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<b>ATTACH THIS CARD SECURELY TO EACH PART OF THE PROJECT. DO NOT FOLD.</b>	

*Centre Number: 2358*

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*Title of Work: "Just Hanging Around"*

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I will never forget that first touch of soft silk on my frozen body. Not a single detail of its elaborate embroidery and cascading lace can escape my memory. Ever since that very first encounter I have shared the lives and dreams of many unique human beings and have worn their hopes and expectations. You might say I have a gift. An insight into the inner workings of man's very soul.

I had just been hanging around examining the unfamiliar surroundings when the door opened. Carefully I was taken out to try on this incredibly beautiful soft silk gown.

The gown belonged to an elegant, rich young lady up from Melbourne for her wedding to an extremely wealthy gentleman. I was new to the hotel at the time and therefore unaccustomed to dealing with wealthy visitors and their remarkable clothing. This particular lady was called Katherine Livingston and this is her story.

Katherine was a young lady of twenty years whose nature and features were of the purest and softest beauty. Her family had always expected her to marry into wealth and arranged for her to marry a highly respected gentleman in Sydney. Without complaint or delay she had agreed to leave to marry as soon as possible. I will never forget the moment when I met her. It must have been early July 1903 and that particular evening the rains were bucketing down and she came through the door with rain streaming down her fair cheeks and golden brown curls. She wore a magnificent French blue velvet dress, trimmed with lace panels and decorated with intricately hand sewn silk roses. Her hair was dressed in a soft, full style with neat ringlets and covered with a perfectly designed matching bonnet. Everything about Katherine radiated happiness and fulfillment; everything except her eyes. Something within their dark, mysterious beauty spoke of a trace of sadness.

“Excuse me Miss, would you like your bags brought in with you?” That evening Katherine had spun around to see a gentleman who had somehow managed to carry in all of her luggage from the carriage outside. His role at the hotel suggested that he was of a lower class status but his appearance was charming and well presented signifying his fine style. As she spoke the gentleman raised his eyes and was captivated by her mesmerizing beauty

“Yes that would be very kind of you sir.” Her voice was gentle but refined, sweet but confident. Phillip was instantly caught in her spell. She seemed to have a way with men. Back in her hometown in Melbourne, there wasn't a gentleman who didn't love Katherine for her beauty and wealth but they all suffered the same sorry fate, for not one met the parent's criteria. For you see Katherine never had any real choice in whom she married and even, if by chance she were to fall madly in love, it would have to be with an appropriate, extremely rich man. Though the chances of Katherine falling in love were sadly minuscule, for she lost faith in “true love” a long time ago. As a child she used to love reading fairytales. Stories of fairies and leprechaun, forbidden love, princes and mystical castles, witches and goblins. She would read into the night until her eyes grew weary and the last candle was blown out. And then when she slept, Katherine would dream, and all the images in the books would come to life. Her mother warned her about reading such nonsense, but the bounds of her imagination had not yet been charted. She believed that two people fell in love and then got married; she couldn't fathom the idea that people got married and if they were fortunate fell in love. However, this fantasy was to be broken when she was only ten years old. After attending a relative's wedding ceremony, Katherine's young mind was filled with curiosity and questions.

“Mother when did you and father fall in love?” To Katherine’s astonishment her mother’s face became red and her cheeks increasingly ballooned forced her lips to burst open and release a roar of laughter.

“Love. I’ve never loved Mr. Livingston. You marry a gentleman for his money and nothing else.” Katherine’s eyes began to well up with tears,

“But in my books it says...”

“Yours books are rubbish. They are lies written to trick children who read too much. To think, you actually believed a fairytale, you’re a silly, silly child.” Her mother’s words were like a dagger stabbing into Katherine’s fragile heart. She searched desperately in her mother’s eyes for something to soothe her open wounds, but even they seemed to mock her fragility. If your own parents’ marriage was based on a fraud, how could there be truth in fairytales? Her dreams were shattered and Katherine stopped believing in the truths her books had spoken of. From this moment onward Katherine’s heart hardened and her once loved, cherished fairytale novels were to remain at the end of her bed, covered with dust, bound by reality.

“I’ll take the bags from here son.” A deep, gentle voice came from the back of the hotel entrance. It was Mr. Thomas, the hotel’s highly regarded owner. He was an older gentleman of about sixty-five years but his gallant and bold strides suggested that he was much younger in spirit. While his presence radiated authority, his calm blue eyes and white bearded face were gentle and inviting.

“And you I presume must be Miss Livingston “

“Yes, it is a pleasure to meet your acquaintance Mr. Thomas. My parent’s speak of you with the highest regard.”

