



# Catch & Release

*Blythe Woolston*

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*I should have died quick. But I didn't. I'm a miracle of modern medicine, only the medicine doesn't get much credit, I notice. People say I'm lucky, or I'm blessed, and then they turn away.*

*I'm not the only miracle. There's Odd too.*

Polly Furnas had The Plan for the future. Get married to Bridger Morgan, for one. College, career, babies. Etc. All the important choices were made.

*It was all happily-ever-after as a diamond-ring commercial.*

But The Plan did not include a lethal drug-resistant infection. It did not include "some more reconstruction and scar revision in the future." And it certainly did not include Odd Estes, a trip to Portland in an ancient Cadillac to "tear Bridger a new one," fly fishing, marshmallows, Crisco, or a loaded gun.

But plans change. Stories get revised and new choices must be made.

Polly and Odd have choices. Surviving or not. Catch or release.

## Catch & Release Details

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Author : Blythe Woolston

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# From Reader Review Catch & Release for online ebook

## Lisa Ferneau-Haynes says

I love the way this author puts her words together, every word means something and isn't just on the page to take up space. Great characters, perfect pacing...

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## Kathy says

On a road trip toward Portland, a fishing expedition, teens Polly Furnas and Odd Estes, connected by their survival from a flesh-eating disease, but missing an eye and a leg, respectively, come to terms with their new conditions.

Polly's first-person narrative, a present-tense flashback, is angry and self-pitying at first, full of her fears about moving around in a world without depth perception and her rage at her former boyfriend Bridger who has decamped. We see Odd's adjustment through her flawed perception, better and better as she gradually improves, moving beyond her own disaster to be able to see the people around her again. As she did in *THE FREAK OBSERVER*, Woolston convincingly imagines what it must be like to deal with an unusual health issue. At the same time she makes her readers care about her characters setting them believably in the upper Northwest world she knows so well. What can you catch? What must you release? A thought-provoking follow-up to her Morris-winning first novel.

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## Amanda says

High school senior Polly Furnas' life was in order: excellent grades, the perfect boyfriend, parents that adored her. It all fit into The Plan: go to college with Bridger Morgan, (AKA perfect boyfriend), become a teacher, get married to Bridger and live happily ever after. That was life before the MRSA outbreak that threatened her town, the drug-resistant flesh eating bacteria of which only two people survived: Polly, Case #6 and Odd Estes case #3. Now Polly must attempt to adapt to life after MRSA, which left her face terribly scarred. No friends, overprotective parents and most importantly, no Bridger. Holed up in her house, with nothing but "lady tv" and monster movies to keep her company, she starts an unusual friendship with Odd. Under the pretense of a fishing trip, Odd takes Polly on a road trip from Montana to Portland, Oregon to confront Bridger. What is her plan now? Blyth Woolston tells a realistic story of a young girl who had her whole life ahead of her, taken away in an instant. Foul language and discussion of premarital sex.

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## Gina says

This was an enjoyable read because the characters made me really uncomfortable. The main character had lost her eye to a flesh eating bacteria and is lucky to be alive. I loved the idea that life is a game of catch and release much like fishing. We all make choices on what we hold on to and what's worth releasing. Great read, but I think it may be over most teens' heads or maybe I read too much into it.

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## Kelley York says

This was...an interesting book. Not interesting-bad or interesting-good, necessarily. Just...head-tilting interesting.

Cover: 3/5 I'm not a fan of the cover. I like the fish hooks, but the font is really not at all eye-catching and it looks messy. And, while the hooks are neat, I think it gives the book a far more ominous feel than it really has.

Characters: 4/5 I really adored Polly and Odd. Their interaction was interesting and realistic, and I enjoy watching them connect in this strange way. Romance? Well, there isn't any *exactly*, which didn't bother me. The very subtle, blink-and-you-miss-it pieces that are present are perfect.

Plot: 2/5 this is where the book felt short for me. So many questions left unanswered! I could have easily kept reading, and just felt...I don't know. We were given these interesting characters, learned about them, got close to them, and that was it. No real plot. And it wasn't a character-driven book in the sense that it felt complete how it was. I reached the end and wasn't satisfied because the book felt unfinished.

