

quarterlife
catch and release

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catch and release

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quarterlife is a literary journal published four times a year that features poetry, short fiction, drama, creative nonfiction, analytic essays, alternative journalism, and any other sort of written work Whiman students might create. Each issue is composed around a given theme that acts as both a spark for individual creativity and a thematic axis for the issue.

quarterlife is an exercise in creative subjectivity, a celebration of the conceptual diversity of Whitman writers when presented with a single theme. Each *quarterlife* theme acts as the proverbial elephant in the room, fragmented by individual perception: each portion is ostensibly unconnected but ultimately relevant to the whole. Every piece illuminates a different aspect of the theme. In this way, *quarterlife* magazine participates in the writing process. The magazine is not an indifferent vehicle by which writing is published, but rather is a dynamic medium with which writing is produced.

whitman.edu/quarterlife
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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to a new year with *quarterlife*. In the spirit of beginnings, and the endings they inevitably follow, this issue of *quarterlife* is themed Catch and Release. Be it a fish, a house, a friend, a good meal—life is a pattern of comings and goings, a long list of all those things we have hooked and then tossed back into the river, and of all the things that have caught and released us, as well.

I had a friend my freshman year who was on the verge of graduating, leaving behind this phase of his own quarterlife. He went through the processes that seniors seem to go through every year; he sold all of his furniture, donated his clothes to the Goodwill, and gave books away to friends. I left his apartment one day with five or six books, all the way home wondering how he could so easily part with his personal library.

My whole life I have compulsively collected books. At some point in my childhood, I was convinced that the Communists were going to invade and confiscate my growing library of Laura Ingalls Wilder and Tamora Pierce. I wanted to create an underground shelter, where I could save my books to give to my grandchildren—I could hand them my copy of *Walk Two Moons* and say, “This, my children, this is a book.”

The Communists never came and still I find myself collecting. As I look at my shelves of books and realize that so many of them are in that place next to my bedside table where dust jackets take their name, I wonder what it is that I am caught on. Is it the books themselves or the spirit of a full shelf? As I begin the end of my time here, and think about that day when I will shed whatever I can stand to part with, I slowly understand that it is all just a game of Catch and Release—of letting go all those things that will not fit in boxes, and holding on to the spirit they hold within them.



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Carter Timbel
An Ineffecient Feeding
Mechanism



I hooked a fish on the Touchet River. Someone had already caught it. The hinge of its jaw was torn on the left side. Connection tissue dangled between the upper teeth and lower. The healing was complete but it could never be called repair. The side of the mouth leaked. I didn't like to look at it. I still don't often think about it.

'Probably an inefficient feeding mechanism.'

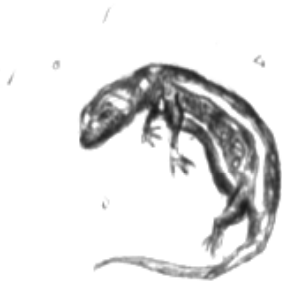
I didn't look too long. I removed my hook from the fish's nose where my nymph hooked it. I project the action of 'hooking' the fish onto my spun fly—a dirty and lovestorn Hare's Ear—because I don't want to be mean to fish, or to myself. When I pulled the hook out, backwards, blood oozed from the spot. This will heal in no time, I told myself.

The fish was slimy in my wet palms, and slipped a little as it moved. I looked at its good side. Pretty fish. The ooze from its nose was on my hands. My hands covered in dilute fish blood, I let it go.

He didn't swim away very quickly. He sank behind a rock and idled with fins akimbo. The current wasn't very strong and he stayed at the tip of my left boot. I wonder whether he later died.

I'm a catch and release fisherman because I'm afraid of killing fish.

Chelsea Kern
You Were Six



I

You were six and liked to dig in the mud and find the living things under there. Beetles round and green-bluepurp iridescent. Fat worms. Some centipedes, orange, sharp. The salamanders with little fires in their eyes. Unearthing a wriggling fire-lizard, you shrieked a shriek of happiness and plopped him into your lap. His fire-eyes bulged and smoldered up at your smile. You named him Tiny Racer for the yellow stripe on his slimy black back—black like the back of a shiny black racecar, you said. He was tiny, too, and lived in a bucket with leaves and twigs and mud and baby worms to eat every morning when you woke up.

II

You are sixteen going on seventeen. I'll depend on you.

III

You buried the salamander in the sand in the grass
(tall wavy green-grey silk sawtooth) where the ants
wouldn't find him. Water by the by and wind rushing
overhead but you were safe in the hollow depression
in the sand with grass and greyblue sky. Tiny Racer.
Only a little fire left in his eyes and named for his
blackback yellowstripe tininess he looked so sad in the
hole in the sand in the grass you made for him. You
cried, face buried in the sand with the sky and the
grass watching your back.

