

Backyard to Backpack by Evie Farrell RRP \$32.99 Murdoch Books

Prologue

'Come on, Mum, please? You know you can do it,' Emmie begged as we stood in the dust on a mountaintop somewhere on Bohol Island in the Philippines.

It was a hot, cloudless day. Under the sharp sunshine, our faces were red and sweaty and our hair stuck to our cheeks in thin, wet strips. We were here only because our sneaky tricycle driver had taken an unscheduled turn up a dirt road. I hadn't been paying attention to where we were going, and now here we were.

A zipline predicament.

My little six-year-old had spotted it first, its glistening wires calling her with a metallic hum as they stretched and rattled out across the deep, tree-lined valley.

'Mum, a zipline! Can we, Mum, please? I want to fly.' She was determined and fearless, and wouldn't give up.

'Oh Emmie, I don't think I can. I'm so sorry.' I hated letting her down, but ziplines were not my friends. Riding them meant hanging from wires in a harness far above the earth, feet dangling in the air, my life entrusted to strangers. And everyone makes mistakes. What was she thinking, this bold little girl of mine? It looked terrifying. I watched as a couple flew out over the nothing below and clattered off into the distance, shrieking in tandem with the metal. Emmie roared with joy and danced from foot to foot, desperately wanting to be out there, too.

'Oh come on, Mum!' She stared at me in frustration. 'I can't go by myself. I'm too little.'

'I can't, Emmie. I'm scared. Please don't beg me.' I wasn't going to fly through the sky suspended from a wire. No way. She looked up at me and smiled.

'I have an idea, Mum. Whatever you're afraid of, I know what to do. Just yell out your fear while you're flying.'

'What did you say, Emmie?' I asked, wondering if I'd heard right.

'Just yell out your fear while you're flying,' she grinned. 'I'm going to yell "I'm a celebrity, get me out of here" and you can yell out your fear and make it go away. Simple!' She shrugged as if she had it all sorted out.

Maybe she did. If I yelled my fear to the void of the valley, could I free myself from it? Release it into the air and let it go? This might be a good idea. Maybe I could do this for her. And for me. But what *was* I afraid of? Why was I holding myself back?

It wasn't the height and the flying that was stopping me; my fear was buried deep: all my doubts and weaknesses, my sadness, failures and mistakes. My fear of being less-than, that the nastiness at home would never stop, that I'd never be able to give Emmie the life I wanted to. The fear and regret that randomly popped into my head to keep me awake at night.

Yell out my fears? I'd locked them away to help me survive. Did I really want to release them? We were only a few weeks into our travels, Emmie and me. It was our big adventure, one year of backpacking through Asia, spending every day together – valuable, precious time that we couldn't get at home. This time, together, was my chance to show Emmie who I was – who I *really* was: brave, fun and up for anything ... not just the mum who rushed off to work each day and came home late at night, tired and feeling old.

I wanted the old me back. I needed Emmie to see that I was strong, and that I would do anything for her. And that I didn't let fear stop me.

I sighed. 'I seriously cannot believe I am doing this but ... yes, okay, let's do it.' I gave in, and her face lit up.

'Thank you, Mum, thank you! You're the best, I love you.' She threw her arms around my waist, grabbed some pesos from my bag and raced over to buy the tickets before I could chicken out. I reluctantly followed her, signed the indemnity forms and chucked my bag into the tricycle. We joined the small queue to the hut where the zipline began.

Hand in hand we waited, watching people shoot out into the air, screaming as the world dropped away. Before I knew it, we were waved over. It was our turn to fly. We took off our shoes and stepped into a harness. My legs were shaking as I lay down in a long bag with Emmie by my side, the poor little thing squashed in beside me. We were flying Supermanstyle: horizontal, vulnerable and totally at the mercy of the metal.

'Are you okay, Mum?' Emmie laughed, poking my weak spots. 'Are you scared? Are you crying?'

Three men strapped us in, connected the bag and the wires, and clipped the straps together. Snap. Click. Laugh.

'Are you sure the wires are strong enough? Did you doublecheck everything? *Are we safe?*' I was desperate in the final seconds, and Emmie loved it. The men laughed kindly and reassured me as they strapped our shoes to the outside of the bag and counted down.

'Three, two, one ... goodbye, mama, goodbye, baby,' and they howled as they set us free.

The whizzing and whirring of the wires surrounded us as we slipped over the platform's edge and dropped into nothingness. My heart froze and I whimpered, clutching the straps in terror. Emmie was ecstatic, her arms outstretched as we soared out over the valley.

'I'm a celebrity, get me out of heeeeeeeeeere,' she yelled, euphoric.

Then, it was my turn. With my heart pounding, I thought of home, of being alone and trying to do it all, and as we flew through the sky, I sobbed out my fear:

'I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH.'

But as soon as I said it, I knew it wasn't true. Emmie was right! Yelling my fear out loud — not just saying it to myself, in my head — showed me how wrong it was. I didn't need to be afraid. I could do anything. I already did. I didn't have anything to be ashamed of.

I might be a solo mum, but I am just as good as anyone else.

I might be alone, but I am strong.

I might be scared, but I am determined.

I might be hurt, but I am healing.

Emmie pumped the air with her fists. 'You yelled it, Mum! You did it! You're free and flying!'

She flapped her arms in the air as we returned across the valley to the mountainside where we'd started. We were hauled up out of the harness, and we hugged with huge smiles. This was the moment that I learned the first lesson of my adventures with my wise little girl, Emmie, who loved me no matter what: I was good enough — and I always had been.