

Raluca
MIHĂILĂ

GLASVAND

35 hours
in the life
of a grown-up girl



CREATOR



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R a l u c a M i h ă i l ă

She has the ambition to see the world as she dreams of it, an attempt that allows her to be a *work in progress*. She shows herself to the world through various creative forms, among which Photography, creative writing and Utopic Brain, the Marketing agency she founded in 2018.



35 hours in Oana's life, a woman who has been working in the same corporation since her college graduation. Although extremely frustrated by her professional limits, Oana finds reasons to continue this way of life. Beneath her apparent superficiality there is a soul eager for appreciation and exposure, but also scared by the judgment of many. She is a woman self-taught to be in control and uncomfortable in vulnerability. However, she travels moments of deep awareness and honest hope that, if she does not have the courage to break away, perhaps life will force her to take a step towards herself, towards the one she knows she can become.

www.glasvand.com



It is only through an imaginary out-of-body experience that you can look yourself in the eye with honesty. If you read this before diving into the book, you might think you're in for a difficult read. Humor, satire, modern language, meagre realities, plenty of substance, clichés, effort and 35 hours in the life of a grown-up girl.

A book you can read in one breath and which takes you through every state, from nostalgia to pure joy, indignation followed by acceptance, especially if you've ever worked in a corporation, an environment where people are to a certain degree just numbers.

And yes, it is indeed hard to digest, if you've only ever worked in corporations and you believe there's nothing you can do and this is just how life is.

Cristina Gheorghe,
HRQualityServices.



Once I finish my morning coffee and hectically getting ready for yet another day at the assembly line, I proceed to convince myself that I still have forty-five minutes left to enjoy the luxury of pondering over the existence of free will. That all ends abruptly once I sit down at my computer, logged as a company asset under a number longer than that of an inmate's locked up for manslaughter.

But, boy, I have been wrong about aspirational luxury. As soon as I step out of my house, I find myself under an aural siege.

"Careful, you moron! I've only just bought that furniture!!" yells a man the size of a wardrobe and the handling aptitude of a brown bear who had been unfortunate enough to escape the gift of perfectly functional neuronal synapses.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean it,” apologizes the other guy who, despite his apparent cluelessness, is probably no stranger to this type of incident.

“I don’t care if you meant it or not, you still said it,” insists the beast.

“Forgive me.”

“Stop apologizing and keep your eyes open! How in God’s name did you get a job moving furniture? Don’t you have to pass some kind of test?”

The poor man (I’m sure if he were rich, he wouldn’t be breaking his back for peanuts) lowers his head and carries on in silence. Maybe if he had paid attention in class...But then, even if he had, it wouldn’t have made a difference. Graduates across the world are happy to stock shelves in supermarkets, so no news there.

The elevator is waiting for me to embark, so all I have left to do is leave behind the rarefied atmosphere of the ninth floor, the kingdom of my vanity, and descend to the vacuous medioc-

rity of the ground floor... So what? We all need to compromise every now and then, don't we?

Vanity, same as fear, serves a purpose, I often tell myself. They both keep you in check. Admittedly, sometimes you get stuck in there, but that's another story.

As I feel my whole being gradually immersed in the cellular density and lack of character of the lower floors, it suddenly gets dark. But the kind of pitch-black darkness where you are tempted to poke yourself in the eye to check if you haven't actually died. The medieval machinery which is charged with transporting my outfit – which I have eventually picked out after a twenty-minute fashion show in front of my mirror – is the cherry on the cake when it comes to a halt between the third and fourth floor.

Seriously, man, couldn't this have happened between eight and nine a.m.? I would have avoided morning sickness; there's a good reason why I become claustrophobic around the bottom floors.

I am generally pretty good at keeping my cool, but it's been ten minutes and nothing is happening. I start to get a bit anxious.

I call the janitor.

"Good morning, Mister R. It's me."

"Me who?"

I keep forgetting that my unique pitch can easily escape the tone-deaf.

"It's Oana, from apartment 92."

"Oh, yes. What's up, Oana?"

"The elevator is stuck."

"Take the stairs, then. You're young."

"It's nice of you to say that, although I'm not what I used to be," I ponder out loud. "Anyway, it's stuck with me in it. We're both somewhere in between the third and fourth floor."

"Damn!"

"My words exactly. However, so we don't get caught up in such primitive reactions, I thought I'd give you a call to ask you to speak to the maintenance company."

“Yeah, I don’t think they’re working today. Annual leave, you see.”