“And I of them. Now let me direct you to your room, I hope that it will be adequate.”

After introductions, Katherine and Mr. Thomas made their way up to her quarters leaving poor Phillip still caught in a daze.

“I believe you have already stolen our ill-fated Phillip’s heart.” Mr. Thomas had commented and his face grew even softer as he smiled.

“I don’t think I understand what you’re talking about.” She impassively replied.

“What I’m saying is that I think it is a case of love at first sight!” Mr. Thomas chuckled lightly waiting for Katherine’s reaction, but nothing in her solemn facial expressions changed.

“There is no such thing.” Mr. Thomas’ cheerful face dropped and his eyes saddened. For throughout his life he had never met a lady so young who was so greatly burdened.

Let me tell you a story,” his voice was so soothing that Katherine couldn’t help but want to listen even though she was long past listening to tales.

“It was in the middle of winter, when the broad flakes of snow were falling around, that a certain queen sat working at a window...” He continued telling the story and Katherine grew increasingly aware of its familiarity.

“Let me guess,” she interrupted, “the prince and the princess fall madly in love and live happily ever after. I knew that story sounded familiar. It was one of those absurd fairytales I used to read when I was much younger and might I add, completely naive.” Katherine’s words were cold and hard.

“Look things like that don’t really happen, love is just a fantasy that people dream up to satisfy their childish desires.” Mr. Thomas had remained unfazed by her harsh words.

“What if I was to tell you that I know the author of this ‘fairytale’ and everything he spoke of he knew to be true.” Mr. Thomas said each word with complete certainty. But Katherine remained unconvinced.

“Why should I believe that?” she had replied expecting some sort of longwinded answer.

“Because I am the author.” Katherine watched in disbelief as Mr. Thomas simply smiled and walked away. Her confident poise began to dissolve. From a young age Katherine’s life had been founded on the belief that love didn’t exist, but now once again she questioned all that she’d been taught.

“Men are simply a material accessory. You mustn’t accept anything but the best.” Had always been her mother’s advise. The only thing she had ever been encouraged to love was money.

She went inside her room and took out her beautiful wedding dress she had earlier hung up. She examined its tightly corseted waist, beautiful pearl embroidery and flowing layers of silk. She knew its intricate detail and had always planned to wear it when she married the decided groom. She had never questioned her mother’s instructions nor considered the consequences of their final choice. But now as Katherine sat, holding her dress she realized that she had agreed to marry a man she had never meet. A man she didn’t know, let alone love. After marriage she would have in her possession a wealthy gentleman and secure future, but at what price?

“Excuse me, Miss Livingston it is I, Phillip, the one who carried your bags in. I believe you have forgotten something.” Katherine calmed herself by an act of will and answered the door. There sanding tall and pride was Phillip, within his arms he held,

what appeared to be a large parcel. She carefully untied the coarse string and tore away the brown paper. In large letters it had written *To Katherine,*

*“The greatest thing of all is love “*

Underneath the paper was also a small, familiar book entitled-

*“The Prince’s Tale”* By William Thomas



Despite the hotel’s beautiful and decorative finish, the port in front of my working home began to be industrialized during the First World War. In fact, the beach in front of the hotel was used as an important naval ship supplier for the allied forces overseas. Our small, picturesque, seaside town was transformed into a working class city and our hotel responded by adapting to these changes. It was during this time that I meet Miss Clara Richards.

She was quiet a plain lady at first appearance, but on a closer look I was taken by her incredible striking green eyes. She had come into the hotel wearing a simple, afternoon dress with a wide ruffle and flounced waistline, which managed to hide the fact that she was indeed quite pregnant. She struggled a little, climbing the seemingly long, endless staircase, but managed to keep her composure. As she climbed the stairs breathing heavily up to the next floor, a young couple practically jumping up the stairs overtook her. Clara stopped and waited while they passed by. As she watched them, every sound in the hotel seemed to fade out of existence

except for the laughing and flattery and charming words shared between the couple. Not for a second did they remove their eyes from one another's gaze. At this point kind of sickness overcame Clara and she held on tightly to the hard, wooden rail beside her. Her heart sank and she quickly turned away from the couple. Seven months ago Clara's fiancé and sweetheart was unexpectedly called as a reserve to go to war. It was considered a great honour to serve your country in battle, but to be apart from one another, for any length of time seemed unbearable. This is how it is when people fall in love. Time together is never long enough. However, no amount of begging would convince Bill to stay.

"Have you any idea what I would be missing! Clara this is the opportunity of a lifetime. This is the kind of adventure I've always dreamed about." His eyes seemed to gleam with excitement. However Clara was not convinced.

