

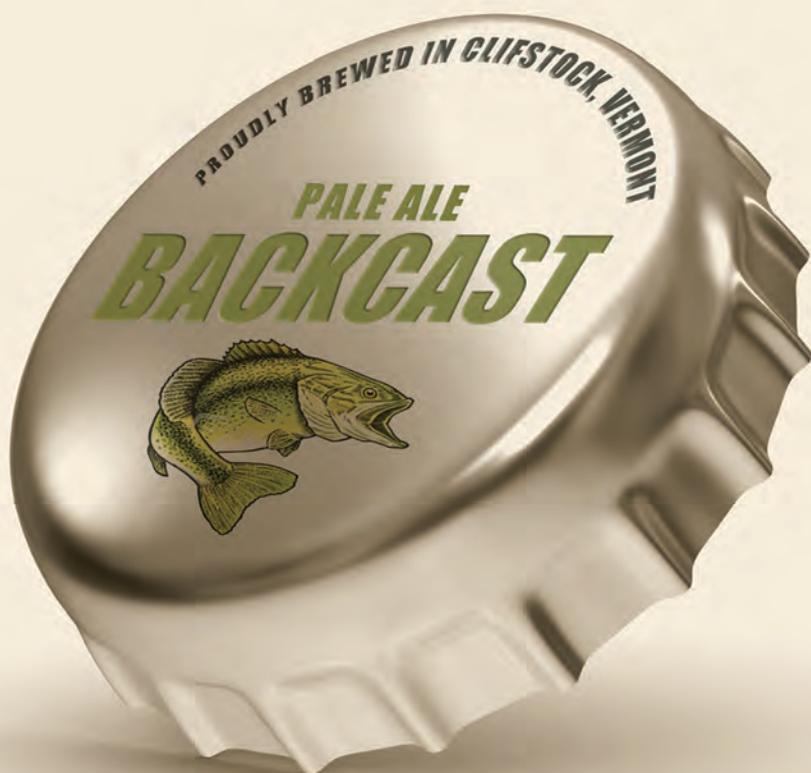
"I love Ann McMan."

—Dorothy Allison, National Book Award finalist for *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Backcast

a novel

Ann McMan



Bywater Books

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This novel is a work of fiction.
All characters and events described by the author
are fictitious. No resemblance to real persons,
dead or alive, is intended.

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Reading Group Discussion Guide

- 1 The differences between perception and reality are dueling themes in the central storyline and various subplots of this novel. How are these differences revealed or reconciled? Are any left unresolved at the end? Why? Why not? What is revealed about the characters that contradict what we thought we understood about them?
- 2 How does the lake function as a metaphor in the story? Do the characters behave or relate to each other differently on the water? How does Quinn's process of learning how to pilot the boat—and cast her fishing line—mirror her journey toward self-understanding?
- 3 What is the significance of the Pisces map Junior gives Quinn? How does it relate to the motif Barb Davis creates to represent the various tales of transition written by the 13 authors? Why does Barb choose to depict the women in the story as fish?
- 4 The great fish, Phoebe, is a creature of both myth and imagination. What role does she play in the central narrative of the book? Is she real, or is she a figment of Quinn's imagination? What does Quinn learn about her own motivations during her face-to-face encounters with Phoebe? Are these encounters real or imagined? Does it matter?

- 5 How does the Phoebe subplot function to tie the disparate storylines of the book together—much like the final series of sculptures are tied together with twine?

- 6 The 13 individual “transition” essays are presented without attribution. Why is that significant? What commonalities do the stories reveal? How do the essays the women write coalesce to create a unified picture at the end of the book? How are the themes they describe tied to each other and to Quinn’s quest to catch the elusive fish?

- 7 How does the fishing tournament parallel the journeys the women make—individually and as a group—during their two-week retreat? How are their lives changed? How does the outcome of the fishing tournament change Quinn? Change others?