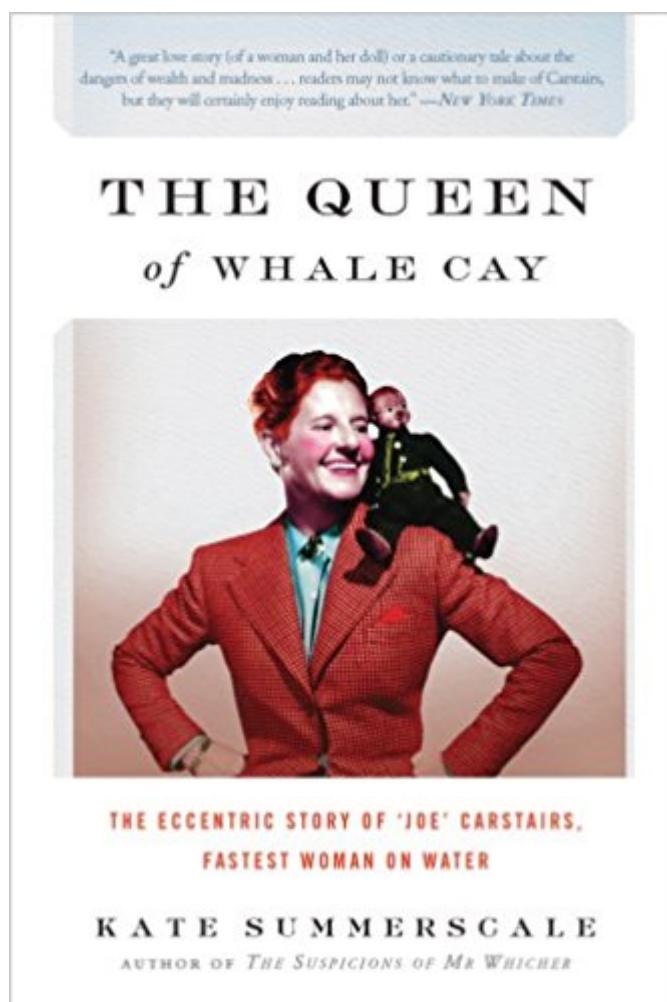


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The Queen Of Whale Cay: The Eccentric Story Of "Joe" Carstairs, Fastest Woman On Water



Synopsis

Joe' Carstairs was born in London in 1900, the daughter of a Scottish colonel and an American heiress. Educated in Connecticut, she returned to Europe in 1916 and drove ambulances for the Women's Legion in France. She deserted her husband at the church door (marriage was a prerequisite for her to receive her four million dollar inheritance) and settled in England where she took up racing, established a boat yard at Cowes, and won nearly every trophy going. In the '30s she started traveling widely, finally moving to the West Indies where she bought the island of Whale Cay. There she developed the island into a populated community, building everything from roads and schools to lighthouses and churches. Carstairs then succeeded in establishing hegemony over the five hundred islanders, controlling not only their sexual morals but also their diet. In 1944 she built a deepwater harbor for the Royal Navy's use and, without a word to her population, left the island to build warcraft in Florida, where she settled for forty years, having run a steamship freightline and set up a chain of airports. Kate Summerscale's brilliant biography brings out of obscurity a woman whose very boldness took her beyond fame and notoriety.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kate Summerscale is the author of the bestselling *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher*, which was awarded the Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction, and the upcoming *Mrs. Robinson's Disgrace*. She has also judged various literary competitions including the Booker Prize. She lives in London

with her son.

The English excel at the nurturing and cultivation of eccentrics. From ferret legging to innkeepers who charge extra to those "whose faces he didn't care for" there's an eccentric for every taste from the land of Shakespeare. I think Will S. would have enjoyed the subject of Kate Summerscale's ode to eccentricity - Marion Barbara "Joe" Carstairs - what with the tropical islands, cross-dressing, vague paternity and feats of derring-do, how could he not? Joe, The Queen of Whale Cay, demonstrated that with enough money and limited interest in the opinions of others one could pretty much live as one wished back in the 1920s and 1930s, including living openly as a lesbian, obsessing over a stuff doll and owning your own kingdom. Refreshingly, our boy-girl Joe is happy eccentric; generous and loyal to friends and lovers, interested in the welfare of her subjects, and generally enjoying life. Despite being inexplicably nicknamed "Betty" by the press, she also earns her title of "the fastest woman on water" by racing powerboats in the early days of the sport. Summerscale strikes just the right note for this slim biography - light without being lightweight. She doesn't over think what motivated Joe and certainly doesn't ask the read to feel sorry for her. If Joe was a bit more comfortable proclaiming her love for inanimate objects rather than people or if she was surprisingly vague about her mother's first name, none of it seems to have resulted in regrets. Joe was who she was, and everybody just had to accept it. She appears to have earned no enemies but many friends. And she lived well and gave generously but still managed to die with sizable estate. We should all be so lucky. A fun, quick read.

As a lover of biographies, I was surprised I'd never heard of this woman, "Jo" Carstairs. A descendant of a Gilded Age tycoon, Jo appears to have lived life on her terms. This information-packed little book is perfect for history buffs in the mood for a one or two-day trip around the world, especially anyone who loves the water. The amount of money this woman must have blown through certainly boggles the mind. Who wouldn't want to own her own island? If you lived in the twenties and you had an extra \$300,000 or so weighing your pockets down, you might buy one, just as Jo did. The bulk of that amount wasn't spent on the actual purchase, but I won't ruin it. This is a story of what can happen in a person's life when she is eccentric, unique, and loaded down with cash.

What an amazing retelling of an amazing life! I agree with Joe- her life SHOULD be turned into a movie!

What a fascinating story of a truly unique individual.

this is an okay book about an amazing woman. The problem that I had with it is that it is almost entirely small stories. There was never a time when I felt like I was looking inside the head of a woman who was so far out of any normal framework. I think it is worth knowing about, but it did not give me the insight that some biographies do.

Fun... But kind of drags a bit in the middle. Interesting story though.

Amazing book great info

Queen of the races would be more like it. More about her life in Whale Cay and less detail about her racing and her lovers would make it more to my liking. I have been interested in her island life since encountering a note about her in some literature about the Bahamas. Of course an account like this needs some background material, but listings of races won and lost, as well as lovers her whole life long, made it kind of boring, had to plod through these to find the parts about her life that were exciting and uniquely her. Her generosity was admirable, her loneliness so touching, her exploits so madcap that she seems a wonder of a woman who deserved more than a thoroughly researched but poorly written tribute.

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