"But what about our wedding? Or did that minor detail escape your memory. You know, our engagement cant go on forev..."She promptly ended her sentence but it was to late. The damage was already done.

"And what by heavens is that supposed to mean? Just how long do you plan on waiting for me? A year...a month...a week? There was a horrible silence as Clara searched desperately for something to mend her careless words. But she waited too long.

"Well I've certainly been put in my place, Have a **lovely** evening." With that Bill slammed the door behind him. Clara stood a while, staring ineffectively at the wooden door

"I'd wait forever," she whispered, but she knew her words were now pointless.



From Clara's earliest childhood years she had dreamed of her perfect wedding. Her and her friends would spend countless hours describing their perfect husbands, their dreams houses, how many children they wanted to have, they even had their names picked out. Clara had her future planned out right down to the colour she wanted the wallpaper to be. Life seemed so simple, and it was. For it is possible for a child to believe that anything is possible, no dream appears beyond the touches of reality. However, sometimes the things we plan in life don't turn out exactly how we would have expected. Bill Wentworth was one of these surprises. As a young boy, Bill was tall and thin with fine facial features. He had keen, blue eyes and a constant cheeky expression spread across his face. Despite his pleasing complexion, Bill was greatly despised by little Clara. He was rude, frustrating and arrogant and would demonstrate his affection by repeatedly punching Clara's arm. Almost everyday without exception Bill would cause Clara to run home in tears due to his unacceptable actions. I remember one night as Clara said her prayers; she prayed that God would send Bill far; far away so that she would never have to see him again. As fate would have it she discovered in the morning that the Wentworth's were moving to another estate that very week. And from that point onward Clara prayed to God every night. Now I would like to say that after years apart their paths came together again and Bill and Clara fell in love at first sight. However, that was not the case. Years did pass and their paths did meet once again, but it was going to take a lot more than simply looks to bring these two together.

Days passed by and there was no sign of Clara's fiancé. No one knew of his whereabouts and Clara began to assume the worst. Perhaps in his anger he had gone off to war without so much as a goodbye. Clara lay awake tossing in bed that

night. Images of their argument haunted her every thought. She couldn't help but blame her self for everything, and nothing would comfort her restless mind. All of a sudden there was a knocking at Clara's window. Terrified, she slide in her bed against the wall and covered her face with the bed sheets. (Some kind of protection method I suppose.) The knocking grew louder and louder, faster and faster, but she refused to move. Then she could hear the creak of the window being pushed open and she suddenly remembered that she forgot to lock it. There was a loud crash on the floor of her a bedroom and a deep voice moaned.

"Ooooooww, help me"

Clara jumped up onto her feet and searched desperately in the dark for the chord from the ceiling to turn the light on. She pulled the chord only to reveal an all to familiar face.

"How dare you! You completely scared me to death." She screamed. However her terrified face quickly softened and she couldn't help but laugh at Bill's clumsy entrance through the window. He rose from the cold, hard floor obviously in pain, but unable to keep a straight face.

"Surprise" Bill moaned, "Although I must admit, this wasn't exactly the entrance I was hoping for." Hearing this, Clara lunged from the bed into his open arms, so relieved to feel his warmth again.

"You silly fool"

"Now before you say another word," Bill interrupted, "there is something I have for you." He reached down and picked up a large bag. "The moment I left your house that night, it was obvious that I'd over-reacted but my pride kept me from admitting it. I guess I just have this overwhelming fear that when I go to war you'll find someone

else. Absurd as it may sound to you, that's what I was afraid of. However, while I was sulking round the town streets the other day, I came across something that surrendered my fears." He opened the bag, revealing Clara's dream wedding dress. "Every since we were children this dress has symbolized all you ever wanted in a marriage. You dreamt of wearing this dress long before you dreamt of marrying me. Now, when you chose to marry me, you willingly gave up that dream. I realized you were always willing to sacrifice everything for me, so there was no need to be afraid that I would loose you. I know I said that we could never afford this dress but I have decided that with your love I don't need money, for I am already the richest man in the world."

That night Clara and Bill were so overwhelmed with their love that it might be said that they let their emotions control their actions. But that's just between you and me. The next morning Bill left for war, but the prospects of a wedding after his return made parting easier. However an unexpected surprise was going to make waiting for Clara a whole lot more difficult.

For months she was able to hide the fact that she was pregnant from her family and friends. However, as time passed many of her clothes admitted defeat and had already reached beyond their stretching abilities and people began to wonder why Clara always made excuses to stay in the house. It would have been a disgrace if they were to find out that she was pregnant before marriage and not to mention the gossip of the century, so she made the decision to disappear until the birth. It was at this point that Clara came to stay at my hotel.

