

Take Off That Chastity Belt...
...and put on some common sense.

by Tess Sharpe

Since her eventful entrance in a cabin in the woods nineteen years ago, Tess Sharpe has home schooled in Redding, played in youth orchestra and swim team, created a groundbreaking blog for international girl empowerment, and lived with two gay men in San Francisco.

After studying at Shasta College and CSU Fullerton, she is heading to Oregon State University in the fall to study Shakespearean theatre. She is also a young-adult novelist.

This column is an excerpt from her author blog.

"Chastity had then, it has even now, a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest."

Virginia Woolf

So here's the thing: I'm writing a book about virginity called "Losing It".

It's about the president of a virginity club who, after finding her supposedly morally upright father engaged in some pretty heavy petting with the nanny, decides to rebel. She does this rather badly but she ends up befriendng a new girl in school and gradually, these two girls fall in love.

I realize I'm going to get a lot of flack for this book. There are sexually promiscuous characters, there are prudish characters, there are characters who are virgins because of their religion or other beliefs, there are characters who are vicious and cruel to one of the sexually promis-

cuous characters, scrawling "Slut" on her locker so often that she keeps a can of blue paint inside of it so she can keep covering it up.

I think that saving yourself for marriage is great. If THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT TO DO. The problem that I've been seeing more and more through my research is that, a) this pledge of chastity is mostly targeted towards girls, rather than boys, and b) is often the result of outer influences, including parents and religious figures, not the girl's own motivation. Case in point: the new, disturbing trend of so-called "Purity Balls", this absolutely disgusts me.

Break Out Your Chastity Belt

Now, I'm all for father/daughter bonding. I am very close to my own dad and I love him to pieces, but I don't want him to EVER think of me as a sexual being. I don't want him to even THINK about whether or not I'm a virgin. And he never WOULD because EWWWW, that's GROSS! Dads have no business thinking about stuff like that. What are we, living in the medieval times? Are we gonna break out the chastity belts next?

I want to take every single one of these girls and say this to them: If you want to save yourself for marriage, do it for *yourself*. Don't do it for your future husband or god or your father or your mother or your pet poodle, Tookie. Don't listen to someone if they tell you you need to pledge this to a male figure. They aren't smarter or better than you are. You have your own mind and you should open it. Look at the options. You are your OWN person, you don't need a daddy or a husband to survive. You are not going to remain a child forever, even if the adults in your life try to keep you that way.

Sexuality: It's All Yours

And to ALL girls out there: Your sexuality is your own. It does not belong to anyone else. Not your dad, not your boyfriend/girlfriend, not your future husband/wife. Celebrate it. It is an incredi-

ble, powerful thing and it's ALL YOURS. Guard it if you want. Wait to unleash it until you're married if that's what you think is a good idea. But don't judge anyone who doesn't make that choice. The amazing thing about being human is we're all so freaking different, and not all choices are right for every one of us.

This book, the one I'm writing, is important to me. It's not a dark book. It's funny, the president of the virginity club (her name is Nell) is so clueless sometimes that it's a little on the edge of sad. But her eyes are opened, and she sees things differently and as she falls in love with this other girl she comes to realize that it isn't about purity of body. Chastity won't make you a good person. It won't make you smarter or better than anyone else.

When it comes down to it, it's all about purity of soul. Doing good things to others and to yourself. To being true to your sexuality and to your mind. That might mean staying chaste. It might not.

Women Helping Women

Maybe that sounds corny, but today I watched my older sister weave around the crowd of people who had gathered to celebrate Roe vs. Wade's anniversary and I thought "This is what it's all about, when it comes down to it. Women helping women. Changing the world. She's changing the world, one woman at a time. She's helping people open up their minds, and by doing that, they're opening up their hearts too."

Whether or not we are virgins does not MATTER. Our value is not in a piece of membrane or in the promise of chastity or in a ring that says "I'll Wait."

We are women. We are strong and brave, and we SURVIVE.

And just by doing that, we are changing the world, one woman at a time.

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