

[Transcript] Mamamia Out Loud / Jessie Stevens: Something Bad Is Going To Happen

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Hello Out Louders, it's Holly Wayne right here.

Look, we're so excited to have Jessie on the show on Friday.

Our wonderful co-host, Jessie Stevens, who's on Mat Leave at the minute, but we rudely dragged her away from her baby Luna to ask her all about her new novel, Something Bad is Going to Happen.

It is brilliant.

Obviously, I have read it.

You all need to read it.

It is available right now.

Jessie spoke about it a lot on Friday's episode, but you really need to listen to this interview with Mia because Something Bad is Going to Happen is about a young woman's struggle with mental health.

It's fiction, but drawn from lots of experiences of Jessie's life and family's life.

She's really honest with Mia about it and about where the inspiration came from, how she's been handling it, how much of it's true, how nervous she was about people she knows reading it.

All of that is in this brilliant interview with Mia.

We really hope you enjoy it and we really hope you enjoy Something Bad is Going to Happen.

Jessie, we haven't spoken since I finished reading your book.

The first thing you said to me when I told you that I'd finished the book.

I said, I felt like you've read my diary.

Jessie Stevens is having a really intense year.

In March she got married.

Last week she had a baby and shortly her first novel Something Bad is Going to Happen will be released.

From Mamma Mia, I'm Mia Friedman and you're listening to a very special episode of No Filter because I've known Jessie for about eight years now.

She's an executive editor here at Mamma Mia and as well as co-hosting a daily podcast together, Mamma Mia Out Loud, she's also become one of my closest friends.

You could even say that she's like family.

Jessie and I have talked many times over the years, both publicly and also on the podcast About Anxiety, which is a mental health condition we both live with, but Jessie also suffers from depression, which is something that I had never heard her talk about before.

She's mentioned it, but only in passing.

And then I read her first novel, which follows the story of a woman called Adela in her late 20s who finds herself in a psychiatric unit recovering from a mental breakdown as the book opens.

It's a deeply moving and incredibly captivating story about this young woman and her best mate Jake and the different ways that depression shows up across generations.

I sat down planning to start reading this book because Jessie had sent me an advance

copy and I didn't get up until I'd finished it hours later.

And then I put the book down and I picked up my phone and I texted her, we need to do a no filter immediately.

I knew that Jessie had some things to say about depression, which would help so many people who have experienced it feel seen and also so many people who haven't experienced it like me, better understand the people in our lives who have.

My eyes were opened by this book and my heart was opened by the conversation that you're about to hear.

We talk about Jessie's own experience with depression and how it's affected generations of her family differently.

And we also talk about how pregnancy threw a curveball at her mental health that she just did not see coming.

God, it's a cracker of an episode, here's Jessie Stevens.

We haven't spoken since I finished reading your book.

The first thing you said to me when I told you that I'd finished the book.

I said, I felt like you've read my diary.

Why is that?

Because this is fiction.

It's your first, it's not your diary, it's your first novel and it's a story of a young woman called Adela who has depression and her friend Jake, her best male friend.

Where did the themes come from?

Why did you want to write this book at this time?

It's weird because a lot of people said, do you feel pressure after the first to kind of come up with an idea?

And I hear so many people go, I'm looking for my second idea, I'm looking for my second idea.

I never looked for this idea.

It was as obvious as the first, like it was always there.

I think that's because a lot of people say that their first novels or their first fiction books are somewhat autobiographical.

They're informed by their own lives and this isn't.

There are lots of elements that aren't and I found that surprisingly easy to kind of get to a point and then imagine beyond it and work out plot and all of that kind of stuff.

But those themes and the question of happiness, what to do about those people in our lives who don't seem to have access to it, the lingering question of depression, do we all just have a point at which we're a four out of 10 and we're never going to get higher?

Is that just set?

And I think that that was my biggest question and it's about generational mental illness.

So my pop, and this is true in the book, it's the mum, but in my family, it's my dad and then myself and my sister and my brothers have all lived with depression and anxiety.

