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#1 bestselling author of *Untamed*

CARRY

ON,

'Profound. I can't stop  
thinking about this book'

BRENÉ BROWN

WARRIOR

GLENNON

DOYLE

'What an absolute  
guru of a woman'

ELIZABETH DAY

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Carry On, Warrior

Glennon Doyle is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Love Warrior*, an Oprah's Book Club selection, as well as the *New York Times* bestseller *Carry On, Warrior*. An activist, speaker and thought leader, she is also the founder and president of Together Rising, an all-women led non-profit organization that has revolutionized grassroots philanthropy, raising over US\$20 million for women, families and children in crisis, with a most frequent donation of just US\$25. Glennon was named among OWN Network's SuperSoul 100 inaugural group as one of 100 'awakened leaders who are using their voices and talent to elevate humanity.' She lives in Florida with her wife and three children.



# Carry On, Warrior

*The real truth about being a woman*

GLENNON DOYLE



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Certain names and identifying characteristics have been changed and certain  
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# Dedication

One night my mom, Tisha, was visiting and she asked to talk to me privately. She looked nervous. We walked into my bedroom and leaned up against the bed pillows together. We talked, slowly and carefully, about my writing. She told me how beautiful she thought it was and how hard it was for her to read. She described the pain she felt when she read about my secret life and how confused she was that it all happened while we did our very best to love each other. We talked about how scary it is to share these stories with friends and strangers.

We cried a little and laughed a little, too. But they were teary laughs.

We talked for a long time, and then it felt as if we were almost done. I was sad, because I wanted to stay on that bed with my mom forever. I thought about that in the quiet for a while. I wondered what she was thinking. Then my mom looked at me and her lip quivered and even though she was very, very scared she said, *I am so proud of you. I am in awe of what you and God have done together. You have to tell your stories. This is what you were meant to do. Don't stop telling your stories, Honey.*

It was like when I told her I was pregnant, and she was very, very scared, but she looked straight at me and said, *Glennon, you don't have to marry him if you don't want to. We can raise the baby together. We can handle this.*

## CARRY ON, WARRIOR

It was like when my baby sister, Amanda, announced she was moving to Africa to save little girls from an epidemic of child rape. And even though my mom was very, very scared, she eventually said, *It's what you need to do. Go.*

People are always calling my mom an angel, but I think she is a warrior.

And I want her to know that this book, and every single word that I write, is for her.

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”

—Rev. John Watson

“Including you.”

—Glennon



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## Cast of Characters

Like yours, my story is tough to categorize. My life is a tragedy, comedy, romance, adventure, or redemption story depending on the decade, time of day, and how much sleep I've had. The constant in my story—the river that runs through it—is my cast of characters.

My husband, Craig, volunteers to help friends move before they ask. He dances in the kitchen, bathroom, and grocery store. He plays hide and seek with our dog, Theo, when the kids get tired of playing. He remains calm. He wakes every two hours to check our kids' fevers when they're sick. He holds his tongue and my friends' crying babies. He's golden. And broken. Just like me.

My firstborn, Chase, is the one who changed everything, just by being born.

My girls, Tish and Amma, mostly scare me. How do I raise little girls before I'm finished raising my own little girl self?

My Sister, Amanda, is my Lobster and my left lung. How I breathed without her for the first three years of my life remains a mystery. Sister's husband, John, is my safety deposit box. I trust him to hold and protect my most precious treasure.

My dad, Bubba, translates his love and wisdom into words, like me. My mama, Tisha, translates her love and wisdom into actions, like Craig.

## Cast of Characters

I'll add God to my cast of characters. I can't explain him or her at all, because I don't understand his ways. I just know he's the one who cast these folks in my story. I'm grateful.

# **CARRY ON, WARRIOR**



## Building a Life

A few years ago, strange things started happening to me at church. I'd find myself in the middle of a lighthearted conversation with a woman I'd just met, and the woman would make a joke that didn't sound like a joke, suggesting that our family was "perfect" and that this "perfection" made her feel bad about her own family. This happened three or four times over a two-week period. Once a woman said, "You are so *pulled together*. It makes me feel so *apart*."