IV

Leonard Cohen says it best:
Slow cliffs of green water, and
kissing fishes making nests

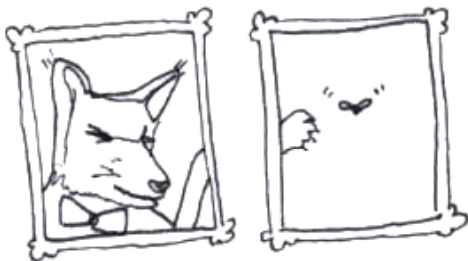
in your loose white winding sheet.

V

I was there. I was there too. You don't remember now but I was there too. Crouching in the grass. Fire under the sand. Linked fingers. Slow tears. Your skull touching mine.



Martin Stolen
Blows and Shouts



the perfect idiot
face of a wife –

a fox – a fly

each one evident
and receding,

unaccountably
busted chairs

Sonya Fabricant
Catfishing



Children? I guess I had a child, a son, but not anymore.

Dead? No, not dead.

Lost? I suppose not. He's right out there. Here. Come with me.

See this well? It's an old time kind of thing. Well water, right outta the ground, it's sweeter, see. I built it for my wife when we built this house, because the water's brackish out of the tap, so I told her: sweet pea, Ima build us a well so that when the baby does come, he'll drink that sweet water straight from the earth.

We had our baby and goddamn he came out hollering. The thing that always got me about Benji were his little hands, just exactly like mine only so ittybitty they could barely palm a pea. I couldn't believe

it. His fingernails were slivers. I coulda fit one of his hands in my tee shirt pocket. Why I coulda fit alla him in my tee shirt pocket.

Benji was one of those babies that just couldn't get enough of his mother. If she even looked at him in a sideways kind of way he'd up and howl. She'd take him with her everywhere. She'd hold him in her left arm and do just about everything with her right: She could plant taters and cook up some dinner and eat it and then wash the dishes all with him in her left. She went one day for water and with one hand on the bucket and one hand round Benji I think that the baby wanted to look in, and I guess he just looked in too far. I built that well and I know it's a long ways to the bottom. Nobody could survive a fall like that, and even if he did, how do you get a baby out? Go fishing? Naw.

It was real rough for a while. My wife would stand at the end of the veranda and look out west, like if she looked hard enough for long enough,

she could catch sight of the Pacific. I tell you, I couldn't take that hurting that inked her eyes; it was too godawful guilty. So I went fishing. Yeah, in the well. Naw, I wasn't fishing for anything special. Catfish, maybe. Or carp. I'll tell you, sometimes my hook'd go down with a bita sardine on it and it'd come up with a catfish, but other times it'd come up clean as spring, like them catfish were clever little fuckers.

I was at it for years just cause there weren't nothing else to do, even after the fog went outta my wife's eyes and we done forgot about what we never talked about, til one day I felt a little tug, and then a big one, and no I couldn't tell you what I was thinking cause I tell you that I done forgot, but I heaved up a big one, and it weren't no fish, and whaddyaknow, my boy done grow up.

This was a slimy one, real cold, dripping a green kind of drip and bony as a runty runner bean. Had these sharp little eye teeth and hair

and fingernails long and blackened. His hands were spindly, green-yellowed, with cracks full of brine. You bet I was scared outta my pants about it but I didn't think, just unhooked his lip and brought him home to his mama.

And she grinned, and she grinned, my wife. She cooked up beef and taters and some bread with some butter, gave him a glass of milk. She made him some little pants and a little tee-shirt, and went out to buy him some shoes. When she came back she saw what I saw: he was standing in the corner stark naked with a fish in his grubby little hands and the widest olive eyes you ever have seen.

What could we do? He hunkered down in corners and flopped about, suppose he never did learn to walk. He moaned a peculiar kind of groan, and when we tried to get close to cut his hair, or his fingernails, or wash the scum offa him, he'd shriek like a monkey and show us his freakish teeth. He looked like nothing human. He weren't human no

more, I suppose. He was more catfish then.

At night, he would crouch in our doorway, no blankets no nothing just big green eyes watching us in the moonlight like some seacreature. He'd fall deep asleep like that. This went on for a week; maybe two, til one day my wife tried to offer him a bit of chicken, and he bit the tip of her finger clean off. This isn't my baby, she told me, and the love in her eyes was rancid, and it soured more each time she looked at him, until I couldn't look in her face no more.