And I wanted to really convey that in all its ugliness.

I feel as though anxiety gets a bit of airtime when it comes to women's fiction.

It does.

Well, also just in terms of airtime, full stop, you know, from about five or six years ago, maybe a bit longer, suddenly everybody, the dam burst and a lot of people were newly diagnosed with anxiety and had a name for something that experienced a lot of high profile, particularly women started coming out and talking about the fact that they had anxiety. It seemed like almost everybody was talking about their anxiety.

So anxiety had a moment.

I think it's more palatable and we're more comfortable with it in the culture we live in because anxiety sometimes can give you energy and it can mean that you get things done and that you just work really hard and that in fact, anxiety can be this hidden secret where it's like, I look like I have it all, but actually I'm really anxious underneath.

And that's not that ugly, whereas depression is an in that it sucks your energy, which is so countercultural.

It often means that you can't get out of bed.

It leaves you with this sense of such laziness and inertia, which is the exact opposite of what we're told to do all the time.

And it also, I think, has been historically owned by men, especially older men.

So say in their 40s, 50s, 60s and then older.

And these men have some profound insights.

I'm thinking about like Man's Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl.

He was a Holocaust survivor.

There's another book called Darkness Visible.

I think he went to war.

And you lean in and listen when these men speak, but then when women speak about having depression, there's a bit of an eye roll or a, what have you really been through?

Does a 20 year old have anything to offer us about the wisdom of depression and what that might tell us about happiness?

And I think most people would say no.

And therefore their worries are really easily dismissed.

So this was an attempt to take depression as seriously as a man in his 40s or 50s might in, you know, a memoir that won, you know, every literary prize because of his insights.

I mean, famously Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, we do have a few small examples of women writing about depression and suffering from depression.

But I think that's so interesting what you say in that anxiety can be an affliction of high achievers, not only of high achievers, but you can be a high achiever and still have anxiety.

And as you say, sometimes the correlation between the two can be quite direct.

But depression is the opposite of success.

And why is that?

Do you think?

I think people who know it intimately say it as the opposite of success.

And I think it's because it's a death of the soul and it's a death of all hope.

Death of the soul.

Yeah.

I think it described, I think Andrew Solomon uses that expression.

It is the absolute death of who you are as a person.

Like I remember this sensation, I found it in journals that I'd written and really explored it in the book of going, I am an empty sack of flesh, like there is nothing in me.

If you asked me for one personality trait, one interest, if you asked me what I wanted to do tomorrow that will make me feel happy, I don't have an answer for you.

There's just nothing.

When have you experienced depression?

When was the first time?

Definitely as a kid looking back, but I didn't get any sort of diagnosis until my early 20s.

What did it look like as a kid having depression?

I remember sitting with my twin sister and we were in this tree house and I said to her, it's like all the lights have gone off for six months.

I'm living in a dream, world is black and white and I can't touch it.

How old are you?

I was in year four.

I remember very specifically.

And because there's specific triggers sometimes that like, you'll be having a hard year, but then I've had lots of hard years that didn't have phases of depression.

But this, I remember it so acutely and just being like, I felt like I was dreaming, like

I was watching myself from above, like I couldn't quite get in touch, like I was speaking and I'd kind of hear it.

I wasn't thinking of the words.

It was just dark.

It was like everything got really, really muted.

Had anything happened that year?

It was a bad year in terms of like development, like I was trying to find out who I was and I was, you know.

But you're what, like nine years old?

Yeah, like I don't think I was going particularly well at school.

I didn't know who I was, but it wasn't anything.

No one died.

Yeah.

Your parents didn't get divorced.

Yeah.

And when you told Claire that, your twin, how did she react?

She was familiar with what I was talking about and that's what's been interesting with my siblings is that you say something that if you were to say it to anyone outside our family, you think they'd look at you like you had two heads.

But in our family, you say it and it's like, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I know that feeling.

