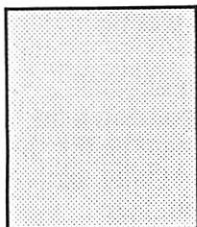
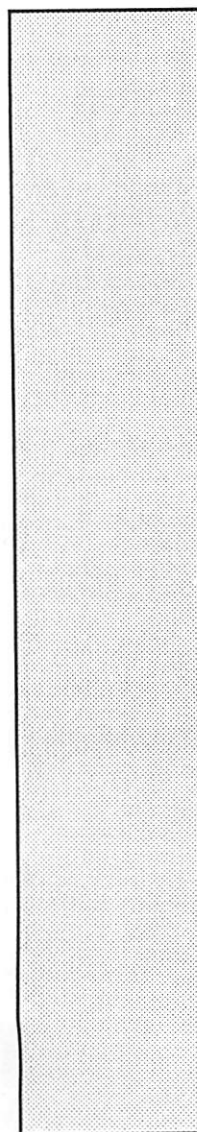


# Fair Marie

Fiction by Charles Pinning



*It was those boat riggers and haulers who gave her the name*



**F**air Marie lived in a field surrounded by civilization. Men who found out she lived there wanted to believe she was a whore and came around after work or later at night to be disappointed until they finally left.

In the mornings, Fair Marie would drive outside the city to shower at a marina. She would pull up close alongside the door to the heads and go inside with a towel. Just like the men who knew she lived in a field, the marina workers figured she was a prostitute and stared at her from a distance and wondered where she lived. They peeked in her car once, half-expecting to see a rumpled blanket and clothing, but instead, all to be seen was an old-fashioned doorknob laying on the back seat. It puzzled the men that she didn't seem interested in them, only in coming to shower then leaving.

It was these boat riggers and haulers who gave her the name Fair Marie. "She looks like a Marie to me," one of them observed from the shadows of the workshop. "Aye," said an Irishman who performed miracles with rope braiding and splicing, "and a fair one she be."

Nobody commented right away, but it somehow got put together and stuck. Fair wasn't the sort of word the other men would ever use to describe a face, much less a woman's body, but they liked it and started using it partly because it was different but mostly because it fit.

After her shower, Fair Marie would get back into her car and leave, never later than eight-thirty because she liked to start work around nine.

She was a carpenter and the people she worked for, every one of them even if they never breathed it to another soul, thought it strange that such a very lovely young woman did

this for a living--and did it so well. The men who worked on the jobs, the laborers, painters, and other carpenters, figured she had to be a dike--they didn't know any other women carpenters. They did know some women house painters who were definitely dikes.

Content to engage in conversation when the work at hand allowed it, Fair Marie's most distinctive trait was that she never talked about herself. On all other possible topics she was, if not loquacious, disarmingly to the point and genuinely thoughtful.

One day, a guy showed up to do some roof work on a house she was rebuilding the porch of. Like everybody else, he was surprised to see she was a woman and likewise impressed by her steady, skillful work. Saying good-night to her at the end of the day, he drove home wondering what she was about.

A week went by, then another, and on a Monday morning he and Fair Marie were alone for a few moments in the garage where various supplies were stored--bags of nails, shingles, lumber, etc.--and he said to her, "I thought about you this weekend."

He'd not considered how she might respond and was taken aback when the grey-violet mosaic of her eyes met his and she replied, "In what regard?"

Unable to answer her honestly, his true feelings being such a pleasant jumble of desire, protectiveness, curiosity and, yes, love, he merely said, "I was repairing a window sill at home."

The rest of his day was outwardly passed replacing flashing around dormer windows, while his best energy was employed in silently repeating, "In what regard?" followed by muttered variations on his true feelings, and then they would kiss or not kiss. That part was very unclear and disturbing--too exciting even to ponder.

That night he left work late and noticed she'd forgotten the red flannel

shirt she often wore over her t-shirt. He brought it home and fell asleep with it tucked under his chin, one sleeve draped across his face.

Two days later, when all the tools were collected and the building secured for the night, he discreetly followed her in his van and she led him across town to the field where she lived.

It was late October and the field had turned a cinnamon haze of tall grasses and spent wild flowers. He watched her wade into them until somewhere near the middle he lost sight of her altogether.

He rolled down the window of his van as far as it would go and lit a cigarette. She did not reappear. Lights

came on in the long windows of the solemn Victorian houses that ringed the field and the air turned sharply cooler, first on his arm then against his neck.

Finally, when genuine darkness had settled in he drove away, having completely forgotten that two hours ago he was supposed to have met a woman he could always depend upon for "a nice, warm time." She was Colombian, and that was her demure way of referring to their...entire relationship, actually. The problem was, from his point of view, she'd been wanting more lately, bringing up the idea of maybe going for a bicycle ride...spending the afternoon together... His apartment was dark and chilly when he

stepped inside and he flipped on the kitchen light. He stuck his hands in his pants pockets, pressed them against his thighs and looked around. Suddenly, he remembered where he was supposed to be and frantically punched out her phone number, but there was no answer.

"Great!" he shouted angrily and slammed down the receiver. And at once he felt to be, in the ephemeral way that these things happen, Fair Marie.

"You just blew an opportunity to act like your old self," she said, as if it wasn't exactly a disaster.



## Neighborhood Celebrates Jubilee in Grand Fashion

### PARTY ON THE PARK by Julie Ikai

As part of Providence's 350th celebration, West Broadway was host to its own neighborhood Jubilee Festival on the Armory Common, Sunday, August 10. The event was a milestone in West Broadway history. It has been many years since residents celebrated as one group. Organizing the event, in conjunction with the city, was a grassroots committee chaired by Gilda Jeffrey. The committee met every few weeks to pool ideas and prepare for the big day.

It was a glorious August

day. The sun made a rare weekend appearance. The park looked uncharacteristically festive with yellow and white tents, green grass (from weeks of rain) and jillions of balloons, courtesy of a hearty Balloon Committee. The Fine Arts Committee, headed by Melanie Shook put up a beautiful show of local artists' work. Glass, ceramic, murals, paintings, photography and sculpture were

all represented.

The kids worked hard on a mural of their own and took time out for sack races and a water balloon toss refereed by Melodie Strain and Kevin

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