

YOUR FREE READER'S COMPANION

Your Gull Harbor Companion

A companion to The Innkeeper's Second Spring · by Eleanor Quinn

Thank you for spending a season at the Saltbox Inn. This little keepsake is for you to keep: a short guide to the town of Gull Harbor, the blueberry cake Eunice made in that scorched old pot, and the letter Marin carried for thirty-three years. Pour something warm, and stay a while longer.

Some doors only the second time opens. I'm so glad you came back through this one with me. — Eleanor

A Short Guide to Gull Harbor, Maine

Gull Harbor isn't on most maps, which is exactly how the people who live there like it. If you ever drove up the two-lane and then the road that isn't paved the whole way, here is what you'd find.

Place	What it is	Who you'd meet
The Saltbox Inn	The white inn above the harbor, third porch board newly fixed	Marin, and Eli if there's work to do
The general store & post office	Where the mail, the gossip, and the old letters all wait in their boxes	Ruth, who misses nothing
The Dory Diner	Pie under glass, coffee that never stops, the warmest booth in town	Joan, and Beak by the window
The town wharf	Lobster boats on the morning tide, the smell of bait and salt	Cal, the harbor master, watching the water
Sparrow Ledge Light	The lighthouse out on the point, dark these few years	(not yet — but soon)
The chapel hall	Chowder suppers, fiddle tunes, the whole town in one warm room	everyone, eventually

A note on the weather: in Maine, mud season comes before spring as a kind of test. If you can love the place in April, when everything is brown and the wind comes straight off the cold water, you'll love it all the more in June. Marin came back in mud season. That was the bravest part.

Eunice's Blueberry Cake

The one Eunice made in the scorched pot, the recipe Marin found in her mother's hand in the back of the recipe box. Wild Maine blueberries if you can get them; they're smaller and they mean it. It is not a fancy cake. It was never meant to be.

You'll need:

- 1/2 cup butter, soft
- 1 cup sugar (plus a spoonful for the top)
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups flour (plus a little to toss the berries)
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 cups blueberries, wild if you can

The way Eunice did it:

1. Heat the oven to 350F and butter a square pan.
2. Cream the butter and sugar until it's pale and forgets it was ever two things. Beat in the eggs one at a time, then the vanilla.
3. Whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt in another bowl. Add it to the butter in three goes, with the milk in between, mixing just until it comes together. Don't overwork it; a tough crumb is a sin in this house.
4. Toss the blueberries in a spoonful of flour so they don't all sink, and fold them in by hand.
5. Spread it in the pan, scatter the spoonful of sugar over the top for the crackle, and bake 45 to 50 minutes, until a knife comes out clean and the kitchen smells like a reason to stay.
6. Let it cool enough to be patient about. Eat it warm anyway.

Eunice burned the coffee every single morning of her life and never once burned this cake. Some things you only get right when you stop trying to be perfect at them. — Eleanor

The Letter from Box 14

This is the letter Marin wrote at nineteen and never delivered — the one Eli didn't read for thirty-three years. You met it in the book. Here it is in full, the way she meant it.

Eli —

>

If you're reading this I've already gone, and I'm a coward for telling you on paper instead of to your face, but I know if I see your face I won't be able to do it.

>

It isn't that I don't love you. I want to be as honest as I can be in the only letter I'll ever have the nerve to write. I love you the way you love the one true thing, and that is exactly why I have to go. Everyone keeps telling me I'm meant for somewhere bigger, and I am so afraid that if I stay I'll wake up at fifty and blame you for a life I chose with my own two hands. I would rather break my own heart now than hand you a worn-out version of it later.

>

You are not a small life, Eli. Please don't ever believe that's why. You are the whole harbor. I'm the one who doesn't know how to stay.

>

Fix the third porch board. It still catches.

>

— Marin

If the book gave you anything, I hope it was this: it is never too late to be known again by someone who knew you when. Watch your inbox — there's another Gull Harbor story coming, and the lighthouse won't stay dark forever. — Eleanor