

Change Your Loaf; Change Your Life

A Novella
Louise Kate Anderson

1) The Journey from Perception to Understanding...

If you take away a person's ability to be noticed, they cease to exist. Say that hypothetically, a lady walks out of her front door, to the nearest post office, purchases a stamp, puts it in her purse, crosses the street to the bread shop, selects a loaf of bread, buys it, walks back home and closes her door. If nobody saw her green-finished oak door scrape a little deeper into the circular dent on her wooden floor; wasn't aware that the clock showed exactly fifteen minutes past nine as her feet left her old, brown welcome mat; if the bleary-eyed postal service worker didn't make a mental note that the stamp she purchased cost her a dollar eighty; if nobody watched her hazel eyes meander over the shelves at the bread shop; if the Luke's bread shop employee did not make a mental note of her purchasing a white Vienna loaf and watch her as she walked back down the street to her old brown welcome mat and green-finished door; if none of that was noticed, was there a point in doing it at all? If this particular lady made little or no impact on the lives of anyone else, how on earth was her morning excursion necessary?

Well obviously, because she needed a loaf of bread, you say. And you're completely right. She did need a loaf of bread. And Luke's needed the \$2.60 for the bread, with which they paid their workers and bought more flour to make more bread the next day. And the whole expedition contributed to the economic state of the country. If the entire demography of moderate class, middle-aged, stamp-buying women, decided they no longer, for any given reason, needed to buy loaves of bread, or stamps or anything else for that matter, then the country could possibly shift into economic depression. So, in fact, there was some basic necessary purpose to this particular lady's voyage on this particular moderately uninteresting morning.

2) The Senseless Need for Control

She rapped her pointed fingernails on the bench top in a syncopated rhythm. Her fingers were festooned with rings, and the chains around her wrist sang as they jingled together reminding me of a pendulum. The eyeliner she had on was a seashell orange and looked as though it had been applied that moment too long ago, when the colour begins to sink into the creases of the skin, nor did it do credit to her rather distinctive hazel eyes. The peachy tinge made her look tired, or perhaps she just was, but there are some things that I can never envisage how people can buy in the first place. Take for example the silver snakeskin skirt this particular lady wore, and left a crowd of people wondering after her, what complete lack of momentary common sense had allowed her to purchase such an item. It goes without saying that she is a regular at the shop, and just one of the eccentric people waltzing in, whom I like to observe and ponder.

I work at a bakery called "Luke's Bread Shop". I don't know who Luke is, no one I know knows who Luke is, and I therefore can conclude that one of the long list of ex-owners had simply rented the facility, and used the name that was already legible in faded, peeling paint on the shop vitrine. Either that or my manager once had a long lost lover who left her broken hearted and she decided to name the shop after him and take the secret to her grave. Although,

a) I cannot comprehend why someone would decide to name a shop after their

long lost lover,

b) I cannot comprehend why my manager's personality would have allowed the proposition of a long lost lover in the first place,

and c) the peeling paint suggests no one has dared to lean a ladder against the wall of this place for an extremely long time.

Have you ever felt as if some people are placed in this world just to annoy you? Sometimes, (usually on Sundays) I feel like taking some blue tack and putting a sign on the shop's door that customers will read just before the little bell jingles above as they enter.

Draft for proposed sign:

As an employee of Luke's bread shop, I feel it is imperative for me to ask you, as a customer, to understand several simple facts before you enter:

- 1) If you ask for a cappuccino, the fact that there is coffee in it, is implied.**
- 2) I am permitted to give out 2 butter sachets per muffin, maybe 3, even 4, but EIGHT is a bit much don't you think?**
- 3) Please work out your marital problems before ordering, I am not paid to decide who pays for your lunch.**
- 4) Try putting in some sugar before complaining that your coffee is too bitter.**
- 5) I am not aware of just how many calories, and grams of fat are in our carrot cake as opposed to our banana one. Please inquire with the cook.**
- 6) I refuse to sell raisin toast to people who do not appear to be there.**
- 7) In my eyes, the apple slice with the most icing, three slices from the left and two from the front looks exactly the same as all the ones next to it.**
- 8) I do not have the time or energy to argue with you about the definition of a milkshake.**
- 9) I am a person, not a computer. You are going to have to wait until I make your small- decaf- take away- weak- soy milk- extra hot- latte with chocolate on top before you inform me of the specific instructions as to how many seconds you would like your date and apple bread to spend inside the toaster.**
- 10) We have a limited supply of loaves of bread per day. The sourdough loaf is, at times, sold out, and you may have to purchase a white Vienna loaf instead.**

Thank you, yes, thank you very much.