After a few days in the hotel Clara began to forget her unfortunate circumstances. She no longer had to worry about nosy relatives out to discover her secret, or rude comments about her increasing weight and diet recipes from her mother. The only person who could possibly know about her whereabouts was Bill. She had written him a letter earlier in the week telling him where she was staying; however she forgot to mention the reason why. Perhaps forgot is the wrong word. Clara decided it would be a much 'bigger' surprise if she waited till he arrived home. She could just imagine his face as he walked through the door to see his fiancé the size of a massive elephant.

"Good lord," she had suddenly screamed, "My dress!" Clara had just realized that her precious dress now had to accommodate two people instead of one. She had horrible visions of walking down the isle wearing a white sheet bunched up in the appropriate places because it was the only thing that would fit. Clara couldn't stand to wait any longer. She grabbed the sacred gown from me, sending me round in circles and held it up to her ballooned body. She noted by looking that its flounced waistline may just be wide enough, but it wasn't sufficient in calming her nerves. She lifted the mass of fabric and poured it over her rounded body. Its weight managed to drag it to the floor and the first stage was successful. With tremendous Clara effort twisted her arms around her back and started to zip up the precious gown. This would be the determining factor. The zip began to rise higher and higher, each inch becoming tighter and tighter and finally she reached the top! Success! She spun around and stood facing the mirror wall and was amazed by her own reflection. "If only he could see me now," she had whispered.

There had been a sudden knock at the door that evening and Clara's fair cheeks had blushed with excitement. She picked up her heavy skirt and ran, plunging her restless body at the doorway. Her heart pounded rapidly as she turned the weighty door handle, longing so desperately to see her beloved. The door swung slowly open, revealing a gentleman partly concealed in the hallway. To her dismay, an unfamiliar face looked back at her, and her heart sank. His despondent expressions caught Clara's unwilling eyes, but she refused to be disheartened or alarmed. She watched intently as the stranger dropped his hand into his shoulder pack revealing a small, typed telegram. At that instant Clara's body weakened and her heartbeat stopped. Her mouth opened to speak but no words came out. For a deathly moment she looked at him in numb shock.

"Dead" she whispered, as she felt her voice return and her stomach sicken. The gentleman looked into her desperate eyes but found nothing with which he could comfort her.

"I'm so sorry ma'am." Clara's weakened body sunk down onto the cold, hard floorboards. She clutched her skirt and closed her eyes. She longed to cry but something prevented her to. She was so afraid. Afraid that she had forgotten the way he smelt, or what they had last talked about, or what he looked like. Afraid that she was all alone to raise a child that he would never even know about.

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"Oh look at this photo. I almost forgot how absolutely beautiful you looked." Doris

continued cleaning, pretending not to hear her friend's comments. Besides it was impossible that she could forget the same photo she seemed to pick up every single time she came around. Doris wondered if she should just give her the damn thing so their conversation could start with sentences that didn't contain the words ceremony or marriage.

"I envied you so much on that day. I was convinced you had everything a girl could ever wish for." "Wish for", Doris thought to herself, I don't remember wishing for a life spending most of my time washing the fat from filthy pans or wiping away vile smelling toxic material from a babies bottom.

"For starters you married your sweetheart, the most popular boy from school. Do you remember that cow of a girl, Pearl who was in love with him all throughout our final grade?"

"You mean Pearl Dawson;" Doris cynically replied.

"Yeah that's her. I bet she's still jealous of you." Ironically Pearl was now a highly successful editor of one of Australia's leading women's magazines, but Doris managed to hold her tongue and simply replied,

"I'm sure she is." Doris bent down and picked up a piece of half eaten, slobbered apple of the floor. As she felt it's disgusting warm, sticky texture between she fingertips her heart began to race and her emotions exploded. She hated Pearl Dawson. She hated her because she followed her dreams. She hated her because had no regrets, and most of all she hated that she was satisfied.

"Are you alright?" After an uneasy silence Doris examined her friend's concerned expression and realised her own look had given away her true emotions.

"I'm just tired." She insisted,

“Well of course you are. I’m sure it isn’t easy being a mother to three young children. If there is ever anything that I can do for you I’d be more than happy to,” Doris thought this would be an appropriate moment to reveal her true intentions for inviting her friend over.

“Well actually there is something you could do for me.” Eleanor was surprised to hear these unusual words come from Doris mouth; in fact she was quite caught of guard.

“Ok just name it.” She immediately answered, intrigued as to what her request would be.

