

Bette Lynch Husted

## Women in Pendleton

### On Main Street

**Wednesday, November 9, 2016**

*At one time, Pendleton was known as the entertainment capital of the Northwest, with 32 saloons and 18 bordellos. As the tour brochure says, "This is where the past becomes real."*

They stand here in the glare of daylight, statues placed to stare across Main Street into each other's eyes: Aura, corseted and bustled, hands folded in front of her long dress; Stella in silk pantsuit and heels, hands on her hips, one leg propped cowboy-style on tall bronze stone. Aura, Mother of Pendleton. Stella, last madam of the Cozy Rooms bordello.

Last night, in the glow of muted streetlights we thought we heard them whispering like sisters, though it may have been the murmur of our voices sharing hard stories we hadn't told before. This morning we are stunned to silence, women wordless as these statues cast in bondage to the ways of men.

## On the March

Saturday, January 21, 2017

*It is the responsibility of the male poet to be a woman*

*It is the responsibility of the female poet to be a woman*

*It is the poet's responsibility to speak truth to power . . . —Grace Paley*

My granddaughter can't wait.

She hopes there will be fireworks. Maybe bulls!

She grips her sign: *We're All In This Together*. "You okay?"

I ask her mother. Mostly white faces in this crowd.

She nods. "For the first time since election night,

I'm not afraid." Someone asks us to shout out the name

of the woman whose shoulders we are standing on

and we do we do my eyes are filling now

we're talking, singing, laughing, marching, girls,

women with babies, grandmothers, women in wheelchairs.

Fathers for Strong Daughters, sons and partners. Men.

"I believe," we say. That women's rights are human rights,

that Black lives matter. Immigrants matter, Standing Rock

matters, Dreamers, science, public lands. Respect matters,

kindness matters. Health care, reproductive rights.

Love is love is love. In her pocket-search

for animal crackers we've somehow exchanged signs

so granddaughter's says *Bridges Not Walls* and now

she's making her way around the courthouse hedge

toward her new friend, another brown-skinned girl:

*I'm the face of America!* Cheers rise around us.

It's the largest demonstration our town has ever seen

and we can breathe again. On the way home,

signs waving like wings, our small girl flies.