3) The Preparation for Enlightenment

Each of the eight places was set with a plate precisely fifty millimetres from the edge of the white tablecloth. Each plate was thirty millimetres and sixty millimetres away from the fork and the spoon respectively, and the knife thirty millimetres away on the supplementary side. Beside and specifically ten millimetres to the right of each plate stood an expensive wine glass. Three tall, white hand-painted candles sat in their holders in the middle of the table, dividing it into quarters.

I had been preparing for my candlelit soirée on the Eve of Christmas Day, and required catering aid in providing the hors d'oeuvres and gourmet dishes I had organised for the evening. It was necessary that I purchased the essential ingredients and products for the caterers the day before.

I strolled out from my green-finished oak door at nine fifteen and took one hundred and thirty-six steps to the local post office where I purchased a postal stamp for one dollar and eighty cents. Indeed I had, had my mind on the menu for my soirée, and by mistake paid one excessive dollar for my stamp, yet fortunately, the postal service worker came after me with my change. I would have been grateful for his kindness had not been staring at me with the most obscure glare.

It was high time that I wrote to my dear older brother who moved away to England after our father passed away six years ago to this day. Nobody ever said Christmas time could not be stressful.

My own stress levels were reaching high points due to the lack of available ingredients at the local bread shop, which had been running considerably slower since the new ever-changing management took over. I had spent fifty minutes the day before planning my recipes, and had decided that a sourdough loaf would be the complement parfaite for the evening's devilled eggs entrée.

My, is it bothersome when the shops vend their most imperative item before the morn is out. Imagine, no sourdough loaf on a Tuesday just before Christmas at thirty minutes past nine!

I was obliged to settle for a white Vienna loaf instead and walked the one hundred and forty eight metres back to my doorstep, significantly worried about the alteration in my menu.

4) The Vertiginous Mind

Number twenty-seven's mail, Davon road. I wonder and speculate if they'd notice if I put it accidentally on-purpose in number twenty-five's mailbox. 'Telstra: final notice', well, someone hasn't been paying their bills. Too many more houses to go, am so tired and really, utterly exhausted of this job. So many magazines, postcards, unpaid bills, Christmas cards, and every so often some kind of interesting package, but I never get to deliver those.

Such were my ponderings and thoughts as I wandered down the street just about to finish my mail route only to slump in between the aisles of the library and watch people through the bookshelves as they passed.

I do this every day.

I hide myself in books, so that no one may see what a terrible disaster and ultimate lonesome tragedy I am making of my own life.

At 6.30 am I wake up and make my way bleary-eyed to the local post office where I work for three hours each morning. This is usually a mind-numbing and tedious activity, but this morning, a small occurrence caused my mind to toil and work hard. A lady entered looking great and really, very good in a luringly ugly silver snake-skin skirt. She sidled up to the counter and purchased a dollar- eighty stamp. Her purchase was not altogether scintillating, nor stimulating. There was an aura about this woman. Something about her made you notice the way she walked stealthily about. She warmed up the room with her hazel eyes, which were highlighted by peach-coloured make up.

The reason I remembered her particular purchase, was because she paid a dollar too much and I proceeded to chase and run after her around the corner with her change. Despite my kindness the lady only thanked me curtly and continued on her way, either not aware of my blatant attraction and real magnetism to her, or too self-involved to give me a second thought.

Although I decided and resolved, for my own self- esteem's sake, to conclude that she was madder than a wet duck, my thoughts didn't stray from this lady all afternoon.

Sometimes I see someone, and recognise them but am unable to link them to where I have seen them before. Other times a sentence crops up in my conversation, which I am absolutely certain and completely sure is a line from a film or television program yet I just cannot remember nor recall it. And then later by coincidence I'm watching that film and I hear the line and recognise and remember it, yet cannot remember why I was trying to think of it in the first place.