My husband, Craig, was standing next to me at the time, and I looked at him confused while he looked back at me, equally confused. This is our signature interaction. I stammered my way through the rest of the conversation, and on the way home Craig and I debriefed.

We were baffled. Craig and I adore each other, but neither of us would describe the other as "pulled together." These women may as well have been saying to me, "I'm just so jealous of your *height* and *culinary genius*." I'm five two *and a half*, and all I know of cooking is how to make the call that results in the delivery of dinner. During our debriefing, Craig and I developed a theory that if you are thin and smile a lot, people tend to believe that you have the universe's secrets in your pocket and that a raindrop has never fallen on your head. If you also happen to be wearing trendy jeans, well then, *fuggedaboutit*.

This theory distressed me greatly. I do not like to make other women feel less than. And I wanted my insides and outsides to match somehow. But I was scared I'd have to start looking like Pig Pen or Courtney Love to make that happen. You see, I'm a recovering bulimic and alcoholic. For twenty years, I was lost to food and booze and bad love and drugs. I suffered. My family suffered.

I had a relatively magical childhood, which added an extra layer of guilt to my pain and confusion. *Glennon—why are you all jacked up when you have no excuse to be all jacked up?* My best guess is that I was born a little broken, with an extra dose of sensitivity. Growing up, I felt that I was missing the layer of protection I needed to expose myself to life's risks—risks like friendship, tender love, and rejection. I felt awkward, unworthy, and vulnerable. And I didn't want to walk through life's battlefield feeling that way. I didn't think I'd survive. So I made up my own little world called addiction and I hid there. I felt safe. No one could touch me.

Then that changed. On Mother's Day, 2002, unwed and addicted, I discovered I was pregnant. I alternated between staring at the test in my shaking hand and into my bloodshot eyes in the bathroom mirror. I tried to force these truths to mesh: I am a drunk. I am alone. I am pregnant.

And because I had no clue what else to do, I prayed. I prayed the only way I know how to pray—in moans and accusations and apologies and tears and wild promises. When I finally stood up from the bathroom floor, I decided to become a mother. I walked out of the bathroom and vowed to never again have another drink, cigarette, drug, unhealthy relationship, or food binge. That vow has been hard to keep. In a whirlwind, I found myself married to a man I'd known for ten sober nights. Marrying Craig turned out to be the best decision I never really made.

During that time, I discovered that I was strong. That was the first true thing I ever learned about myself. I also learned that wifedom, motherhood, and sober life were really quite difficult. I always wondered if other women found these things to be as difficult as I did.

Then, one day I was at the playground with a new friend from church named Tess. I suspected that Tess was having trouble in her marriage. We hadn't talked about this, though, because we were too busy talking about more important things, like soccer practice and highlights. I felt frustrated that our conversation never went deeper. We seemed incapable of discussing the very things that were most important to discuss.

Lost in my frustration, I started thinking about all the time and effort I'd spent building protective layers between my broken heart and the broken world. I considered the ways I'd distanced myself from other people—people who might hurt me more than I was already hurting. People who might be disgusted if they saw the real me. My fear of really being seen had driven me to hide inside the bunker of addiction for decades. When I finally crawled out, I pulled on my secrets and shame like armor and carried my invulnerability like a weapon. Life, to me, had always seemed like a battle to survive. But there at the playground, I realized that surviving wasn't enough anymore. Sitting there with Tess, I realized I wasn't really *sitting there with Tess at all*. There were so many layers of my armor and her armor between us that we couldn't touch each other. And even if we'd wanted to, we couldn't have gotten close enough because we were shooting at each other with stories about our “perfect” lives.

Suddenly this all seemed completely ridiculous. Sure, I was sober and out of hiding, but by denying my past to others, pro-

tecting myself with the shield of secrets and shame, I had isolated myself. I was lonely, and a bit bored. Life without touching other people is boring as hell. It hit me that maybe the battles of life are best fought *without* armor and *without* weapons. That maybe life gets real, good, and interesting when we remove all of the layers of protection we've built around our hearts and walk out onto the battlefield of life *naked*. I wondered, *If I put down my guns, will Tess do the same?* I decided it was a worthy experiment.

