I guess. I'll think about it a bit more.

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### **David Jay says**

The book opens with Jesse competing as a swimmer for the US at the 1968 Olympics where she takes the silver medal. From there, the book veers off in three different directions. The book jumps to 1990, finding Jesse nearing 40 and contemplating her life from three dramatically different vantage points. Following the Olympics, she makes various decisions and Anshaw tracks how different her life would have been if she had made some choices as opposed to others. For example, one story line has her moving back to Missouri and moving on from swimming, while another story line has her deciding to tour, promoting a line of swim suits with her name attached. I don't want to explain any more. Part of the joy of this book is seeing how different Jesse's life would be with different choices, and how other aspects of her life seem unalterable no matter what choices she makes.

Exquisite. The writing is just lovely, every single word. A book that you want to read slowly, to savor, but it is just too good and I read it in just a few short days.

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