“Well I’ve been thinking of taking some time away from James and the kids.”

Instantly a horror brushed over Eleanor’s plain face and left her completely speechless.

“It’s not as serious as you think, it’s just a few days to get some real rest and to regain my sanity.” After a few moments Eleanor composed her disbelief and found her voice.

“And who do you suppose will do the cooking, keep the house clean and look after the children, certainly not James?” Doris felt her face become red and hot, the emotions boiled inside of her and she had to refrain from screaming

“Is that all you can think of? Don’t you think that a married woman has other desires in life besides cleaning up after others? For twelve years I have played the part of the housemaid without complaint. All I’m asking for is a few days to remember what I look like without an apron on!” Eleanor was shocked to hear such words. She was a woman of blind dependence and didn’t understand women who wanted marital liberty. She was a very plain, slightly overweight lady of about thirty years with black dyed hair in short, tight ringlets. She longed desperately for children and marriage

but as time passed her chances became more unlikely. Despite this fact, Eleanor and was quite content and held a respectable job as a head saleswoman in a frock salon

“Well, although I don’t really understand the problem with your situation, I’m sure a few days aren’t going to hurt anyone. Now what is it exactly you want me to do?”

Doris understood her implications but was grateful that Eleanor was still willing to help.

“I was hoping that this Friday you could mind the kids just till James gets home from work”

“This Friday, why the urgency”

“I can’t explain it right now but the sooner I get away the better. Besides I’ll be back on Monday.”

“What makes you think that James will give you a razoo?”

“I don’t need his money, I’ve been saving up for months, and anyway the hotel that I’m staying at is good value. Can’t you just trust that I know what I’m doing?” There was a pause as Eleanor examined Doris’ desperate eyes.

“All right Doris, I’ll help you, but James isn’t going to like it.” She picked up her bag and headed for the front door,

“I better be off, I have responsibilities to take care of.”

For the next few nights James and Doris argued about her rash decision. However in actuality it wasn’t rash at all. For some time Doris had longed to break the circular routine that consumed her every moment but had lacked the means. Now that everything had fallen into place, no amount of guilt could convince her to stay. As



she left the house, late on the Thursday night, she felt a kind of freedom surge through her veins. The only thought that frightened her was knowing that in a few days everything would be as before.

It was that Thursday night in the early 1950's that I meet Doris. As she entered the large hotel doors her face beamed with excitement and curiosity. Her inquisitive movements had fascinated one man in the back of the room. His eyes followed her until her figure disappeared at the top of the staircase. Shortly after he approached the gentleman at the front desk.

"My name is Mr. Dunn and I am currently staying here. I would like to inquire about that lady's name." His words were smooth and charming, however, his question was inappropriate.

"I'm sorry sir, but I'm afraid I can't tell you that." Replied the small plump man in a dignified voice, who was now standing on his tippee toes. Mr. Dunn reached deep into his pocket revealing a large wad of money.

"Perhaps this will change your mind," he said confidently and watched as the small man's jelly eyes pop out of his head.

"All right, all I can say is that her name is Doris and she'll be staying here till Monday."

"Thank you, that's all I needed to know," and with that he smiled and handed the man a fair amount of money. Mr. Dunn then turned walking away on tippee toes, compelling the little man's feet to return to the ground and his cheeks turn a brilliant, tomato red.

In the morning Doris put on her lovely, low-necked floral dress and a string of large pearls. As she was about to make her way out of her room, a sudden urge overcame her. She reached down to her left ring finger and began to remove her wedding band. After twelve years she was surprised to find that it actually came off. Although her hand felt completely naked and bare, she sensed that another barrier had been removed. A further surge of independence flowed rapidly through her veins as she entered the hotel bar. She sat down and immediately noticed a young man walking towards her. I should have taken my wedding ring of a long time ago she humored herself silently.

“May I sit here” The man who spoke was tall, dark and handsome. He reminded Doris of one of those Fabio men she read about in her romance novels, although he didn’t have one of those French accents like she had imagined.

“Sure, feel free.” Her voice had trembled, revealing her nervousness. Conversely this only made him more confident.

“I can’t help but notice that you look out of place here, have you perhaps come here to escape someone?” Doris’ heartbeat was now uncontrollable. She suddenly felt transparent, like he could see everything about her, yet for some reason she refused leave.

“What makes you say that?” The man moved in close enough that she could just smell his cologne.

“Something in your eyes.” he answered, moving in closer again. It suddenly became too intense and Doris rose to feet.