I know that feeling where you kind of feel like you're dead and I have this with my dad now because I remember growing up and witnessing depression in our household from the outside, which was him and only in adulthood have I been able to say things.

And he's like, oh, I've never heard this, yeah, that's how I felt for X amount of time

or whatever.

And same with my grandfather.

Like they didn't have the words, but they were exhibiting those symptoms as well.

How many periods of depression is it something that happens to you periodically?

Yes.

And I think that because of that, you're always, and I assume it's sort of the same with anxiety.

And in fact, it speaks to the title.

Something bad is going to happen.

You have a sense that even if you're not in it right now, it's waiting.

It's like you kind of get out of it.

So I had really early twenties, really, really bad, dark depression.

And then I emerged out of it.

And then even when I started working here and I got this momentum and I got this energy and everything was starting to work in the back of your head, you're like, it is waiting.

It is always waiting and it will get you when you least expect it.

And you will look at this period of your life and wonder how you did it because it will zap you.

The biggest thing is the way in which it robs you of energy, all energy to do anything.

And without energy, there can't be joy.

There can't be production.

There can't be the walk around the block.

There can't be the food that tastes really good.

So it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in a way or a spiral, like a downward spiral.

All the things that could help bring you out of it are closed off to you because you can't find the motivation to do them.

And I thought about it in terms of it being this thief, the feeling of being in Europe as someone I didn't go overseas until I was 20 and saved up and I was so, so excited.

And that holiday was great, but I've been on a trip since that cost me a year of savings and I've arrived there and gone, here it is, it's come out of nowhere.

It has stolen some of the most potentially joyful moments of my life from me and I don't know how to wrestle it back.

Like when I'm in it, I'm just like, there's such a victim mentality because I'm like, how do I plug into this?

All I want is to be able to feel it for what it is, but it's stolen it.

When was the first time you heard the word depression and connected it to this feeling of someone turning the lights off?

Probably not until I saw a psychologist.

Maybe I was vaguely aware of it growing up in the context of dad, although mom and dad didn't talk about it much.

Without wanting to pry, when your dad was going through one of these periods, what would it look like from the outside to you guys as the kids?

Very quiet, disconnected.

We used to make jokes about it where it was like you'd speak to dad and he'd go, huh?

And then you'd say the same thing and it was like, huh?

He couldn't listen.

He couldn't engage in a lot of ways.

Could you feel it in the house?

Oh yeah.

Yeah.

Very, very much.

And even growing up, memories of like the house at night was never completely quiet because you'd probably hear dad wandering at 3 a.m.

That was really normal for him not to sleep and you could see the toll it was taking.

And he went so inward rather than outward, but you could taste it.

It was everywhere and the helplessness as a kid of being like the things I remember I'd get obsessed with vacuuming and I'd go, if I just vacuumed the floor, that will make him feel better or make him a cup of coffee or, I don't know, tell a joke or something then.

Be really good.

Be really good.

That's not on him.

He never asked for that, but it was like he would go out into the world and work and come home and it was like there is not one light left.

Everything went out into the world and then he came back and it was nothing left.

Was it discussed?

Like, did you ever talk to your mum about it?

Did she ever acknowledge it to you?

Not until we were adults and then we also spoke to dad and to pop about it more.

And in fact, I'm thinking actually that there was a moment during my teenage years where I was really, really down and dad used to get one of his in the car on their own.

We'd go for like a little drive or whatever.

And every now and then he'd say something and I was like, oh, he actually really gets it.

And so we laugh now about dad giving us advice and we're just like, mate, you had nothing.

You had absolutely no expertise on it.

The blind leading the blind here.

But he had empathy.

But he would say something like, look, I know how it feels at the moment.

You've just got to put one foot in front of the other.

I think he used to say, but it's quite good advice.

Yeah, it is.

But it's so depressing.

It's like trudge through.

It sucks.

He would say the trick is to do the exact opposite of what you feel like doing.

So if you don't feel like going to school, go to school.

If you don't feel like going to netball, go to netball.