This is exactly how I felt now. I knew this lady. I knew that I knew her. Yet where from, or when, or even why it felt so terribly significant and horribly important, I had entirely no clue, and absolutely no idea. I was claspng at straws.

After my postal route, I spent and passed an hour in the library, pretending to be reading philosophy, groaning to myself trying to seize and summon the information about this woman, which seemed to be hidden and buried very deeply inside my brain.

5) The Importance of Making Goals

I walked past a man in the library yesterday he was sat on the floor with several books littered around him. He kept groaning. I don't mean subtly clearing his throat, or giving out a slight moan of exasperation either - it sounded more skin to a suffocating cat! He would breathe heavily, and then sigh which quickly turned into

more of a moan and then pause and then sigh again before letting out a sort of disgruntled groan and eventually after working himself up for a minute or so he would go “mmmuuuggghhhhhRRRRRAAAHHHH WHAT A PERVERSION HHHHhaaaaggghhhhhnnmmmm” and then quieten down for a while, and then start up all over again.

I asked the man casually walking past if he was all right and he grunted something like “I’m fine”.

What I want to know is, what on earth was he reading? All very upsetting. And distracting, but mostly upsetting, because he must have been reading philosophy, and analytical philosophy at that... so how come the orgiastic delight? It's not RIGHT, I tell you. It's just not right.

What on earth am I doing? What I need are goals. Goals, aspirations, aims, objectives, ambitions, or whatever else you want to call them. Forget philosophy, I shall do a flower-arranging course. No wait... I shall go to night school and learn an obscure art form and shall meet a handsome man with a moustache who is an expert at this obscure art form and he'll whisk me away to some obscure island and we'll live... hold on a moment.

This was supposed to be about ambitions, not fantasies ending with happily ever after.

I want to be a writer, no, an author I suppose I ought to call it. It's all very well to sit here fantasising about obscure islands – such is my poetic licence, but to be a true author I need something distinct, and pure. A goal.

Problem is, I have no idea how to summon the motivation to create a goal.

But I suppose, if worst comes to the worst you shall find me at the age of sixty in between the aisles of a public library somewhere, sucking peppermints and moaning to myself. There are worse fates.

6) The Presence of Strange Coincidences

If the way in which one person does things is always changing, when is it that their identity incorporates them changing their mind a lot, and other people are just classed as really scatterbrained? Are there degrees of changefulness? But if this same person goes out of their way to purposefully change their mind, for no other reason than to earn the identity of changeful, doesn't that mean that in reality, the only thing this person ever does is stay the same?

These were my thoughts as I went about my day-to-day activities feeling slightly bored with the happenings in my life.

Yet every so often, life surprises you. Only if you want it to, of course, but it was this phenomenon creeping from the little voice inside my brain that astonished me. Not having anything smaller than a twenty-dollar note, I accepted the bus driver's gesture to take a seat without a ticket on the rather crowded bus. The ticket inspectors of course, who normally check the buses once in a blue moon,

arrive a few stops later. Although I resolved to calmly explain that I hadn't had any change, a distinct argument a seat in front of mine instilled in me a small sense of nervousness. The lady ticket inspector was having a heated argument with a man for overriding a single stop on the bus, which began as something like this:

“You have gone past your paid stop on this bus. I'm going to have to take down your name and details and issue a warning. The next time this happens, you will be fined.”

And ended up with most of the passengers listening to something like this:

“You're being very rude.”

“No, I'm not being rude.”

“You're being rude.”

“No, I'm not being rude.”

“I've a good mind to write a letter to report you!”

“Please do!”

Needless to say, I was astonished, as was the man, that when it came to my moment of truth, the lady inspector barely pronounced a simple “Oh” to my explanation and got off the bus.

7) The Search for Self-Help

“You can write, if you have something to say”

At least, that's what I've been told since I picked up an orange crayon in my left hand, aged three. But it seemed to me as I sat in my sturdy wooden armchair with my notebook computer, that it wasn't a lack of something to say as much as a complete fear of how to record everything I had ever thought of, pondered, questioned and contemplated.

They say writing is something of a catharsis, and if they're talking of dark and depressing poetry, sure, I agree. Perhaps Shakespeare was expressing something of himself in Hamlet's erratic ways, or Jane Austen herself was aspiring to meet her own Mr Darcy.