“Today of all days?”

“Exactly, Miss Oana...that’s what I said to them yesterday when I asked them to come for the annual maintenance check. They’re three months behind, can you believe that?”

“I can and I now see it was absolutely necessary.”

“You said it. But don’t worry, I will call them again tomorrow and fix it.”

“That’s a very good idea. But in the meantime, how do I get out of here?”

“Oh, it will come round on its own.”

“What do you mean ‘on its own’? How does that work?”

“It acts up sometimes. You know what it’s like, it’s an old building, the administrator won’t put any money into maintenance...”

“What do you mean sometimes? Has it happened before?”

“Oh, yes, many times.”

“Mister R, why on earth do we pay maintenance and association fees? To suffocate inside an elevator heading toward the center of the earth and be late for work? Do something about it this minute!”

I yelled. I normally tend not to, but I felt I was the only reasonable person in this conversation; or at least the one lacking patience and endowed with some sense of rebellion.

“Miss Oana, please don’t get upset. It’s bad for your heart. I read about it in a magazine. But just so you know, even if they were in today, nobody would pick up this early in the morning.”

“Oh, so now it’s my fault that I work for a company that needs me there at 8 a.m.?”

“It’s nobody’s fault, Miss Oana. You, youngsters, are always trying to place the blame. Back in the day people weren’t so mean...”

“Mister R, I want to get out of this elevator. What do I doooooooooo?!!”

“Miss Oana, screaming will only cause trepidations and risk sending the elevator right down in the void “

“Excuse me?!!”

“That’s right. Stay put and I’ll call the neighbor on the third floor to press the elevator call button.”

After a few minutes, I start hearing footsteps and voices asking me if I’m feeling sick.

“I’m not sick. I would stay longer, but it so happens that I have something planned for today. God damn it!” Then I really start screaming: “Are you serious right now?!!! Press the damn button and get me the hell out of here!”

“Oh, Miss Oana! Good morning! It’s Marinescu, from apartment 34. Don’t worry, we’ll take care of this. Let me just grab some pliers.”

So, this is what these pensioners do all day long...they watch soap operas, wait around for the pension delivery man and free people who

get stuck in elevators with the aid of pliers. I hope I die before I get to see this up close.

“Hello, Miss Oana, is Mr Marinescu there?”

“He is, yes. Thank you.”

“Good, good. I called him and apparently, he was right in the middle of watching a movie. See, miss, there’s always a way. Worrying is not good for the heart.”

“Yes, you said that...”

Meanwhile, I go on Facebook and find that I reached about nine hundred and twenty friends... imaginary ones, that is. Look at that, I just got a ‘like’ to one of my posts yesterday. I play it cool and log out.

Boom! Both I and the elevator jolt into action and we reach the ground floor, so we can open the door in a normal fashion, like civilized folk.

A few minutes after the greeting through the concrete walls, Mister Marinescu manages to release me and, through divine intervention, I do not need any mouth to mouth resuscitation. I say goodbye to the nice man and dart down the stairs.

“Darting” is a figure of speech, given that I’m wearing 4” heels.

Right, now I need to rush to the office. I’m about thirty minutes late.

But why don’t I call in late and stop worrying?

Didn’t Mister R say worrying is bad for the heart and I need to look after it?

Yes, I need to call, or they’ll take it out of my salary.

I’m just gonna call to tell them I have an emergency and give them no choice.

Actually, I better send a written note. Then, it’s all recorded with the time of delivery and all that.

I find myself typing a story about an emergency, something about food poisoning from an apricot and that, alas, I needed an IV to stabilize my blood sugar level and I finally recover. Thank God it wasn’t anaphylactic shock, I end the message with obvious concern.

That will do it. Even I am convinced. I just need to make sure I’m a bit wearied when I

walk into the office, as if I had been to the hospital. Damn it, and I really looked like a million dollars.

I get out of the building and head toward the taxi rank.

What? No taxis?! This country is going down the drain. Abroad, there is always a line of taxis eagerly waiting to pick you up ; all you need to do is wave and they pull in front of you; at least that's what I saw in the movies. Lord, why are you punishing me? I guess it's no wonder the youth wants to leave this country. At this point, I begin to worry that I ran out of options on getting to work.

It felt like I was rushing to occupy my spot in some cattle assembly line, although the most reasonable and honest thing would be to go back home and ditch all responsibilities I have never resonated with, I still don't and most likely never will.