Writing: 4/5 Beautiful. Poetic and yet easy, reminds me of Hannah Moskowitz except not *quite* as sharp. Admittedly, the beginning of the book had me scratching my head so much as to what the point of everything was, that I only kept going because the writing was beautiful.

Overall: 3/5 I enjoyed it, and the writing was fantastic and the characters, interesting. I just wish there were *more* in the other areas.

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## Mark says

"I miss my eye.

Not as much as I did at first, but I still miss it, especially when it comes to situations like this, when distance and closeness matter. I can't play ping-pong. I can't catch a set of keys if you wing them at me. Those are things that Polly-That-Was could do. Not me. I can't depend on the world, but other than that, I'm doing fine. I'm moving my story down the road. Slowly, slowly, like an old man in a hat, I'm moving my story down the road."

Polly Furnas is eighteen, and she and her classmate Odd Estes, are the only survivors of a fast-moving and deadly flesh-eating virus that killed five other people in their small, rural Montana town. There is no clear medical reason for why Polly and Odd survived while the others didn't, but the MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) has left Polly with a badly scarred face and no left eye, while Odd has the lower part of one leg. Before the virus, Polly had a boyfriend, plans to go to college, and some semblance of a future ahead of her; now, she stays at home, attempts to avoid and placate her worrismatic mother, and tries to come to grips with the ways her life has changed. In most respects, she's failing to do so.

When Odd shows up at her doorstep, and asks Polly to go fishing with him, she assumes it'll just be a quick

trip, something to take both their minds off of their conditions. She and Odd have never been close, but their shared good luck/misfortune has tied them together in some strange fashion. Once they leave for the river, it's clear that the two of them are dealing with their conditions in very different ways; Polly is much more sullen, depressed, and is unsure how to deal with her appearance. Odd, who comes from a much different background than Polly, appears to deal much more positively with the loss of his leg, but as the trip extends longer, it becomes clear that Odd has secrets of his own.

While I gave this book 5 stars, if you're looking for a strong plot, this ain't your novel. There really isn't one to speak of, but the voices of the characters were so strong and compelling (particularly Polly's - wonderfully snarky and honest), that I didn't mind at all. The fishing trip that the two originally set off on becomes more of a camping/road trip, with occasional stop-overs so Polly and Odd can drink, smoke pot, and interact with locals. Eventually, the trip develops another purpose; to deal with Polly's ex-boyfriend in Portland. The characters are extremely isolated, and by the end of the book, they're still pretty much in their own bubbles, but they've come to learn more about each other. I appreciated that there was no romance forced down the reader's throat here, simply because the two are stuck in the same car, and share the same devastating background with the MRSA. In fact, it's obvious that they still don't particularly like each other by the end of the novel. Both are incredibly complicated, and it's hard to imagine either one being in a successful relationship. But the brief moments of kindness they share are magnified, because of their misfortune. As the narrator, we learn more about Polly, but after the two separate near the end of the novel, and Polly reads Odd's letters to his grandmother, much more opens up about his character, in surprising ways. This is a powerful book about young people faced with a world not of their choosing, and how they deal with their lives the best they can.

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## **Julianna says**

I don't recommend the novel *Catch and Release* to teens and/or older and all genders because the action starts off slowly and doesn't catch an eye to the reader.

My book, *Catch and Release*, is about Polly, the narrator, and Odd, who both are survivors from an outbreak called MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*, also known as flesh-eating bacteria). This outbreak killed 5 other victims. Even though both Polly and Odd didn't die, they still had injuries. Polly lost an eye and her face is all bruised up, and Odd lost his foot. Both of them spent weeks in the hospital until they all got healed up. Before MSRA had happened. Polly and Odd had no connection together. They didn't know each other as well. After the MSRA, Polly and Odd found an interest they both like to do, which was trout fishing. When they go the river, Polly and Odd know that they will have an adventure that will never last.

I don't recommend this book because the story starts off with Polly having a flashback. It wasn't a positive flashback, but instead was a sad flashback. Her flashback was about the time she had to move and her depression she had going on in her life. Another reason I don't recommend this book is because I can't really relate to the characters, since they both love to go fishing.