"That's very insightful, but the truth is you don't know anything about me. I'm sure one of those darn horoscopes could of said just as much." Doris began to walk away, but came to a sudden halt when she heard him call her name.

"How do you know my name?" She was becoming more curious.

"Maybe I know more than you think. Look I would really like to get to know you better. How about meeting me tonight at the restaurant up the street. No strings attached just good food and friendly chat. So what do you think, say 7:30?" Doris mind was racing; his charming words seemed so appealing.

"I need to think about it," was all she could manage to murmur.

"Well I'll be waiting there at 7:30 and I would love it you could come!" With that Doris left the room and hurried upstairs. She burst into her hotel room and collapsed onto the bed. She lay there for hours trying to sort out her crowded conscience. She longed so desperately to be free from her constraining role, but everything she knew and loved would be destroyed if she did. She looked at the clock, it was 7:01. She took the dress from me, which had been hanging in the closet. It was an elegant, stunning blue dinner dress with intricately hand sewn crystals. Doris had bought a long time ago, but never worn. She held it up to her own body in front of the mirror. It complimented her slim figure and she felt young and beautiful once again. 7:15. She sat down on the edge of the bed, it was now or never. Doris had to decide whether to put the dress away and do the right thing by her family, or take a chance and see where fate would lead.

She knew what to do.



“Now sweetheart do you remember Tony? You know the good looking one with the designer teeth?” Katie was used to her mother’s exaggeration. Tony as she remembered was a middle aged, short, hairy gorilla, with teeth that were bigger than her grandmother’s dentures. Nevertheless, she thought that he was better than her last love interest. At least the overpowering smell of his cologne didn’t burn her nostril hairs every time he walked into the room.

“Well anyway, he’s asked me to go away with him this weekend. Just the two of us. I know what you’re thinking, but this time he’s the one. I can feel it.” Katie wondered if this was the same feeling that attracted her mother to one of ex-lovers Karl, who was now not surprisingly (enough) in jail for attempted murder.

“Besides, you’ll only be staying with your grandma for the weekend this time. I promise.” These solemn words were meaningless. Katie knew by now that her mother’s pleading words were empty pledges. At times she would look into her mother’s eyes, almost wishing there was some malicious intent so she could hate her. But there was nothing but desperation.

“You know how hard it is for me to find anyone these days. He’s a good bloke, you just need to trust me on this one.” Her mother stood there anxiously waiting for her daughter’s approval. It was at this point that Katie was famous for letting down her tough guard and leaving herself vulnerable.

“Ok mum, I’ll stay at grandma’s.” Her mother bent down and held her daughter tightly. Katie had allowed herself to be sucked in, persuaded once again beyond reason. She wondered when she would see her mother this time. Invariably her

guess is as good as ours. Outside the window came the blasting roar of a persistent car horn.

“That must be him now, I best be off. I wouldn’t want to keep him waiting.” Katie wondered what attracted her mother to these men. Tony couldn’t even be bothered coming to the door. A real gentleman!

“Everything will be fine honey. Grandma will pick you up soon and I’ll be back before you know it.” Katie opened the tattered curtains and watched the pair drive away until their car was nothing more than a speck off in the distance. With the disappearing sun horrible shadows began to entomb the room in which she was sitting. She lay down and buried her face in the dirty carpet, too frightened to move until her grandma’s arrival. For there were some things that even she was not brave enough to face.

After some time, Katie’s grandma arrived and was shocked to find her all alone, but this was not the first time.

“Come on Katie, let me get you out of this dreary house. It really is quite disgusting.” Katie loved her grandma’s theatrical and booming voice. Although many found her to be quite eccentric and absurd, she was someone constant and reliable. Katie’s grandma was also a lady who believed in freedom of expression. It was not unusual to see her wearing something similar to a ballroom dress in fluoro colours and her body covered in strings of fake pearls and jewels. It was impossible when passing by not notice her. In fact, whenever the two would go walking down the street they would acquire a group of dumbfounded onlookers. Katie always assumed that people thought her grandma was a famous actress or someone of great importance and was proud to be seen by her side.

Without another word the two left Katie's house and headed for her grandma's. As Katie turned around and looked back into the empty house she wondered if she would ever be able to call it home. It's worn carpet smell and narrow rooms still seemed so foreign. Throughout her entire life she had never stayed in the one place long enough to become familiar with its uniqueness'. The only place she felt comfortable calling home was her grandma's house. It seemed to radiate warmth and security and the colourful composition reflected the grandma's great love of life. But the one thing that Katie loved best about its distinctive characteristics was its smell. There was forever the scent of fresh, acrylic paint. Like her grandmother she shared the love of art. From the moment she could hold a paintbrush, Katie and her grandma would spend hours together creating wild and expressive works. Painting was a way they could escape reality and enter a world of imagination. However whenever it was time to leave her grandma's this world would collapse and as a child she would be forced to face stark reality.