Damn heels, these straps are eating into my flesh! Why did I have to dress up this exact miserable day? I curse the universe.

To my left, I see the subway entrance. Even if I risk getting sucked into the ground, heels and all, I still won't take the subway. The descent from my house into hell was enough, thank you very much. There's no way I'm gonna go down two additional floors into Bucharest's geological belly. My behind has very high standards.

Fighting terrible foot pain, I eventually reach Amzei Square. Ignoring the fact I walked like someone who was staggering home at the end of an extended happy hour, I was fully aware that I looked good and consoled myself thinking that after all, these sandals were better suited to a corporate desk job than a hike on cobblestoned streets. Hello, what are we talking about? Not that the people noticing me would ever reach that conclusion No, they wouldn't. Because people are superficial, that's why. You have to hand-feed them. They couldn't possibly conceive a disaster such as the one I went through? Falling from the ninth floor in an elevator is no small thing.

Anyway, let them talk. Nobody understands my pain.

Oh, look, a taxi. Life is good again.

I walk up to the taxi driver, knock on the door and ask him:

“Good morning. Are you free?”

“For you, sugar lips, I’m free as a bird”, says an ignominious nobody, letting out a sleazy and creepy laughter.

I feel the familiarity of the morning nausea crawling up my throat and I desperately want to escape it, so I slowly recoil from the low-life trying to avoid falling backwards.

What a horrible human being! I’m done with this godforsaken city. Land of opportunities, my ass! t. The nerve! I’m a lady, you pest. And sugar is toxic, you stupid peasant.

There’s another car in front of him, which I approach with courage and hope in my heart.

“Good morning, are you free?”

“Where are you going?”

“Aviației”

“How does thirty lei sound?”

“Doesn’t anybody use meters anymore? Whatever the meter says is fine.”

“It’s either thirty lei or you can go with someone else.”

I ruffle up and decide to deprive this rooster of a top-notch client.

He has no idea what he’s missing.

The excruciating pain in my feet brings me close to howling like an animal on the way to the slaughterhouse: Don’t kill me, I’m a good person! But I manage to conceal my locomotor agony and march on.

I come across another poor soul.

Before I approach him, a sudden realization hits me: God, what if I become poor and have to work as a taxi driver? But I immediately abandon this nightmarish scenario and I gesture my intention to speak to him. He rolls down the window. I ask:

“Good morning, are you free?”

It’s already my third time greeting people I don’t know, but how has the universe reciprocated? Huh? What a waste of my life!.

“Good morning. I am free. That’s why I’m here.”

Would you look at that, I tell myself. As hard as it might be to find, decency is still very much alive. I get in.

“Aviatiei, please.”

“Where in Aviatiei?”

“The gas station in the intersection.”

“Sure. That’s where we’re going, Madam.”

Ah, he called me Madam. It’s not all bad, I think while I register the cleanliness of the car. They say taxis are dirty and stinky, but it’s not universally true. It’s all about the human touch, no doubt about it. This car is sparkling clean.

Hats off to you, sir!

I immediately think of a counterargument: Why do I praise this guy so much, aren’t these normal standards?? Isn’t it normal for a taxi not to smell like sweat and staleness? When, you’ve endlessly been surrounded by intellectual draught and apathy, you find yourself praising normality like it’s some massive

achievement. Well, it's not. We need to think critically, otherwise we risk losing focus and falling prey to mass manipulation.

I check that the meter is on, so we don't get into God knows what arguments. Everything is in order. The guy is legit, and I feel respected. Up to a point, that is, when he starts annoying me with his expletives:

"What a godforsaken city," observes Mister Rāsvan Paise, as I read his name off the badge displayed on the dashboard.

I'm guessing the council worker who drafted the birth certificate forgot it's "Rāzvan" and not "Rāsvan".

He carries on whining.

"Bucharest, nothing but a rotten city. Dirty, overcrowded, a lot of people and a lot of cars."

"You can live somewhere else, you know."

"I tried. It didn't work out. It's like these filthy cigarettes. You know they're bad for you, but you just gotta light up. Can't live without it."

"I think Bucharest will be just fine without you," I let slip out.

I see his raised eyebrow in the rear-view mirror and understand it was the wrong thing to say. But I leave it there. Apologizing doesn't look good. In life, it's important to stand your ground, even if you're in the wrong.

However, I decide to continue.

"You can quit smoking, you know?"

"Maybe you can, ma'am, but I failed."

"I actually managed to do it."