This is all sounding like excellent advice.

Is it?

I don't know.

Is it good advice?

But it's also this funny thing of just like, mate, you have not worked it out and even pop, pop every now and then like off as a pearl of wisdom.

And I'm like, you are 95 and you are so depressed like here we are in our 20s and 30s looking around at each other.

Like you can see the work that we're all putting in to try and fix this.

Maybe we're wrong.

Maybe this idea that we can fix it is naive and idealistic and they're actually right.

And they're like, this is just how it is.

But that's so depressing.

And that's something I wanted to explore in the book too is my sister and I went, we were prescribed medication in our 20s.

We've very much been diligent with what, you know, we've been told to do, which is similar to Adelaide in the book.

But the reason I wanted to write a Jake is because it represents very much my brothers and a male perspective and a male approach to mental health, which is something I've written for Mamma Mia about the work and the valorizing of the work.

What do you mean by the work?

I mean Tim Ferriss, Joe Rogan, macho men who want you to get in an ice bath and then they want you to do your marathon and then drink your own urine and then you can journal and if you just work hard enough, you'll crack the code because there's a code to be cracked.

It's a very masculine to crack your code.

Is the idea that medicines for pussies, you're cheating.

And you must access and go through your own pain in order to discover anything in order to get to the bottom of it.

So it's quite martyr in its attitude to you must go through it and you must suffer to get to the other side.

Whereas the idea that medication, oh, you haven't suffered enough if you take pills.

Exactly.

Suffering can become very respected and it's like the more you suffer, the better almost.

And I see that with a lot of men in my life who are like, no suffering is part of it.

And to me.

Is that depression or is that Catholic?

Definitely a Catholic influence, but I also think it's a little bit capitalist because

I think that it's a little bit, if we all just worked harder, then we wouldn't be afflicted with these things, which I don't think is true.

I think that if you have a chronic illness, which is what depression is, then the idea that there's a way for you to hack it is wrong and unhelpful.

And this is something that I've seen so much in my brothers and I've gone, just take the medication, it'll help.

But there's this conflict in our culture that leads us to such different places.

It is, I think, quite gendered.

And I think that it is also because men can feel, and this is a lot of the research I did, pain so viscerally in their body.

And so you see an obsession with exercise or an obsession with the ice bath thing or whatever to try and do things like exercise it, exercise it by exercising.

Whereas women, I think, go quite introspective, ruminate very much in their brains and are also, if they're mothers or if they're caring, then it's like everyone else has to go first.

So I think there's a real difference there.

But the exploration of some of the men in this is about it's looking at the limits of the work.

When you're going into one of these depressions, it seems like for you, they last like a period of around six months.

What are the signs that you might be entering into one?

Can't sleep, that's a big one, really, really disrupted sleep.

And the thoughts, and this is what I struggled with, with cognitive behavioral therapy.

What's the principle of CBT or cognitive behavioral therapy?

CBT challenges the thoughts.

So I come in and I say, I am really bad at everything I do.

I'm very lazy.

I was meant to do this day and I didn't, I can't get out of bed, blah, blah, blah.

And then they challenge those thoughts and they say, are you lazy?

Because you did this.

That's just not worked for me because the thoughts and the emotions are so immediate and so ingrained and so central to who I am.

The undoing them has not been possible for me.

So I would get stuck in that sort of self loathing thing.

Then what happens is, mum used to call it like the wheels completely fall off, like nothing is functioning.

So at uni, it was like, couldn't submit the essay, couldn't write.

There was a period in my 20s where I had horrible writer's block and just couldn't get the sentence out and that's kind of explored in the book.

And then all the things that give you any self-esteem disappear

and all the things that bring you any joy you can't do,

like your life genuinely becomes very sad.

It's like, if you put anyone in it, they too would be sad because it's just a life of sadness.

It is objectively sad because you're in bed with the curtains drawn.

Yeah, yeah.

Thinking bad thoughts about yourself and the world.

You've created it and you know that.

It's even worse with any chronic illness.