People shouldn't read this book because both characters influences the readers to be very rude to their parents, relatives, friends, etc. Odd does bad things that might influence the reader to do the same things Odd does. Polly always talks about her wanting to move away from her mother and how she hates everyone in her life, especially herself.

Some people might recommend this book to other readers because Polly and Odd's adventure gets very interesting and makes you feel like you're in the book. My thesis is correct and the rebuttal is not because their adventure is about fishing and traveling to different parts of their town. I personally don't like to fish and I'm not much of a nature person. Yes, I do like to explore my city, but visiting different lakes or rivers is

not my thing. Instead, I like to explore Chicago and go to the popular attractions, such as the Bean. Even though Polly and Odd go on adventures and makes you feel like you're in the book, the book leaves you with many questions that aren't answered, which tells me that the book feels unfinished. Also, Polly and Odd influence readers in a negative way and use inappropriate language to communicate.

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## **Claire Dix says**

Catch and Release was one of those books that I picked up off the YA shelf of my local library using my usual look-at-the-cover-and-skim-the-summary-to-see-if-it-looks-interesting method of picking books off of this shelf.

I think after reading this book I might need a new method, because honestly, life is way too short to read awful books like this one.

It's the story of two teenagers who have survived the same tragedy but wish they hadn't. So, they go on a road trip/fishing trip to run away from their lives instead of facing their problems and moving on from what happened to them.

I hated both the characters as much as they hated each other. The guy, Odd (yes, his name is Odd), who only has one leg, is the grossest, most immature, idiotic jerk of any fictional character I have ever read about. Go read the book if you want to find out more, because the list of stupid things he does is too long for this review.

The girl, Polly, who has only one eye and a severely scared face, is so absorbed in her self pity that she never talks about anything else, except how much she hates Odd, herself, and her parents. She is so rude to her mom that I wanted to slap the half of her face that is still intact. Throughout the book, she just keeps saying over and over that she wishes she were dead. It's no wonder her friends left her. Well guess what, I know you hate yourself and that you have a disfigured face, but you DIDN'T die, SO SHUT UP AND TRY TO GET ON WITH YOUR LIFE!!! Please.

In the end, I think the worst thing about this book was that there was no point, message, or relevancy, or change whatsoever. Polly and Odd still hated each other, hated their lives, and hated God and this cruel world. the author tried to give the story meaning through an event at the very end of the book, but it didn't work. Both characters stayed stagnant in their depression and annoyingness.

So yes, I definitely need a new method of choosing books to read.

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## **Louisa says**

Quite possibly the strangest YA novel I've read in quite a while. Like "A River Runs Through It" with snarky, angry MRSA-surviving teens. It's not an easy book to get through but a really beautiful one nonetheless.

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## Angela says

I have to be honest: the premise of this book is among the strangest I've read in a long while, which is rather impressive if you knew some of the books I've read and generally enjoyed. I say that because the catalyst to this entire story is this: A high school girl and a few other unfortunate souls contract MRSA. Don't know what MRSA is? Well, it's the flesh-eating disease. And poor Polly's face was mauled rather terribly by it.

The writing moves easily, even when depicting some rather gruesome detail (i.e. Polly's scarring), but it took me a while to understand where the novel was going, as well as what its intent was. The story itself follows Polly as she and an acquaintance, aptly named Odd, go on a fishing trip. They are not romantically inclined, not really, but maybe they are. They are imperfect and human, and through their story, Woolston showcases the human condition when faced with overwhelming odds. Do you collapse inward? Do you blame the world for the things you're fighting? How can you express yourself when no one will listen? What kind of future can you make for yourself when every plan you made is shattered and tossed aside in a moment's time?

My favorite parts of this story are the quiet ways that Woolston showed but did not tell. Whether she was referring to the maybe/maybe not strains of romance developing between Polly and Odd or the nearly silent revelations Polly has regarding her lot in life and how she wants to view both herself and her future, it's smartly done. And, I really loved the way that Polly's growth was steady but almost imperceptible, unless you were paying close attention.

So, why only 3 stars, you ask, instead of a more shining rating?

Quite simple, really: It took me a very long time to become invested in either of these characters. Polly required significantly less time than Odd, but still, it was well after the halfway point of the novel that I felt any kinship with her, which made the book difficult to enjoy, as she's the narrator. However, particularly with regard to the last handful of chapters, by the end of this book, I was happy with the resolution and character growth, and felt confident that both Polly and Odd would enjoy their futures, both in the small ways they will likely interact and apart.