I shed my armor and I waved my white flag. All of a sudden I heard myself saying the following to Tess:

*Listen. I want you to know that I'm a recovering alcohol, drug, and food addict. I've been arrested because of those things. Craig and I got accidentally pregnant and married a year after we started dating. We love each other madly, but I'm secretly terrified that our issues with sex and anger will eventually screw things up. Sometimes I feel sad and worried when good things happen to other people. I snap at customer service people and my kids and husband regularly. I always have rage right beneath my surface. And right now I'm dealing with postpartum depression. I spend most of my day wishing my kids would just leave me alone. Chase brought me a note the other morning that said, "I hope Mommy is nice today." It's depressing and scary, because I keep wondering what will happen if that feeling never goes away. Maybe I can't handle this mommy thing. Anyway, I wanted to let you know.*

Tess stared at me for so long that I wondered if she was going to call our minister or 911. Then I saw some tears dribble down her cheek. We sat there, and she told me everything. Things with her husband were bad, apparently. Really bad. Tess felt scared and alone. But at the playground that day, Tess decided she wanted help and love more than she wanted me to think she was perfect.

We hardly knew each other, but we both realized that we were in this together. We went through some tough times over the next few months. Therapy, separation, anger, fear, and lots of tears. But a little army of love circled the wagons around Tess and her family and blockaded anybody from getting too far in or out. And eventually things got better. Tess, her husband, and their beautiful children are together and healing and thriving now. And I got to watch all of that. I actually got to see the truth set a family free.

At that point in my life, I was dying to do something meaningful and helpful outside of my home, but no one would have me. We were rejected again and again when we tried to adopt. Then I tried to become a volunteer at the local nursing home. They seemed thrilled with me until the background check. They never called back. Perhaps they thought I had a secret motivation to get all the old people wasted. Then I tried to volunteer at a local shelter for survivors of domestic violence. It looked as if they might have me until the final interview, when the woman said, “As a formality, I just have to ask if you’ve ever been arrested.” It was hard to explain that it was *only five times*. She never called me back, either.

I was depressed.

But then the Tess thing happened. And I thought, Maybe I could do *that*. Maybe my public service could be to tell people the truth about my insides. It struck me that for this particular “ministry,” *my criminal record was a plus*. It gave me street cred. And I considered that maybe the gifts God gave me were storytelling and shamelessness. Because I *am* shameless. I’m almost ashamed at how little shame I have. Almost, but not really at all.

So I decided that’s what God wanted me to do. He wanted me

to walk around telling people the truth. No mask, no hiding, no pretending. That was going to be *my thing*. I was going to make people feel better about their insides by showing them mine. By being my real self. But I was keeping my trendy jeans. I decided they were part of my real self.

A few days after I told Craig that I was going to “volunteer” as a “reckless truth teller,” my minister called me on the phone. My first thought was that Tess had ratted me out. But the minister said, “I know you’re having a hard time with the baby, and it might seem like a bad idea, but you need to tell your story to the church. The whole church. On stage. Live.” Craig sweated and looked into whether he could be fired for having an ex-con for a wife. I planned my outfit.

Then I wrote down my story, without leaving anything out. I read it to my church, and it went really, really well. People were shocked. It is so fun to shock people. Lots and lots of people wanted to cry with me and tell me their stories. And I thought, *Okay, then. Take that, nursing home. I didn’t want to serve your stupid lemonade anyway. Does one get standing ovations and tears of joy for serving lemonade? I think not.*

I’d found my thing: openness. I decided, based on firsthand experience, that it was more fun to say things that made other women feel hopeful about themselves and God than it was to say or omit things to make people feel jealous of me. And it was easier too. Less to keep track of and monitor.

I started writing a few months later, so that I could tell my truth recklessly to more people. After reading a few of my essays, my dad, Bubba, called and said, “Glennon. *Don’t you think there are some things you should take to the grave?*” I thought hard for a moment and said, “No. I really **don’t**. That sounds *horrible* to me. I don’t want to take *anything* to the grave. I want to die used

up and emptied out. I don't want to carry around anything that I don't have to. I want to travel light.”

