



Victorian Secrets: What a Corset Taught Me about the Past, the Present, and Myself

Sarah A. Chrisman, Sue Lean

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On Sarah A. Chrisman's twenty-ninth birthday, her husband, Gabriel, presented her with a corset. The material and the design were breathtakingly beautiful, but her mind immediately filled with unwelcome views. Although she had been in love with the Victorian era all her life, she had specifically asked her husband not to buy her a corset—ever. She'd heard how corsets affected the female body and what they represented, and she wanted none of it.

However, Chrisman agreed to try on the garment . . . and found it surprisingly enjoyable. The corset, she realized, was a tool of empowerment—not oppression. After a year of wearing a corset on a daily basis, her waist had gone from thirty-two inches to twenty-two inches, she was experiencing fewer migraines, and her posture improved. She had successfully transformed her body, her dress, and her lifestyle into that of a Victorian woman—and everyone was asking about it.

In *Victorian Secrets*, Chrisman explains how a garment from the past led to a change in not only the way she viewed herself, but also the ways she understood the major differences between the cultures of twenty-first-century and nineteenth-century America. The desire to delve further into the Victorian lifestyle provided Chrisman with new insight into issues of body image and how women, past and present, have seen and continue to see themselves.

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