After all, an author runs the lives of the characters. Anna Karenina threw herself on the train tracks of Tolstoy's will, not her own. It was Mark Twain's idea for Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn to stage their own deaths, and later turn up at their own funeral. The author, in this way, writes it all – birth, life, death, love, hunger, freedom, and walking to the corner shop to buy a loaf of bread.

And moreover, in such a fashion, a person writes his or her own life. Only with the cards we're dealt, of course, but one must wonder how important perception is in this world. Someone once stated “I am not who I think I am, I am not who you think I am, I am who you think, I think I am.” And so I must conclude that our perceptions of others are altogether complex, and so too are our perceptions of ourselves.

Each day everybody wakes up and puts on their mask, trying to hide their insecurities, embarrassing habits, and weaknesses. If the decision to hide these becomes a part of who we are, then who is more real than the person who fakes everything about their lives, such that all we ever know about that person is the mask we are shown?

An author seeks to expose these people... to find the true, pure person beyond the impressions, beyond the mask, and beyond the insecurity that results in the need for a mask.

This is my goal. I have something to say.

8) The Spreading of Appreciation and Enthusiasm

I was on the bus the other day coming home from my daily trip to the library and it was very, very busy and completely full. And when I say completely, I mean there was a busload of people with pained faces holding onto the railings trying to not whack the person behind them with their backpacks. I had paid my fare home, but halfway there happened to change my mind about which stop I would get off at, after thinking I ought to and I should stop off at the shops for some groceries.

Figuring the ticket inspectors would have something better and really more interesting to do with their Saturday afternoon, I decided to avoid crushing several elderly women, two rough looking tattooed men and a dozen wild teenagers to pay the extra 80 cents, and I forgot about it.

It was just my bad luck and real misfortune that the ticket inspectors did get on and it ended up with a very fiery and really heated argument and a large fine. I overrode a single stop yet the young girl behind me didn't have a ticket at all and was let off without so much as a terse warning. Perhaps I am making a mountain out of a mouldhill, but at that specific and very precise moment, I felt like throwing out the towel.

9) The Inner Voice

Veronica: (to herself)

- 1. Goal set.*
- 2. Motivation acquired.*
- 3. Something to say.*
- 4. Comfortable place to work.*
- 5. Ideas...*

Author: (an internal voice) Reveal your purpose and audience.

Veronica: (out loud) Yes! Purpose and audience. Right if my purpose is to expose the melodramatic sense of self-perception in people of the modern world, and my audience is these very people who...

Author: Very good.

Veronica: ...who will identify with an existential viewpoint and nihilistic outlook...

Author: Make sure you know the meaning of these words else they become superfluous, and their meaning useless.

Veronica: Of course I understand the meaning!

Author: Define 'existentialism'.

Veronica: Existential? Recreating the text... no wait, for a different... in the different values of lost identity and... why am I listening to you?

Author: I am the author.

Veronica: No, (shakes head) I am the author.

Author: Why?

Veronica: Because I have something to say – I can write people's lives interestingly.

Author: As can I. I am writing yours now.

Veronica: Define 'existentialism'.

Author: The philosophy that seeks to make sense of the futility and hopelessness in the postmodern world, and allow humans to make and attach some kind of meaning to life despite its despair.

Veronica: Right. And your purpose and audience are?

Author: Why the same as yours, my dear lady.

10) Going Through the Motions

Two bunches of gardenias sat 200 millimetres on either side of my green-finished oak door. I had put away my worn brown welcome mat for the evening as I often do for special occasions since it is getting rather tatty yet I am too attached to it to simply discard it. The hallway smelt distinctly of flowering hyacinths, and acted as juxtaposition to the sweaty smell of summer beyond the parameters of the house.

It was exactly four o'clock, two hours and thirty minutes before the beginning of my candlelit soirée. I was already wearing my most novel possession, a rose and sunset coloured pleated frock.

Everything was arranged and in its precise place, that is, except for the sourdough loaf. It was indeed the only part of my evening that had not gone according to plan. Once again I walked the one hundred and thirty six steps to the post office to mail a letter to my brother, and then continued on my perambulation to the local bread shop where I am now seated in a corner sipping a rather bitter-tasting cappuccino, waiting for my specially baked sourdough loaf to come out of the oven.