Interesting read, interesting characters, and at the end of the day, an interesting premise.

3.5 stars.

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## Donna says

Aside from the fact that I would be perfectly content living in a bubble as I now see little squiggly germy death on every door handle, I hate it when I'm at a loss for words on a book. Like stomp my feet, hold my breath until the words come hate. Considering that'd be counter-productive I won't do it. But it doesn't make me happy.

There is nothing bad about CATCH & RELEASE. Not a thing. Except it might make you a disciplined germaphobe to an extreme. But aside from that, there's nothing even remotely wrong about it. The voice is perfect. And I mean perfect. Woolston has captured Polly's voice so amazingly that that's all I can say about it. It's amazing. Reading Polly's words you get a sense of the person that she used to be before MRSA. There's a hint of it still lingering but it's all dripping in bitterness and disdain because of what she's lost.

There were times where I was getting frustrated with how she was thinking and reacting to things but you catch yourself. Instead of spiraling the thought about her being an overreacting drama queen, the words hitch in your brain and you can't help but ask yourself, 'if you lost a third of your face, including one of your eyes, how would you feel?' It would be hard enough for an adult to cope with something like that but a teenager? At the beginning of the book Polly's consigned herself to her couch for the rest of her life. Her life is over. By the end she's been, well, released, and you watch her transform from someone who hides, who throws in the cards, who wants revenge, to someone that just releases all of that anger and hatred and bitterness and starts over. And you can feel how monumental that step was.

I was less than thrilled with Odd but his reactions to things become clearer at the end of the story so I won't ruin that one. But it's funny with Odd because the story is in Polly's voice so you see him as she sees him and at times he can be a dick. But then you get to see Polly through Odd's eyes and it's when you can get out of her head and see from another angle how she was acting and how it was perceived by others that maybe it was a little over the top. Considering this was viewed by another MRSA survivor that lost his leg, he could relate to her pain and as such is in a position to tell her to get over it, in his own unique way.

The dirt and grime and grit that they slough through on their trip is something palpable. Especially when Polly gets her period. I'll leave you to that. But you get a sense that as they travel along, they're picking up more and more crap but leaving just as much of it behind. They're both coming to terms with what's happened to them but they're doing it in the only way they each know how. As the road before them becomes less and less visible, they each take their own paths and any fear that's there manifests and then fizzles as one steps up to help the other. You can't help but watch the steps up they take, some of the tumbles that result, but the ultimate moving on that they're both doing.

Before this runs the risk of de-evolving into a nonsensical meandering of a review I'll end it here. I'll conclude with the offering of awesomeness to that which is CATCH & RELEASE. While I loved it, I wasn't in love it with, hence "just" a four rating. It is truly awesome but it didn't quite hit me in my cockle region to rank it higher. But it's more than just your average contemporary novel about teens coming to terms with themselves and finding their place in life. These teens had something monstrous happen to them and as a result were effectively pushed out of society to deal with it on their own. Which they did. And they're forcing their way back in. You can't help but feel moved as you read it. And just a little squicked out. I'll be honest. I micromanage my papercuts now.

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## **Mandy says**

Polly Furnas had a plan. Graduate highschool. Marry her sweetheart. Go to college, and have children. MSRA was not in the plan. Neither was spending weeks in the hospital and loosing her eye. Somehow, out of everyone in her hometown who survived the infection, she survived, along with a fellow highschooler, Odd. Now she has a choice. She can lie around wallowing in self-pity or take Odd's offer for a fishing trip. She can choose to fight to live or slowly die inside her new body. Plans change.

Blythe Woolston's Catch & Release is interesting, a bit disturbing, and just perfect for analyzing our views and anger. With writing and a story line that gets under your skin, Woolston wraps it up with Odd's letters to his grandmother, effectively putting a balm on the infected story. A new book with merit for discussing what we make of life and those around us, Catch & Release is certain to find its own among teens looking for something out of the ordinary.



Disclaimer: A copy of this book was provided by the publisher.

