



What Strong Women Do

Noelle Elliott

Every so often I fall apart. I would say it happens at least once every few months.

I had this favorite pair of high heels. They were perfectly broken in. They carried me across campus for the past five years at least 1000 times. A few years ago the heel became detached from the sole. Just a little bit, and I ignored it and kept stomping across campus.

You see, these shoes were perfect, my pants were the perfect length for them. When I wore skirts, they were high enough to make me feel professional but not too high to look like a street walker. Well, they were kind of on the border of the two, and I was okay with that.

I had the soles of these heels repaired twice. But the heel was wobbly. It threw off my balance several times, but I kept going. One of my colleagues helped me duct tape it once. I applied superglue at least three times.

But last week as it was starting to rain, the heel came completely off. I didn't have an umbrella, and I stood in front of a group of college guys and had a complete adult temper tantrum. I took them both off threw them in the trash and proceeded to walk in my stocking feet in the cold rain to my car.

My husband was out of town, and I was single-parenting for the week. I had several work projects I had been working on but was unable to complete because I had to leave work early to pick my sons up from school. I had a paper due in grad school. My oldest son, Parker had a

major project for school that he was stressing about. I got an email from my second son, Fin's violin teacher informing me that he keeps forgetting his violin. My third son Jack had made it his mission to be mean to his younger brother, which caused said younger brother to cling to me like he hadn't since he was two. Top that off with morning workouts that made me say things like "My body is showing its age." and stop for air. My boss, well, I nicknamed him PUMA which stands for person up my ass. And that was just in one day. And then my fricking heel came off my favorite shoe.

When I got home I checked my email and had one from my grad school professors. I received a B, but then she wrote, "I think you would benefit from a writing tutor. WTH? That is like telling my brother, who is a professional opera singer that he needs opera lessons. I understood what she was saying, but it was too late.

Cue: Falling apart.

I decided to screw dinner. I told the boys to eat whatever they wanted. I had to say it twice because they didn't believe me.

I then proceeded to sit on the couch with a glass of wine, holding back tears as I texted my friends. My tribe of women who I know I can trust. Who I admire. It was dinner, after all, and after I rapidly fired a dozen texts my phone was silent.

I could hear the microwave beeping, and the blender buzzing as the boys made a cornucopia buffet of everything they weren't supposed to make for dinner. Smoothies, nachos, pickles. I saw them peek in to see if I really meant it when I said they could eat whatever, and I did. Hell, I was having Pinot Noir, with a side of nothing. I wasn't one to talk.

My sons have seen me cry before, but you see, my mother-in-law was really ill and that is why my husband was in Florida. I felt like my problems were self-induced and insignificant. I didn't want to worry the boys more than they already were. So I tried to maintain a somewhat normal composure as I stared at the wall doubting all my life decisions while drinking my dinner.

What felt like hours, but was just minutes was when my phone started going off. All the friends I had texted were texting me back. My phone has a light that flashes when I get a text, and it makes my family room look like a disco. One text after another. Telling me to shut up, that I'm fully capable. That they love me. That I'm stronger than I think. That I'm not a dumbass.

Maybe it was the wine, maybe it was the exhaustion, maybe it was gratitude, but I finally allowed myself to cry. Tears actually dripped in my wine. Not an image you hope your children remember. The tears are okay, and it is okay for them to see that sometimes, we all hit a breaking point.

But Damn, I have amazing, strong and wonderful friends. We don't see each other often because the truth is, we all have careers and mortgages, and we have to take care of kids and husbands, and maybe just life They were busy, making dinner, or sitting at practice, running

their own company or grading exams. But when a friend sent out a message, they stopped what they were doing, and they were all there, at least in texting form and that is what I needed.

What strong women do, is they don't avoid the pain of a friend, they rush to it. They swoop in and take care of business. The business of repairing a wobbly soul. I'm not throwing this one out.

By this time, the boys had taken the free-for-all dinner to mean they could eat on the couch. I didn't care. They were also watching Teen Titans. A show I happen to like. Fin (the one who keeps forgetting his violin at home) made half of his nachos the way I like it, just in case I wanted some. And I did.

We all fall apart for whatever reason, but surrounding yourself with people that won't rush in to pick you up, but give you encouraging words that let you know, that YOU are fully capable of picking your own damn self up. Even if it is shoe-less and in the rain, they know you will find a way, because deep down they know you have got it in you and you can. And when you do, you will be even stronger.

They knew I wasn't going to give up. I wasn't going to call in sick, quit my job, or school, or go AWOL and leave the kids alone.

They have no doubt in me because they have been there too. They know, that on the other side of this, I will be fine. The painful and crucial times like this are when true personal strength and growth happen. And that is what strong women do.