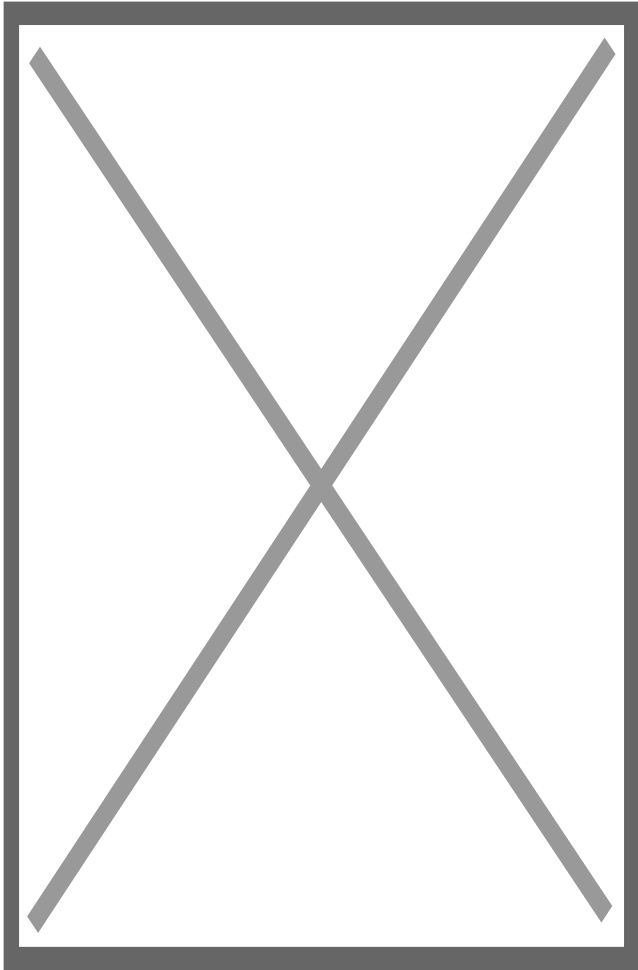


Carry On, Warrior and *The Girl Got Up*

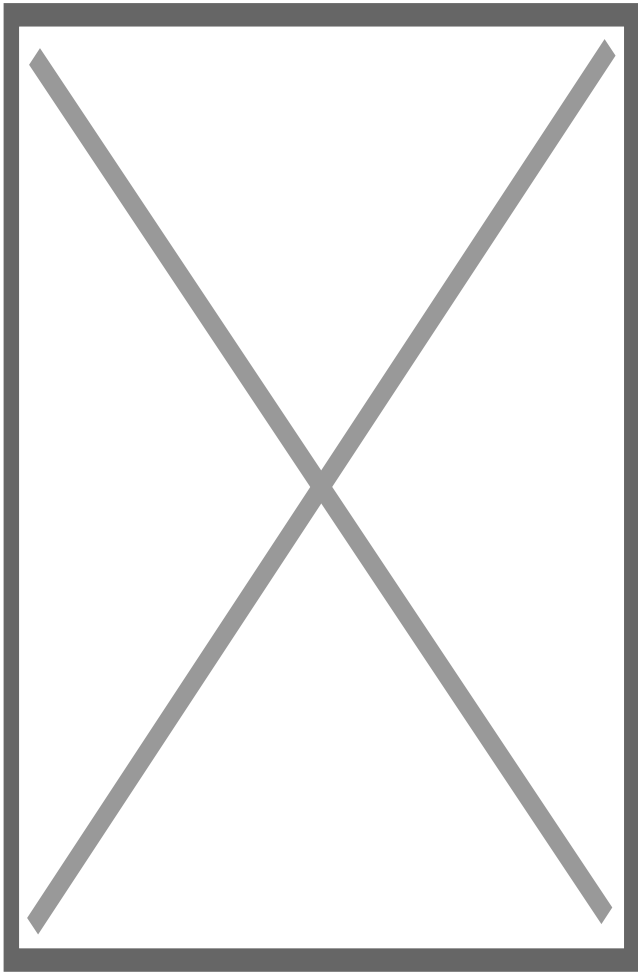
reviewed by [Katherine Willis Pershey](#) in the [May 1, 2013](#) issue

In Review



Carry On, Warrior

by Glennon Melton
Scribner



The Girl Got Up

by Rachel M. Srubas
Liturgical Press

Shortly after Glennon Melton was plucked from obscurity thanks to a series of enormously viral blog posts, Scribner beat out nine other major publishers in the bidding for her first book, *Carry On, Warrior*. Melton shared the press release on her Momastery blog with her trademark wit: noting the luminaries in the Scribner portfolio, she wrote, “I’ve heard that Hemingway started as a mommy blogger, too.”

In some ways Melton is a typical mommy blogger, plumbing the ordinary crucibles of parenting for material. One of her most popular posts—which, like many others, appears in the book relatively unaltered—takes on the older women who stop mothers of young children in public to remind them that the years pass quickly and to enjoy every moment. One day Melton receives such advice at a department store during a particularly trying moment:

[My daughter] was wearing a bra she had swiped from the cart and sucking a lollipop she undoubtedly found on the ground. She also had three shoplifted clip-on neon feathers found on the ground. She looked exactly like a contestant from *Toddlers and Tiaras*. A losing contestant.