"Really? How's it working out for you? You don't miss it?"

"No. I'd rather be free and not depend on anything."

"I know what you mean, but I think it's an illusion. We all depend on each other. I depend on you (I suddenly felt special and almost felt my pores open up to absorb his admiration) and you depend on me (this second part took the wind out of my sails and I almost protested against his nerve).

“How do I depend on you? If it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t have any clients.”

“That’s exactly my point. However, if it weren’t for us, the clients would have nothing to buy.”

“I’m not sure about that.”

“Well, then should I drop you off here, on the right?”

“Noooooooo,” I jump, observing he’s got an answer to anything.

“See?”

I did get it. That’s just messed up! But he was right.

I go back to my cell phone. Twenty-five new likes on Facebook, probably to the same post I added yesterday. Isn’t that something! But I keep my cool and don’t check to see who liked it. Whoever they are, they must know who deserves their appreciation. I also got a message from him...for a second, I sink inward.

“Are you from Bucharest?”

Are you kidding me? I say to myself. That's it. I pull myself together, as this is no time for dramas. I don't read it, turn off the phone and look up at the guy.

"No, but I've been here for twenty years."

"You probably came here to study and never left."

"Something like that."

I keep looking out the window. There are a lot of angry, anxious people rushing places and I wonder what's gotten into everybody. They stare into the void and rush towards it.

"Excuse me, are we almost there? I'm terribly late."

"About ten minutes away. I chose the road less busy, not the shortest, just so you know. It's more efficient."

"Yeah, that's great."

As I sit back again, I get this itch to read the text. Don't even think about it, I urge myself, in an exercise of self-restraint and try to keep myself busy.

“Is driving taxis still worth it? I keep hearing it’s a tough job and there’s a lot of competition. I see new companies popping up every day.”

“It’s worth it, ma’am. If you look after your clients and you care about doing a good job, you find your place. But you’re right, it’s tough.”

Out of the blue, the guy makes a sudden turn which sends me crashing into the right back window and causes me to drop my bag, thus revealing the backstage of a perfect life. I conclude everything was but a scare so I readjust my sunglasses only to become the witness of the driver’s transition from the embodiment of kindness to a raging mama bear protecting her cubs. He gets out and lashes out at the lady in the car which apparently cut us off. I missed the moment, as I was using the dark screen of my cell phone as a mirror to check everything is still in order.

Citizen Paise was screaming like a mad man, demanding that justice and respect be granted to him.

“Are you blind, lady? Can’t you see I have a client in the back? How can you drive so chaot-

ically? Did you miss the streetlight? How did you ever get a license? You're a public liability. Holy crap! You're gonna kill us all if we're not careful!"

The lady was completely shocked. She sat there, clutching the wheel, probably realizing her stupidity and her only hope was that she would come out of this unharmed. I wouldn't swear to it, but I think she was holding back some tears and was trying to keep it together, so as not to give away her weakness. Otherwise, the now raging mister Paise would have bitten her head off. I couldn't help feeling relieved I wasn't in her shoes right now.

Phew, how would that even be possible? I am nowhere near that.

Almost exhausted from the scare, my taxi driver comes back and says sheepishly.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, for losing it just now. The world has gone mad, I swear....and it's taking me with it. I'm not normally a violent man. But how is it possible to fall victim to such incompetence? You can die any day, and for what?

Because some chick forgot to put on lipstick when she left home?"

He looks at me in the rear-view mirror and says:

"You know I saw her make-up stuff in her lap when I went up to her car...she was putting on make-up while she was driving."

I thought I misheard him.

So, I risk spraining my shoulder and smashing the insides of my bag because some floozy couldn't spend an extra five minutes in front of the mirror? How careless can you be?

Mister Paise goes on:

"I don't know what's wrong with the world today...why people behave like that...it's not fair. It's not fair that they can just treat us like garbage. And it's not normal to just shut up and take it. I heard it helps if you smile at them...I don't see how...but I just can't. Believe me, I tried, but in this kind of situation I just don't feel like it. Honest to God! I read that if you get angry, it's very difficult to come back from it..."