After their arrival at the house they spent hours telling stories, making up silly plays and dancing to songs on the radio. If Katie's eyelids had not been so insistent she would have stayed up forever.

"Now off to sleep or you'll be no fun in the morning"

"Grandma"

"Yes Katie"

"We'll be friends forever wont we," her grandmother paused for a moment at the door entrance

"You know I love you Katie more than anything in the whole world"

"Even painting?"

“Even painting. But there will come a time when I won't be around anymore. I'm getting old Katie. My mind may still think that I'm only twenty-two but my body's getting tired and one day, hopefully not for a long, long time I'll go away to rest with grandpa. ‘

“Grandma, does my mum love me?” Her grandma's eyes began to well up with tears, but she forced them back, so not to let Katie see.

“Of course she loves you. Your mother just has a funny way of showing it sometimes. Katie you have to promise me that no matter what happens you won't give up hope. Things will get better just sometimes they have to get worse before they turn good. Promise me that you will never give up your dreams.”

“I promise grandma.”

“Good. Now, get off to sleep so your poor grandma can have some beauty sleep.”

“Night grandma.”

“Night Katie.” Her heart couldn't take watching Katie as she closed the bedroom door. She was so afraid of what might happen to her granddaughter when she died, but she knew her own time was running short and there had to be someone reliable before it was too late. Her job was to protect Katie from all that could harm her but her mother might be the only person who could save her. It was time to make things right.

For the next few months Katie learnt about the good things in life. She learnt about the joys of love and how if stare at the clouds for long enough you can find one that looks just like an elephant and how to eat a chocolate cake without using your hands. While all the time her grandma was getting sicker and their precious time was running out. Then one day, there was a knock at the door.

"I'll get it grandma." Katie ran as quickly as she could so she could get back before her painting dried. She opened the door and her body froze.

"Sweetheart it's mummy, come here and give me a great, big hug." Katie reluctantly moved forward and hugged her mother, desperately searching for her grandma in the background.

"Hey little rascal do you remember me, It's Tony." She remembered him all right, and he was just as hairy as ever. There was no way that she was hugging him!

"Well don't worry, you two will have plenty of time to get better acquainted. Katie, Tony, and me we're getting married. We're finally going to be a family." Katie felt sick in the stomach but at last her grandma came into the room and she felt sure she would tell them to go away. But as she looked closer, her grandma's eyes were red and swollen, like she had been crying.

"Katie I've packed your bags and I've also packed plenty of paints so you can continue your painting. Now come and give me a hug so that your Mum and Tony aren't kept waiting long." Katie's eyes were suddenly filled with a deep horror, but she did as her grandma said. As she walked towards her, she realised that her grandma didn't look the same as usual. Her face was bland and colourless; her hair was down and tattered. She looked old and tired. She reached out and held her grandma tightly, afraid to let go.

"Grandma" she whispered, "please don't let me go. I'll do anything." Her grandma knew she had to stay strong but her heart was getting heavier.

"Look at me Katie. Remember everything I taught I. I'm doing this for the best." Katie felt betrayed and all alone. She walked slowly out the door; never removing her eyes



from her grandma convinced that she would do something like she always had. But she didn't.

The next thing her grandma knew her little Katie was gone. A single tear rolled down tough, wore check and a violent pain struck her heart.

Katie looked silently out the car window. Inside, everything seemed to reek of foul cigarette smoke and cheap take-away food, which made her feel sick. She pretended to be brave and courageous but inside she was terrified.

"We'll be staying at a hotel for a few nights, just until we find a place to rent." Like usual her mother's words were of no real comfort. All she held onto was what her grandmother said about things improving.

"Here we are. I know it's nothing fancy but it's got a great history. Katie, why don't you go upstairs first and put your stuff in room number seven?" It was that day, in the late 1980's that I meet little Katie. By this stage the once majestic hotel was looking run down and abject. As she walked up the stairs they creaked and moaned and the handrail slightly trembled. She opened the door with the tilted, rusty number seven and closed it quickly behind her. She quickly surveyed the filthy room and was captured by something beautiful on the bed. She moved in closer and gently removed a small, white, beaded dress from me, which had been so carefully laid out. She had never seen anything so striking in her life.

"Surprise!" Her mother shouted from the doorway.

"They lady at the shop said she thought you would like it. I was hoping that you could wear it to our wedding. Do you think it's ok?" Her mother looked at Katie with those same desperate eyes. This time maybe it would be ok, maybe her mother was right.

