

One Poem

Sue D. Burton

**Over at the Shiva Piano Lounge the Woman Who Was Sawn
in Half Is Drinking a Hipster Variant (Green Chartreuse and
Gin) of Lydia E. Pinkham's 1876 Original Vegetable Com-
pound**

I do like a green Lydia after work. Though sometimes,
I don't know, Lydia kicks me.

This afternoon, at the matinee, when they lifted me
into the box, I pulled my knees up to my chest (that's
how it works—another woman dressed in red
crawls up from underneath—the saw
slices between us)—

anyway, when I tucked my knees,
I thought of myself as a shirt. A shirt being folded
and put in a suitcase. The suitcase was brown,
tweedy, lined with tan silk. The shirt was white.

Then I thought of myself as a nightgown.
A white nightgown. My great-aunt Nettie's.
The one they told her to bring to the appointment.
So to protect her clothes.

The thing about the Pinkham formula, all those roots
(life root, unicorn root, black cohosh)—
they're *emmenagogues*—they bring on your period.
So you got pep and a cure (18% alcohol
for your *womanly Complaints and Weaknesses*),

and you weren't pregnant anymore.
Except for Nettie.
She needed an appointment.

When my mother died, the undertaker gave her
a *nice blue nightgown* for the coffin.
But Nettie's was a white nightgown. No frills.

Cy Stewart was the "author of her ruin."
The family tried to shush her "dying declaration."

That was the language of the time.

A scandal, my mother said, *in all the papers*.

I have my mother's christening gown.

Nowhere to go but back alley.

White cotton and lace. I made it into a curtain.