I knew then that sorrow was gonna kill her. You can lose your baby once and maybe you'll live, but if he comes back as a catfish, what's a mama to do? So I gathered him up one night. I went out walking, and dropped him back where he come from.

I guess what I meant to say was, no. We don't have any children. We had a son, but not these days. Not anymore.

Jenni Doering
Subsidence



little girl by water's edge
builds a castle made of sand
leaning sharply into sea;
ocean laps at castle wall,
pulling tendrils golden, smooth,
kissing feet where water soothes.

walls are now collapsing fast,
there where moisture meets the sand;
now she's mending feverishly,
wiping brow with sandy hand,
shoring up the castle walls,
watching as they sink and fall.

oh! the ocean powerful,
sweeping sand away like dust,
fills with wondering her eyes,
newly opened to its might.
stepping back, she gives the sea
leave to take her masterpiece.



Fig. 19.1
The Catch



Philip Hofius
Problems with Sex



I. Poultry

Sexing chicks has gotten tedious
in the last few years. We now
always end up with a few young,
fat-footed fuckers that grope
over their mothers

and sisters- cause heads
to roll. Everything looks the same
to us, just out of the egg, or when
we wake to find the sun
has mucked around in our closed eyes.
But no card slid under premature
feathers helps to sate these dumb-shit
animals' insatiable urge towards
incest.

My mom wishes we would
kill them all

II. Fiction

My bookshelves are peopled
by too many impotent protagonists
for me to count. They've been rubbing
off on me.

I guess the spring might
force some sprouts from the sick seed, now
lying in the dry recesses of our
converted out-house, tool shed- hearted
fist blossoms, maybe sunchokes that could
fester into rossler. And I've sang so many
blues bemoaning the drooping, walkable,
clouds to think that there's a chance
the tubers won't turn fetid in their cellar
shelves.

I'm done hearing
of all the people I recognize myself in.

Where's the goddamn belt to knock the sense into/out
of my head when I really want it?

III. Trucks

The Ranger's bed
is caked with cow shit, so
it's impossible to tell
Amelia that the brown of her hair
might just be the prettiest
color I've seen. I can't make
myself believe the lie because-
my arm wrapped around her
flat against the peeling,
screaming, stupid, lipstick
red on the Ford's back gate-
I can see it's just the same tint
as that crusty manure.



Zoë Ballering
The Bone Nights



“ . . . about the third week in July, 1884, the boys . . . were much amused by finding on the beach stones which would float, evidently pumice-stone. The lady who was with them . . . also noticed that there were a quantity of human skulls and bones ‘all along the beach at highwater mark’; these were quite clean and had no flesh remaining on them, and were found at intervals of a few yards . . . ”

—The headmistress of a Zanzibari mission school

It was a stranger summer than before.
The nuns had warned us from the water’s edge
and in the flush of June we sheened
the back of pews with praying hands:
“God the Father, may the new moon come.”

That moonless night of late July
our livid bodies lived with their own yens;
down from dormitory windows

in our dressing gowns, bare feet thick
on brick and sand, we crept towards water.

Here we found the secret of the thin-lipped nuns:
Ten thousand skeletons, scoured
and sleeping bodies on the slab of beds—
burnished white by sea winds,
floating on volcanic glass like Jesus walked.

They lit the shore, ten thousand slivers
of a shattered moon. The Old God granted
our impious prayers and in his awfulness
He blacked the sky by bringing bone yards—
no greater miracle exists.

We who own nothing but the rosary
collected curves: clavicles, ribs, the broad basin
of a mother's pelvis, meant for childbirth.
We traded ossicles for oranges, vertebrae for cigarettes,
Mallei for mkate with our tea.

At Sunday mass Adimu-who-the-nuns-call-Mary

heard lachrymals calling lachrymously from her pockets.
She had ripped each prize from the eyes of a woman
and in the secrecy of the sacristy she bent us to the bones.
We learned again of God:

*“The ash fell white.
I thought it was the Dutchman’s snow—
and then it burned me. The myrinx of my left ear
burst and I died deafly on the sand,
running towards the steaming ocean water,
rafted up on gouts of felsic lava, cast away,
the human jetsam of my home upon this island,
Sebesi, subject to a God who is not your God,
who is not gentle, who does not love.”*

So the bone nights were born; we did not sleep.
Squatted and casting from our still fleshed hands,
phalanges, rites of speaking lit by noctilucous clouds—
the stapes strung on cords around our necks,
the others thrown as auguries.

He broke the moon and blacked the stars,

marked the sky with bands of glowing blue,
knowing no good things, light from dark,
night from day. The Father lied; we hear the gospel.
Our world has no order—only God.



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