Like there's that real, real, real self loathing.

But there's also like, yeah, I've brought it on.

I can't even point to this.

It's like, if I was less lazy, then I wouldn't be like this.
And for me, the thing that's helped get out of it is almost always medication.
Like that's been getting the right medication has made a massive difference
because that jump starts like a it's like when you car and you leave your lights on
and then you get the jump stars and then.
Yeah, the jump leads and then you have to drive the car for a bit.
But you need the jump.
Something.
So I take medication for anxiety, but I take it all the time every day.
Is it different for depression?
There have been times when it's like, OK, we need to up it.
So right. So when you go through a period, it's like, OK, we need to up it.
They're the jump leads that you. Yes. Yeah.
And although it's environmental, like there are some things where you kind of go,
OK, this is a particularly tough period, maybe just watch out.
It's also not like it can be completely chemical.
So is it true that there are two types of depression?
There's sort of situation or where, yeah, you're depressed because this person died
or you've lost your money or your unwell or whatever.
And then there's chemical where on paper, your life looks great.
Nothing's happened. Exactly.
And I'm really interested in that chemical thing,
because being last days of pregnancy now,
I'm thinking a lot about genetics and what you pass on
and what you want for that baby.
What are you thinking?
It was funny before I got pregnant, I was always looking at people who were pregnant.
And I was like, are you doing the hot housing thing where you're playing
Beethoven and you're trying to make them a baby genius?
And everyone was like, no, we're not doing that.
And I was like, oh, weird.
And then you kind of go, oh, is she going to be amazing at this or that?
This is when other people are pregnant.
I get pregnant and I look down and I'm just like, I hope she's happy.
I just hope she's happy.
Like, that's it. Yeah. That's it.
Like, I hope that she is the happiest little girl
that just runs around with a big smile on her face and nothing's complicated.
And the idea that there will be in her
this complicated set of genetics that's come down from generations.
I think on both sides.
Oh, yeah.
And I I think I believe in the chemical explanation.
I think I do.

And I've read lots about it.
And this was also informed by sort of the
Johan Hari idea of the way in which the world in which we live
can make us depressed, which I think is very, very true.
And there's a lot to be said about that.
But it's not all of it.
It's not all of it.
And there is something weird about our family and like particular
ages that we seem to get to that it is freaky.
So it happens to I mean, there's four of you, four kids
and also your dad and your grandfather.
What ages have you noticed triggers?
So I believe my pop was hospitalised in his 20s for really severe sort of depression.
And that was a long time ago.
Like that was not something you talked about.
Must have been really bad.
Yeah. And then my dad around that time also had like probably
what would be described as a sort of breakdown.
There's a weird story in the book about a fly and not being able to decide
whether to kill this fly.
And that happened to dad.
It was like he had lost all efficacy or like self.
He didn't even know how to make a choice.
He didn't know how to make a choice anymore.
And then for me, it was early 20s.
My brothers, it was early 20s.
For Claire, early 20s, like something is happening there.
And then I think for women, and this is a kind of overriding theme as well,
there is something that's happening at the tail end of the 30s.
It's different, but it feels printed in your jeans.
And that's what I wanted.
I think you go into a novel with an overarching question.
And that's what I was trying to work out and untangle.
Have you had bouts of depression since you've been, I mean,
in a relationship since you've been with Luca?
Definitely, definitely.
How long had you been together when it happened for the first time?
Not very long, I don't think.
And it's weird because when you're in that phase,
it doesn't mean that you're incapable of making a joke.
It doesn't mean that you're incapable of having a night
where you really pull it off and you look like you're totally fine.
It's something else.
And it's who you are really when like your partner bears the brunt of it, I think.