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## **E. Anderson says**

I'm essentially blown away by Blythe Woolston's latest novel, *CATCH & RELEASE*. Never has a book about a flesh-eating disease been so oddly romantic, so compelling. And perhaps you, readers, are thinking, "but I don't know of any other novels about a flesh-eating disease." But that's the thing. It doesn't matter. This book is the zenith of flesh-eating disease books.

Polly, a recent survivor of a lethal drug-resistant infection which killed most of its other victims, certainly never imagined herself in her current position. Recently released from the hospital, she and her friend-but-not-friend Odd are the only ones who didn't bite it in the quarantine unit. Not that there aren't personal casualties, so to speak. Odd lost a leg. And Polly lost an eye, and most of one side of her face. She hasn't heard from her boyfriend lately either.

Now stuck on an accidental road trip with Odd, stopping to fish -- the one thing they have in common -- every once in a while, Polly is left to figure out her new plan. The plan that no longer involves her boyfriend and the future she'd seen for them together. She's not exactly thrilled about being stuck on the road with Odd. But it might be the only way to figure it all out. The plan, that is.

Complete with the characters' monster-themed alphabet book for children (in rhyming verse, made up on the spot), and the addition of "beranoia" to my vernacular, *CATCH & RELEASE* is absolutely a must-read for 2012. Woolston's voice is impeccable, and Polly is a character you won't soon forget.

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## **Ashley says**

This book hooks you and will not let you go until you see Polly and Odd down the road.

The star here is the voice of the narrator, Polly. Polly after a brush with death via flesh-eating bacteria. Polly who no longer has The Plan. She is raw, cynical, and stalled in a place that's scary and looks very different with only one eye.

Because she's been robbed of The Plan, Polly has also been freed from The Plan. Freed to think thoughts that would have been off limits to the Polly who was nice because she had to be, not because she wanted to be. Who had the boyfriend she thought she wanted to marry, but never thought too hard about.

For me, those thoughts were just delicious--pitch-perfect but also provocative. I love a character who teaches me something. And not just Big Thoughts. Crazy facts, which I believe are Blythe Woolston's secret specialty.

But there's more credit to spread around; it's the trip with Odd (who is) that lets Polly discover the difference between being robbed and being freed. Odd needs tending, and the kind of tending that he needs opens up that place in Polly that can let her move her story down the road.

In case you were wondering, there's not a romance that opens up between the two; it's a book about the push and pull of unexpected friendship (and what happens when you put two very different people in a car for an extended period of time). BUT, for those of us who think about what might be down the road... Polly does think of him as her "beautiful Odd." I think there are some more road trips in their future.

Gorgeous storytelling and incredible voice. *Catch and Release* is not to be missed.

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## Tez says

MRSA (what does that stand for?) is a contagion - bacteria enters the body via a cut and kills what it comes across. For Polly Furnas, it entered via a bleeding blemish, taking out her cheek and an eye. MRSA also took Odd Estes's leg, which has since been replaced with a robot leg. And these people were the lucky ones.

Polly and Odd met in hospital, and now they embark on a fishing road trip. On a diet of junk food, coffee, alcohol, and medical marijuana, each teen comes to terms with their disabilities whilst trying to survive each other.

With a parent blind in one eye, I believe our narrator's problems merging lanes and parking. Polly Furnas is affable, clever, and funny; exactly the traits that make for a great "Vagina American".

## AWESOME POLLY QUOTES

- "I am not a pussy. I prefer the term Vagina American."

- "It's a trout. It's a whore. It's every guy's fantasy."

- "Krikey. Bad idea, mate." Actually, it's spelled *Crikey*, but hopefully this'll be fixed before publication.

Meanwhile, Odd is a douche: He dumps a dog on Polly's mum to care for, he pees on roads and graves, he struggles to sleep without booze, he carries a gun, he makes Polly pay for everything...and he's a massive bitch. He's such bad company that I'm not sure why Polly chose to go with him (other than needing time away from her mum). But Polly thinks he's a douche, too, so I have the intended reader reaction - and that doesn't often happen, so Blythe Woolston should be commended.

*Catch & Release* is character-driven, and the low level of plot may put off readers, but it's still more accessible than the author's first novel. And it has one of the most deliciously creepy covers!

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