I am somewhat disconcerted incidentally by the same postal service worker in a bright vermilion cravat, who had given me my change yesterday. Once again, he was staring at me with an ambiguous expression as I checked my watch for the dozenth time, impatiently hoping my loaf would be ready soon.

Out of the blue, the postal service worker began to quake frenziedly.

11) The Off Days

Perhaps it was the pre-Christmas blues, or some kind of existential middle-age mid-life crisis of despair coming on, or maybe I was just plain coming down with something nasty, but I woke up and felt unusually fatigued and really, very tired at the idea of playing the same daily cards that life had dealt me. I attempted in vain and without success to cheer myself up and be happy by selecting a bright red tie to wear with my uniform, for lack of what else there was to do.

It just seemed and occurred to me that I was always waiting around in my life. I am always waiting for the dusk to settle. I waited for mail and it never came. It came in hoards for other people. I waited for love, and that never came either. Yet it came for all those people receiving their Christmas cards and Season's Greetings. I had delivered two hundred and sixty two Christmas cards so far this year. I hadn't even received one.

I continued to feel rather unwell and really, very ill as my morning shift wore on, yet I had never taken a sick day in all the time I have been a postal service worker, rain, hail nor shine, and did not plan to start then.

Something of a sun shower began to pour whilst I was on my route and I grudgingly and reluctantly trudged through the decorated streets; houses with Christmas lights on their roofs, trees sparkling and glittering in their windows and drenched and really soggy Santas holding onto chimneys.

It seemed as though my red bag was filled and overflowing with Christmas cards. Two hundred and sixty-three, two hundred and sixty-four, two hundred and sixty five...

I had walked past my own house with its empty and really very vacant letterbox, and felt entirely depressed and really, very sad. I crossed an intersection nearing the end of my route, and held card number three hundred and nine in my hand.

**Mrs J. Landers
12 Kenneth Street
Latinsburg 2457**

Mrs Landers, had so far a count of fourteen Christmas cards. A certain feeling of strong abandonment and powerful self-pity caused me to place the white rectangular envelope, not in her letterbox but in the pocket of my soaked and really very saturated raincoat.

Instead of going to the library as I usually would, I traipsed to Luke's Bread Shop avoiding a crowd of charity workers, ordered coffee and slumped in a corner, feeling utterly sorry for myself and really, very down, yet slightly cheered up by my first Christmas card of the season, securely in my jacket pocket.

I noticed after a while, that a striking lady with rather distinctive hazel eyes was sitting rigidly and rather straight in an opposite corner. I recognised her from around the neighbourhood and knew that I had been trying to recall her recently yet did not have the faintest clue nor any idea why.

Perhaps it was some strange after-effect of the caffeine or a complete psychological breakdown, but I suddenly and rather unexpectedly felt dizzy and faint.

12) The Slip Back Into Insecurity

The bread shop today was a sad affair. Every Christmas we play these awful old Christmas records with tracks my grandmother might enjoy, but as far as

attracting customers into the store, it wasn't particularly successful. However my manager either hadn't noticed, or had spent years turning a deaf ear to the monotonous throtle of Bing Crosby's half-paced 'White Christmas' in order to relax a little during the festive season. So I leaned half over the countertop next to the Jumbo Triple Chocolate Cookies sitting on a doily and mindlessly watched some group of people collecting for our new community hall with reindeer antlers wrapped around every inch of their chests, looking as if they'd been frozen in the moment they found out Santa wasn't real.

Not that I can talk. I am wearing my own pretentious Christmas decoration – a red Santa hat, with a bell attached to the end of it, which of course results in very painful headaches after work each day.

Have you ever seen someone, and recognised them but have been unable to link them to where you have seen them before? Or has a sentence ever cropped up in your conversation, which you are sure is in a line from a film or television program yet you just cannot recall it? And then later you're watching the film and you hear the line and recognise it, yet cannot remember why you were trying to think of it in the first place?