And so I think Luca has come to recognise some of the signs of it.
And almost there was a period quite recently where he was in telephone contact with the psychologist and booking appointments.
And because he knows that I just get stuck and then the energy of doing any of those things is way too hard and he just did it all.
The difference that's made to have an advocate who notices and sees and acts and also comes from place of empathy because he knows what it's like to, you know, he's experienced anxiety.
And so he's not one of those people who has no idea what's going on, but he knows what's normal and what isn't.
And that's actually been, I think that I haven't been able to fall ads deeply into this pit with our relationship because he is so efficient.
And he's just like, I won't allow it.
Like I will pick it up when it's 10 percent bad, not when it's 90 percent bad.
Whereas I would let it get bad bad.
When it happened the first time and you're in the early stages of any relationship or any period in your life and and you go through a period of depression, how do you know that it's that?
Does it make you question everything?
Like, does it make you think, oh, I shouldn't be in that relationship, particularly the first time it happened?
Yeah, definitely.
You start thinking, oh, this job's wrong for me or this relationship's wrong for me. Or what's wrong?
It's like, OK, I need to blow it all up, which is it's funny even with the title.
Like a lot of people with depression immediately got it.
They were like, the title makes me feel sick and I'm like, yes, that's it.
It's like you're looking at your life.
Two things happen.
Either you look at it and you go something really bad's around the corner.
And this is my mind's way of trying to work out what it is and why I'm feeling so bad.
You become very, very superstitious because the feeling is so bad that you're going, you know what, there's probably going to be a natural disaster tomorrow.
And then that will make sense as to why I have felt this impending sense of doom.
And then finally, I'll understand.
And so you're looking around going, oh, someone's about to die really suddenly.
Or I'm not meant to be in this part of my life.
Yes.
So there's that or there's this other sense sometimes, which is that your life is made of glass and everything's going a little too well.
And you're like, if I just move at all, then something's going to fall off the shelf.
And that's almost more trapping.
I've realised how much I hate the sensation of things going well as much as you don't trust it.

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Because you're like, well, now something really bad's going to happen because it's superstition. It's just like this isn't how life works.

Bad things happen to me. Bad things happen.

And so when good things happen, you're just like you're daring me to believe it.

Up next, Jesse explains the lengths that she went to to write this book and how it affected her own mental health in really unexpected ways.

Something bad did happen to you a couple of years ago now when you broke your leg in a hiking accident and you were critically ill and was an ongoing, a long recovery.

You had to have surgery, emergency surgery.

There were complications.

That was objectively a terrible thing that did happen to you.

Did that push you into a period of depression?

I know you were very low around that time.

Yes. And it's funny in a way, because when I started writing the book, I had this, you know, creative idea where I went, as I'm writing it, when I get to the bit when, you know, I really want to fall deep into the depression and explain how it is.

I can't properly access that if I'm on medication.

So what I should do is go off my medication and then write, like, really raw, like, and I thought that was really smart.

Well, that suffers, yeah.

Exactly, exactly.

Bleeding from my heart.

And then I break my leg and I'm deeply traumatized by what happened.

And I was like, I don't think I need to go off anything.

I think this is great timing.

I think that I can write very authentically about how this feels.

So medication wouldn't cut it.

You were just, was it a whole other level?

No, it was a whole other level.

And I was on very low, like a very low dose at the time.

And when something is situational as well, I'm very conscious of like, let this pass, let this pass.

And even speaking to my psychologist about trauma and stuff, he was like, you're going to get flashes.

You're going to get these scary things that happen.

Really normal.

Let them happen.

And it's only when it's happening six months down the track that it's not.

It's your body processing it.

So I would, in that state, again, life incredibly depressing.

But all of these thoughts coming back and going, here we go.

You've lost momentum.

This is your lazy bad self.

