**A Soaring Heart**

Annabelle sat glued to the instruction video, her mouth open wide in disbelief as she watched the people flying across the rainforest canopy. She was with her mum and sisters, waiting to take on the flying fox adventure. It was times like these Annabelle wished her dad was there to hold her hand, offer her a supportive smile, and tell her she was going to be safe. Her mum had said all the right things as they waited for their turn, but it wasn’t the same as when her dad used to say it.

Annabelle missed her dad. She sometimes cried herself to sleep at night wishing he would come back. She remembers that evening so clearly when there was a knock at their door. She was playing with her sister, quietly colouring in – it was her favourite thing to do. Her mum answered the door, and standing there in all their authority and rigidity were two police officers. She couldn’t hear what they said, but she heard her mum gasp as if starved of breath and saw her stagger sideways. The police officer had to help her stay standing and ushered her to a chair. She knew it was bad, she didn’t have to hear any words to confirm that. The next week of her life was a blur with people coming and going. There was a heaviness that hung over the house, like the blanket of smoke from a large scale bushfire. Then finally they were escorted to the church one grey and dreary morning by their extended family. All Annabelle remembers from that day was the sound emanating from her mum. Her sobs were endless and haunting.

But that was two years ago now, and here she was, getting kitted with a safety harness and helmet, ready to throw herself off a perfectly good platform. The safety instructions and practice run took 40minutes and only added to her anxiety. By the time she arrived at the first platform, her knees were visibly shaking. She hadn’t even noticed the instructor, Carlos, and her mum had been chatting all the way to the beginning of the flying fox adventure.

Melanie was excited to finally take a risk and do something invigorating. She felt like the last two years had taken their toll, and she’d aged ten years! She woke up one day recently and realised she had three beautiful children and was alive, so she needed to live and not just exist. She trawled through the internet and spotted Hastingbrook Adventure Park. Melanie thought to herself that this was a great opportunity for her to do something special with her girls. It was like a new beginning, a rebirth.

What Melanie didn’t plan for was her immediate attraction to her instructor. As they walked the 15minutes through the rainforest to the start of the flying fox adventure, they chatted about their favourite music, food, places they wanted to travel to, work, everything! Melanie couldn’t remember a time when she found it so easy to talk to someone. Carlos made her feel comfortable and safe, two of the things she missed most.

It was time. They were lined up and ready to experience the flying fox adventure. Annabelle barely made the weight restriction to fly solo. Carlos smiled at her as she waited on the platform. “Take care little one. I’ll see you at the other end”. With that, Carlos took off down the flying fox with a combination of grace and agility. Melanie stared after him in awe and couldn’t wipe the silly grin off her face. Her heart was warming and she knew she’d made the right decision to get out and live again.

The first four guests, including her mum, did their run. Next it was Annabelle’s turn. She followed the safety instructions and took off on the 200m flying fox run. All her sisters were behind her and could hear her as she departed “weeeeeeeeeeeee”! As she approached the other end she could see Carlos grinning from ear to ear. She lifted her legs in preparation for landing. Carlos secured the brake and eased her into the landing platform. “Here you are princess” he soothed. The hearts of all four guests on the platform melted. It was such a tender moment, and they could tell his words came straight from his heart. Melanie took a deep breath, her heart soaring. It was caused by a combination of feeling like she could fly thanks to her surroundings, and watching the interaction between Carlos and Annabelle. “This was my best decision yet” she thought to herself as she hugged her precious child.