A man wearing a bright red tie enters the shop. I knew I remembered him from somewhere. I felt like telling him that the colour of his tie didn't complement his postal service uniform, but I figured he was probably just trying to fit in with the Christmas spirit. He seemed a little disconnected as he ordered his coffee, but I figured after running away from the reindeer people outside, that anyone would be feeling less than enthused by the moment.

After a while I noticed that the man was strangely peering over at another table rather often. There sat a lady with rather distinctive hazel eyes, and a badly chosen outfit with a combination of pink and orange. The deep groaning sounds of the man then drew my attention, but, thinking he was probably just dissatisfied with his coffee, I thought nothing of it.

My manager sat sipping her coffee, stirring it with her finger and pretending to read the newspaper but in reality was only relishing the fact that I have to stand here beside the Jumbo Triple Chocolate Cookies sitting on a doily, and she gets to sit down and take off the damned noisy Christmas hat.

My thoughts began to follow a well-trodden path. Perhaps I'm in the wrong job, I ought to find myself a boyfriend, perhaps I should contact my mother again, the front of the house needs painting, perhaps I should go back to university...

And my thoughts had just come to rest on the fact that nothing interesting ever happened in my life when without warning; the man in the red tie began to tremble uncontrollably.

13) The Classification and Categorisation of Being

As human beings, we need to categorise, place everything in a section; a genre; a mentality. Post-modernism, Fauvism, Dada-ism, minimalism, Cubism, masochism.

I've always firmly believed that all these 'isms' are futile and hollow. But I still find myself questioning my own mental stability and moral fibre as I loiter in the emergency room of the local hospital looking for writing material.

A rough looking teenager came out of a door looking murderous, severely troubled and rather drunk. His eyes were caked with black make up, his ears were pierced countless times and he wore around his neck what looked to me like a dog collar. It was clear that he was in the midst of clear tragedy and pain. I wrote:

He took a step back and redirected his feet so as to walk down the hallway more on the right hand and slightly shadowed side because he figured that if my mind subconsciously associated him with darkness it would aid in him acquiring either more pity or more of some sort of identity. What he didn't realise was that his tiny step backwards told me exactly what his intentions were and therefore all I ended up concluding is that the characters in my story are very, very confused.

A mother came in with a small child bleeding from the head and the triage nurse immediately admitted the child and called for the doctor. It was tacitly understood that the young mother was very distressed. I wrote:

Tears streamed down her face as she put on a show of a distraught mother for her audience of the emergency waiting room. She felt the need to exaggerate her grief as if to prove that she was in fact worried about her child, and had she been watching, her much loved baby would not have fallen from the tree. Yet the countless anxious people in the room were much too concerned with their own injured children, troubled teenagers and elderly cancer patients to reassure her.

A lady came in with paramedics rushing around her, obviously suffering from a ruptured appendix. Her screams were heard from behind the doors of the waiting room as everybody shuddered. I wrote:

She screamed as high-pitched and loud as she could from the depths of her lungs. It hurt her to scream yet she couldn't stop, she was desperate to express the amount of pain she was in, even if expressing it caused her chest to throb faster, her stomach to cramp tighter, and her head to pound like a grandfather clock counting milliseconds.

And after many attempts in vain, there it was, the perfect story: A man coming in on a stretcher, groaning in agony, and speaking to a striking lady with rather distinctive hazel eyes. His metaphors were jumbled, but the meaning was clear:

"My love is like the mountains, precious and really, very dear!"

"Your beauty is like a fountain of the beholder!"

14) It's A Small, Small World

The ceiling was worn and really very old. I felt a sudden pain and looked around, realising slowly and gradually that I was in fact, in a hospital. The curtain was white, the floor was white, the sheets were white; white, white, white. The bed was at an

uncomfortable tilt and the mattress felt taut and really very stiff below my body. The window showed a dark sky outside. It was silent and really, very quiet in my room, so I gathered that I was alone, despite the beeping and bleeping noises outside.

I got up painfully and painstakingly and grabbed hold of the IV machine that was attached to my arm. I moved out into the hall in search of a bathroom and saw a familiar young girl who looked as though she was about to faint or cry or... something at the drop of a cat. I must have glared at her strangely because she made no motion to get up or look at me.