When I got sober, I woke up and stepped out into real life for the first time. I was twenty-six years old, but because I'd been in hiding since I was eight, I saw the world through the eyes of a child. I was awed and afraid. My heart opened to the world's beauty and brutality. I looked closely at humanity and all of its brokenness and decided to forgive it and myself. Since brokenness is the way of folks, the only way to live peacefully is to forgive everyone constantly, including yourself. I decided that I had nothing to be ashamed of. I'd done the best I could with what I had. I'd do better now. Mostly.

This new-found state of forgiveness and hope allowed me to trust another human being with my whole heart, so I got married. It became clear that marriage was hard and holy work. I learned that I could do hard things. I learned I was worthy and capable of being another human being's constant. And this confidence helped me widen my circles. I had Chase, Tish, and Amma. I became an active part of my community. And I reached out to God: the ultimate circle—the One that holds us all together.

I realized that these widening circles—accepting myself, my partner, my children, my community, and my faith—were the only layers of protection I needed. These circles were my life, and I was at the center: naked and honest and sober and broken and imperfectly perfect. A work of art in constant progress.

The more I opened my heart to the folks in my circles, the more convinced I became that life is equal parts brutal and beautiful. And/Both. Life is *brutiful*. Like stars in a dark sky. Sharing life's brutiful is what makes us feel less alone and afraid. The truth can't be stuffed down with food or booze or exercise or work or

## CARRY ON, WARRIOR

cutting or shopping for long. Hiding from the truth causes its own unique pain, and it's lonely pain. Life is hard—not because we're doing it wrong, just because it's hard. It's okay to talk, write, paint, or cry about that. It helps.

This book is my story, and I hope it's yours too. It's about how I built my circles—how I built a life—and what it means to me to carry on.

# WAKING UP



# Sisters

My decision to get sober was more like a weary surrender than a bold march into battle. After I had allowed my life to fall into a thousand pieces for the thousandth time, Bubba and Tisha planned a loving intervention. Then I found out I was pregnant with Chase, and I realized that I was running out of people and options. At the time, the path of least resistance seemed to be sobriety.

*It's not somebody who's seen the light  
It's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah.*

I called my sister and said, “Sister, do the thing you always do,” which is to figure out what the hell happens next, and then make that thing happen. A few hours later, she gathered up my broken self and we drove to our first AA meeting.

Sister held my sweaty, shaky hand and walked just in front of me, scanning for problems or people from whom to shield me, like she always does. She took an AA brochure from a table so we'd have something to look down at when we sat and joined the circle. On the front was a list of alcoholism warning signs:

Do you drink more than four servings in a setting?  
*One time I didn't.*

Do you ever drink in the mornings?

*Only on weekends.*

Do you ever black out?

*Can't remember.*

Have you suffered negative consequences from drinking?

*Being here seems like a pretty negative consequence.*

Neither of us said a word until my sister leaned over and whispered, "I don't know if AA is going to be sufficient. We might need Triple A."

After the meeting, we came home, sat on my bed together, and stared at the disaster on my bedroom floor. During my drinking decades, I lived like a pig. My room was a hazardous pile of stilettos, tube tops, wine bottles, ashtrays, and old magazines. I valued nothing. Everything that came into my life was disposable: clothes, opportunities, people. My bedroom looked as if my insides had spilled out onto the floor.

After a few minutes of quiet, Sister climbed down from the bed and started picking things up, one piece of trash at a time. She threw away the wine bottles and the cigarettes, she folded the tube tops, and she gently tossed the magazines. I watched for a while and then joined her. We hung up every piece of clothing, wiped down every gritty surface, poured out every hidden bottle of booze. We worked silently, side by side, for two hours. Then we sat back down on my bed and held hands. My room looked so different. It looked like a place where a girl might want to live. I wondered if my head and my heart might one day be places I'd like to live too.

It was the beginning.