These things happen to you because you're, there's like this badness.
I remember that day that it happened as well.
I was a bit irritable.
So it happened because I was being a very bad person that day and I deserved it.
And it played into these things of, oh, I'm weaker than everyone else.
And these things happened to me.
It was this victim mentality that got darker and darker and darker.
In that state, I was like, I'm just going to try and capture this.
This is the untouchable thing, maybe for a lot of people or they do feel it at particular times, but it is really ugly because it is so self-involved and the victim mentality is so ugly to everyone around you that you become like toxic.
And that's the thing.
No one wants to hang out with you because you're a terrible company.
Is that because you mean to yourself?
So then it just spills into how you work?
Because you see the world as through a couple of glasses.
And you're irritable.
Oh, I was just awful, awful company.
And you know it.
And that's the thing as well.
And something I wanted to look at was the experience.
We've got to be really careful because you don't want to make the person who's depressed feel worse.
But the experience of living with or trying to help someone who is depressed is its whole other experience that we don't talk about enough.
The sensation of wanting to yell in the face of someone who is walking around with their shoulders hunched going, it's a sunny day outside and they won't go outside and they won't eat.
Like I've been that person too who's just gone, do it for everyone else.
Like all of us have that pitying self.
But some of us are.
And then this is where the hypocrisy comes in, but working really hard at this.
And this is the dynamics of our family as well.
Like, okay, so I'm doing the medication and I'm doing the exercise and I'm doing the mindfulness and I'm doing all of these things.
Fuck.
And then my twin sister is like, no, I feel like shit.
And I'm like, no, no, no, no, stay away, stay away.
Like these are the thoughts I am trying to avoid.
And then I have a brother that, you know, comes up with something and then, you know, dad's feeling sorry for him and it's like, oh, can everyone stop being so fucking depressing.
But then when it's me, I can't get out of it.
Because I imagine when you're not in it, you really don't want to dwell on it at all.
No.
You don't want to be reminded of how easily you could slip back in.

No, it's like you're floating or you're like doggy paddling and you're like, guys, this is great, guys, everyone, a doggy paddle and everyone else is drowning and they're trying to like grab on to you, which is probably how my mom feels because she is not really experienced depression.

And so she's laying on her back in the ocean like, look at the sunshine and our whole family is like stuck in the waves drowning.

And she's like, this family is so depressing.

Like it's, I feel very, very bad.

You convey that all in the book so beautifully.

There were so many times where you would describe scenes and it gave me such an insight because I think if depression is a spectrum, I think most people have touched on times or periods of depression or even thoughts that I could really recognize.

Like there was not a moment when I thought, well, that's weird.

It's more just like all things that I've experienced as someone who doesn't have depression, but the volume turned up to 100.

And all of that was drawn so well and the characters around the people with depression and also the different ways that depression can manifest.

Another theme in the book that's really, really strong is class.

And that's something that I wanted to ask you about because the characters in the book are very much working class.

And one of them, Jake, has these experiences where he'll just brush up against wealth and people and life in a whole other class.

He's a tradie and so he'll go and be working on these amazing houses or he'll occasionally like meet someone in a bar who's living this very, very, very different life that he had never even imagined existed.

We joke a lot about when you first came to Mamma Mia that you'd never been in an office before and you were sort of like Dorothy in The Land of Oz and sort of wide-eyed and we joke about it, but there are aspects of that that are really true.

I mean, you hadn't actually ever been in an office before.

Yeah.

There's this quote that I always think about from The Hunchback of Notre Dame about how the one-eyed man is worse off something like that than the blind man because he knows what it is that's missing.

It's this idea that not seeing at all is sometimes better.

And this was my upbringing, right?

Like, because you go to your school and you see, you know, no one was going to Aspen in the school holidays and it was great.

And I had no sense of class for most of my teen years and I'm very, very grateful for that.

And then towards 11 and 12, it was when we started hanging out with different schools and there were comments and you would go to a house and you'd go, wait a minute.

And it is really confronting.

You have this sense of like feeling poor and there is this-

That you hadn't had before until you were put in these other environments.

Yeah.

And I hadn't seen that written about, especially in a Sydney context because Sydney, we don't like to believe we have a very clear class system and it is so clear and so stratified that I was going, this has an enormous impact on our social lives on who we date and also when it comes to things like mental health and access to certain services, it changes the outcome of a life.