After going to the bathroom, which was surprisingly and astonishingly white, I was trying to find a nurse perhaps to ask why I was in a hospital in the first place and what the hell had happened to put me there. I must have been a bit unsteady and rickety on my feet because I very nearly but not quite tripped over an attractive lady writing in a notebook with a poised pen, who was also staring at me intently, obscurely and strangely.

When I went up to her to demand an explanation or clarification of what precisely and exactly she was doing, she said in exclamation, “Why, you’re the man from the library!”

Having absolutely no hint and completely no comprehension of what she was on about, I must have expressed some level of misunderstanding and she explained further,

“Oh I’m sorry, I was in the library one day and you were in the philosophy section”.

Of course, I still was clueless and utterly confused, but being tired and really very ill, I thought nothing of it and walked towards the nurse’s station.

However just before I got there, I was the approached by a lady whom I recognised from somewhere, though I could not recall exactly nor precisely where. She had rather distinctive hazel eyes and was wearing an enticingly hideous orange and pink floral dress, and looking thoroughly prepared to be somewhere other than a busy hospital emergency room waiting impatiently for me.

She and the familiar young girl who looked at me earlier explained that I had had a small stroke in the local bread shop and that they had been waiting to see whether I was all right before making their way home.

I thanked them, asked to see the doctor and went back to my stiff and really very firm, white hospital bed, groaning to myself and wondering what lovely evening such a striking lady would have missed to wait around to see if a man she hardly knew was going to live or die.

15) Déjà Vu

Veronica opened up her notebook in her study at home, and began to type on her keyboard, eating biscuits and swearing each time her computer decided to freeze. She began to write:

Mrs Josephine Landers' green-finished oak door scraped a little deeper into the circular dent on her wooden floor as her feet left her old, brown welcome mat while her clock showed exactly fifteen minutes past nine. The postal service worker on this particular, moderately uninteresting morning, although lethargic and bleary-eyed, was aware enough to realise that Mrs Landers had accidentally paid one dollar too much for her stamp. Despite his fatigue, he proceeded to chase her around the corner to give her her change just before she entered Luke's Bread Shop to meander over the shelves with her rather distinctive hazel eyes. Despite the postal service worker's effort, Mrs Landers did not import the kindness of his act onto the bread shop employee as she grouchily complained about the lack of sour dough loaves and then resolved to purchase a white Vienna loaf instead.

16) The Attainment of Understanding

A man got up out of his hospital bed on New Year's Day and began to search among his jacket, pants and red tie, which were strewn across a chair next to his bed. From his jacket pocket with a smile on his elderly face, he drew a white envelope, which contained a regular sized Christmas card with a picture of snow and pine trees on the front. Inside was written:

My dearest sister Josephine,

Forgive me, for my season's greetings come later than socially expected and I do apologise for my tardiness. I do hope all is well since your recent letter and your festive season proved to be free of stress and mishap.

I trust that your Christmas Eve soirée was laden with sophistication and celebration, and that my absence was not missed a great deal. I know that I can be sure without asking that the evening was a complete success, as is any invitation of yours.

I write this letter with the joyous news that I shall be joining you to celebrate the New Year, and hope that I am welcome to lodge in your home for the better part of January. I do await with impatience some warmer weather, since the snow here is beginning to melt into brown slush and mire.

You have said that my old premises are continually changing hands, and I do hope that I shall be able to instil a sense of stability during my presence. My days there as a proprietor have not been long forgotten, and the mornings at three am till afternoons at five pm remain to me a pleasant memory of hard work.

Once more I express regret at not writing sooner, but wait in anticipation for the New Year when we shall meet again.

Sincerely, your loving brother,

Luke.

17) Discourse

Veronica: (to herself) No, that didn't work very well, now did it. I must choose a different setting, no perhaps a different purpose...

Author: (an internal voice) Yes, what happened there? You really didn't achieve what it was you set out to do, did you?

Veronica: Excuse me? Of course, I... oh okay all right.

Author: Your characters got confused, didn't they? They began to understand that they were characters. They rebelled against your parameters, and they didn't do what you wrote down. You didn't find meaning, and you didn't reveal your purpose.

Veronica: No I suppose I didn't.

Author: What was that meaning of 'existentialism' again?

Veronica: Oh I don't know! I don't know! I was just trying to write people's lives interestingly. And you, you're supposed to be the author! Did you achieve your purpose?