She confesses that the older women’s well-meaning reminders make her feel rotten, because all she really wants is for the day to be over.

The typical mommy blogger leaves it there, letting the bracing honesty and self-deprecating humor suffice. But Melton pushes further, offering her readers pearls of spiritual wisdom. The “Don’t Carpe Diem” story ends with a lesson in *chronos* and *kairos* time. *Chronos* is “ten excruciating minutes in the Target line time, it’s four screaming minutes in time-out time, it’s two hours until Daddy gets home time.” Melton identifies *kairos* as the moments when she glimpses her daughter’s beauty or steps out of her impatience with a slow cashier to behold the abundance of her shopping cart full of good food. “Don’t Carpe Diem,” she writes, letting tired parents off the hook for not enjoying every moment. “Carpe a couple Kairoses a day.” Certainly, this rendering of time is nothing new to many Christians. But Melton serves as a translator, artfully setting this and other potentially heady spiritual concepts smack dab into family life, *Toddlers and Tiaras* references and all.

Melton explains herself in the introduction. Realizing that other people tended to look at her apparently pulled-together family and deduce that they were, in fact, pulled together, she became tired of hiding behind pretense. She dared tell the truth about herself to a new friend at the park: she was a recovering bulimic and sober alcoholic with a police record, rage issues and a lingering case of postpartum depression. The friend eagerly reciprocated Melton’s risk, divulging her own heavy burdens. At the time, Melton’s family was trying to adopt a child. Her police record slammed that door and also disqualified her from volunteering at a nursing home.

The playground connection sparked a new sense of vocation for Melton:

Maybe my public service could be to tell people the truth about my insides because it seemed to make people feel better, for whatever reason. . . . I considered that maybe the gifts God gave me were storytelling and shamelessness.

Days after Melton decided that she was called to “make people feel better about their insides by showing them mine,” her pastor invited her to tell her story at church. It went swimmingly, of course. She 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.”

Melton’s personality is strong, and her writing is probably not for everyone. Yet even if her dramatics and occasionally overdone humor start to grate, it’s awfully hard not to be moved by her faithful recklessness. During the painful saga of the failed adoption attempts, Melton heard what one might call a still, small voice. The voice asked, “Now what do you want more? Do you really want to help my orphans, or do you really want an adopted child? There might be a difference.” Melton and her husband (from whom she separated last fall) donated the lion’s share of their savings to an orphanage in Guatemala.

Carry On, Warrior is precisely the kind of book I hope the parents in my congregation will read. Melton is a richly gifted storyteller, and her shamelessness is the best kind, rooted in a refusal to believe that she is anything other than a forgiven and beloved child of God.

The Girl Got Up: A Cruciform Memoir, by Rachel M. Srubas, is an entirely different kind of book. Whereas Melton is populist and popular, Srubas is esoteric and published by a press run by the Order of Saint Benedict. Whereas Melton’s progressive Christian faith tends toward the generalities of 12-step spirituality, Srubas’s memoir is saturated with biblical allusion. And whereas Melton is not a master wordsmith, Srubas crafts prose so poetic it scarcely surprises the reader when she weaves original poems into the narrative. But like Melton, Srubas has the God-given gifts of shamelessness and storytelling, par excellence.

A Presbyterian clergywoman and Benedictine oblate, Srubas explains her project:

I write and publish stories about myself in which sex, drugs, and family secrets figure. It’s unseemly. I hereby sacrifice any image of seamliness I might have once wished to project. . . . If this memoir is truly to

be cruciform, I must sacrifice the fantasy popular among Christians that the new life in Christ may be attained without suffering and death.

She likens herself to the girl who was not dead but sleeping, to whom Jesus went and extended a hand. As the girl got up, so too did Srubas, at 22, when she converted to Christianity from atheism and a traumatic early life. I expected her conversion to be as exciting as the escapades that preceded it. It was not. Srubas simply sat in her nice Presbyterian boyfriend's blue chair and prayed, unexpectedly but with great sincerity. After she prayed—a prayer of lamentation, surrender and, above all, devotion—she all but dashed to the nearest Presbyterian church.

The cruciform motif, with its agonizing insistence that the tomb cannot be emptied before it is filled, makes for a harrowing journey toward redemption. The book is at times almost unbearably dark, but Srubas is a brave narrator. “Some writers, like some psalmists, are meant to lament, to allow readers into their tenebrous rooms. Fear not. The darkness will not overcome you.” And it does not; the light comes, brilliant and redemptive, and it seems all the brighter for the shadows (and strange beds, and a mental institution) where Srubas suffered. The cruciform shape also underlies the profound purpose of Srubas's work. She allows that her vulnerability may well be a source of healing for readers, but unlike Melton, whose goal is to make other people feel better, Srubas grasps that crucifixion and resurrection are ultimately about glorifying God.

Though it is every bit as deserving, *The Girl Got Up* will not make it onto nearly as many nightstands as *Carry On, Warrior*. It isn't the kind of writing that goes viral, but it will benefit from word-of-mouth advertising. Dog-eared copies will be passed from friend to friend, along with the imperative: *Read this*. Srubas achieved her aim of writing a “cruciform memoir” so successfully that one knows the gist of it if one has heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and has uttered the mystery of faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.