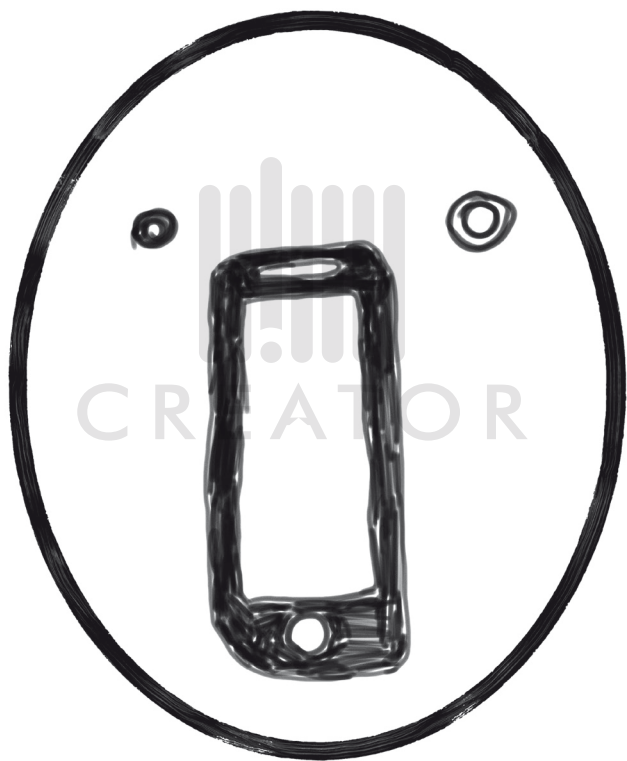
“It’s true, anger is not good for the heart,” I concur, employing my recently achieved medical expertise.

“What can I do to fight this terrible instinct to get angry with people? It feels like all drivers are mad. Maybe you, as a neutral third party, you see things differently, and I’m not ashamed to ask: can you give me some advice, please? I feel like I’m a better person than this.”

9th floor drop in an elevator, exposed flesh on both my feet, near-fatal car crash, currently acting as a motivational speaker for a taxi driver.

Life abides by no rules, I ponder, seeing how much can happen in just one hour, which is about the amount of time I’d need to finish two Excel documents, if only I were in the office. A much more peaceful scenario, if you ask me.

Right, how do I play the smart lady now? I wonder, knowing that mister Paise is expecting me to come up with a life-saving solution. I wish I could ask a friend. But I soon realize none of my friends are smarter than me, so I have a go at it myself.



“You do your part in making the world a better place.”

As the car jolts again, I’m thinking the driver is going for crash number two, hoping that at least this time we would get a man behind the wheel, and chip away at the bias that women drivers are angels of the apocalypse.

“That’s some advice, ma’am. Where did you read that?”

“Ugh, I didn’t read it. I...came up with it,” I reply a bit baffled, thinking I may have spoken complete nonsense.

“That’s amazing. You are so right! Incredibly useful and very simple. Thank you so much!”

All of a sudden, my head (including my hair) seems to acquire more volume and my ego gains epic proportions. You just have to know who to ask. If I were standing, I would have straightened my back to give a visual signal that I deserve it all. I mean everything. I deserve what’s best just because I am alive. Since I’m sitting, all I can do is lift my chin and my nose and gaze at the world through my thick and charismatic eyelashes.

Oana is yet another proof that appearances are often deceiving. Her story, that of a woman who works for a corporation, is admirably and captivatingly recounted, through numerous snapshots of everyday life. Skillfully manipulating the words of Oana's inner monologue, the writer bursts into the room of the soul, by pushing open the glass doors that conceals it.

In theatre, we sometimes encounter the 'one-woman show', a solo performance by a female actress. Glasvand is a one-woman show... dotted across the pages of a book that contains special drawings, which subtly mark a woman's confessions, one of the many that walk among us. She is but one brick in the wall of a massive building which hosts a corporation.

'Once upon a time, in a land far, far away' is how Romanian fairytales and legends begin. However, Glasvand is not a children's campfire story, but a "documentary film", which captures moments of everyday life. Their underlayers are not only meant to raise emotion, but also to challenge one to think deeper, to lift the glamorous veil which can sometimes conceal the world around us. Raluca Mihăilă does exactly that in her book, an honest and original 'journal' about the people of our day.

Ileana Lucaciu, theater critic, blogger Spectator

Humor, satire, modern language, awful realities and substance, a lot of it.

Cristina Gheorghe, HR expert

Other readers' reviews:

'A real page-turner. You lose and find yourself among the pages with impatience for what's next.'

'It is a fresco. A desperate plea to a society in a downward spiral, promoting an inverted hierarchy of values.'

'Innovative language, revealing ending, similar to a groundbreaking musical piece.'

'I was captivated by the linguistic accuracy and the depth of the message.'

www.glasvand.com