As she looked at the pretty dress, the first real gift she had every received there was only one thing she could say,  
“This one will fit fine, I love it.”



In all these years, hanging around here, I guess that I have learned a few things about people. Their lives may be short or long, happy or sad. Sometimes what life offers them isn't always a good fit. Sometimes they don't even try it on. But one thing that I am certain of is that everybody is faced with choices everyday, one way or another they're going to have to take a risk.

## The Reflection Statement.

The overall intention of my work, "Just Hanging Around" was to create an imaginative story that investigated the separate lives of four women, in four diverse eras but connected by a common thread by their presence in the same room of a Sydney hotel. The overarching objective was to look at each woman as an individual in her society and to explore how a piece of symbolic piece of clothing could "represent" her situation. I have sought to achieve this goal, in my independent research, by linking my investigations to my English Extension One course and the knowledge gained there. By researching characters such as Nora from Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Elizabeth from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* I have been able to further examine the individual as an agent for self-determination and their struggle to break free from the conventions of their day. My own particular interest, however, in this work was to explore the attitudes of society towards women in the Twentieth century. In my story I have intended to reflect on and communicate some of the issues and dilemmas that women face regardless of the time in which they live. The women in my story contemplate the meaning of love in their lives, however for each it plays a different role. Some of the other universal issue which the women in my story face are: loss of innocence, grief, the complexities of relationships and the necessity of taking risks. To further my understanding of these issues I read books which deal with similar ideas like Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi* and analysed films like *If These Walls Could Talk*. Another resources I greatly benefited from was Minirth, Meier and Arterburn's *Complete Life Encyclopaedia* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1995) which explains the stages of grief and other significant human emotions.

I decided that I wanted to present my characters in an intimate and insightful way where there was a close relationship with the audience. It was at that time that I decided to combine my interest in an imaginative work and my desire for intimacy and I came up with the idea of a non-human narrator. The idea of a coat hanger narrating the story gave me the artistic freedom to explore the minds of my characters.

My writing is aimed at an essentially adult audience; from eighteen or so upwards, both male and female, specifically those who share my interest in the human condition and in particular the changing role of women throughout the twentieth century. In my reading I looked at authors who also wrote for this same audience, to see what literary devices and other techniques they used. One article which I found particularly inspiring was "The Dress" by Helen Garner which appeared in the Good Weekend section of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in recent times. This article speaks about the power of a garment (in this case a wedding dress) to create a role.

I decided that the form of my story would be a series of vignettes, taken from the lives of three women and one child, each from a different period in the century but all coming to the same room in the same hotel and using the same coat hanger. The hotel in my story was my creation but it is based on research I did on the internet, in particular the *Esplanade Hotel* in Melbourne. This hotel has a rich history which spanned the century. It passed from being a grand hotel to one falling into neglect and disrepair, although it has now been restored. When the first character, Katherine arrives at the hotel, it is at the peak of its glory. With the changing years its glory passes and the kind of clientele changes. By the 1980's it is reduced to being a cheap place for strugglers like the family of Katie.

Another thread that runs through the story is clothing. In part, this reflects a story my father told me about a friend of his who described the losses associated with his marriage breakdown and divorce. He said that it was as if his old life with all the richness of patterns and friendships was like a coat and he had had to take off that coat and leave it behind and start all over.

For each character a piece of clothing symbolises their unique circumstances, the choices they face and told something of their story. For Katherine the wedding dress symbolises the conventions of marriage. She must make the decision between marriage for financial security or the possibility of love in the future. Clara also has a wedding dress, but for her it symbolises all the things she will lose; her hopes and dreams and the security of a complete family. For Doris, it is an elegant dinner dress that represents freedom from her domestic role and its lack of possibilities. However, it also represents the loss of everything she knows and loves. For Katie the dress is the first real gift she has ever received from her mother and it represents a future which, on the basis of her past experience, she is afraid to believe in. Each of these garments links the characters in the dilemmas of choices they must make. Each represents a possible future but also speaks of a risk to be taken.

The choice of language was determined by the period and the obvious simplicity of a coat hanger as “narrator”. This allowed for a fairly familiar tone to exist between the work and the reader. The ‘voice’ and perspective of the narrator hints at the coat hanger’s identity but this is not made explicit so as to not distract from the insights it can offer. The coat hanger has the unique advantage of actually putting on the other person’s life along with the garment in question.

In conclusion, my story was my attempt to explore some of the universal issues for women in a way that was simple and accessible to my audience; to be entertaining but also to connect with the struggles of real life.