And so I remember I was dating someone who went to a school that was a private school and he just couldn't believe where we lived and it was like, do they even have mobile phone reception here or it used to be a thing about lock the doors as we kind of entered our suburb and it sort of hurt.

But it was as then it got into like uni and I had this experience that I write about in the book where I went to Watson's Bay Hotel for the first time.

And just felt like vomiting.

Why? What did you see? What was you?

I went, I didn't need to see this. This isn't my world.

But it's just like I'm thinking about the Watson's Bay Hotel. It's like it's a pub near the harbour. I sort of grew up going there.

Yeah.

Paint it through your eyes. What did you see?

So that night I was working at a golf club like sort of out west that I worked out every Saturday and we thought it was really nice like because I did weddings and stuff and it is nice.

But I went, it was a guy that I was seeing and he invited me and a friend

and I didn't know what to wear. I didn't know what the Watson's Bay Hotel was.

And I got there and the way people dressed, the way they looked, the linen, it was like everyone knew how they were meant to dress and I was dressed completely wrong.

What were you wearing?

I was wearing shorts and a t-shirt or something.

The way they spoke, they all had fedoras on. The way they spoke to it, it was like I had gone to the fanciest country in the world. I'd gone to Monaco and had a glimpse of it and it's like you can't really afford to be here. You do not belong here. These are not your people. Go home.

Were you made to feel like that by them or that was just something that you'd internalised?

Probably both. Probably both. Like it was every marker there said you don't belong here.

There's a certain eastern suburbs blonde. There's a certain eastern suburbs style of sunglasses, like all of it. And I was reading all these signs going, wow, you are a fish out of water and you're a Westie and they can see that. Even the cars on the street, it was like this level of wealth, it just blew my mind. And then I had to drive back to work and do my shift at the golf club and I was kind of looking around like, oh, maybe my life is a little bit more depressing than I even realised.

And that was something you would go to an 18th or a 21st at someone's mansion and the way in which class begins to expose itself to young adults, I think it starts to happen in Sydney and it stuffs people's ambitions up. It really starts to get into your head and then you go, oh, hang on, what does success look like?

So it recalibrates what you think of because it's like, could this be possible? Should I be aspiring to living in these suburbs, driving these cars, wearing these clothes, being one of these

people? Yeah, you're kind of taught that if you work really hard, then you'll make it and you'll live in a nice house. Your sense of what a nice house is and that private schoolboy's sense of what a nice house is, is completely different. So you start going, well, do I have to live in my lane or can I wish to live a little bit over there or is that a little bit even embarrassing to admit? And in fact, I don't think that's ever accessible to me. That's quite confronting because you feel as though you can never quite be enough and you just wish you never knew that this other side of Sydney existed. It's just better when you think, we have the funny little things about walking into the video shop or whatever and mum being like, you can only get three weeklies because they're cheaper than a new release and no popcorn this week because we spent too much money and we laugh about that, but we were always so aware of every dollar and even that's privileged to be able to go to the video shop. But you know, speaking to other people about their childhood, it's like there's such freedom in not having to think about all of that. I think I also sensed that for my dad, money worries was what informed some of his depression as well. Like there was this enormous responsibility. So then I'm kind of going, well, is the key to not being depressed, just having more money? I remember when you look at first out of dating, you kind of would own that, like you would lean into it, you would sort of joke, oh, I'm only dating him because he'll pay off my hex debt. And like you guys would joke about it. Has it without wanting to probe? How have you navigated that? Because he has had a very different upbringing to you and now you in your own right are successful enough that you could, regardless of who you're married to, you could afford that life that you looked at at the Watson's Bay Hotel all of those years ago. That is your life now because of what you've earned and what you've done. The undoing of resenting anyone with money is a lifelong project, I think. And I think when you talk about privilege, I've been really challenged by that and even talking about having a little girl and the, you know, Luca would go, okay, so she'll go to this school. And I'm like, oh no, no, no, she can't go to that school because then she'll be, I don't like the idea of her going to the school where she's comparing herself to all of these people who live these ridiculous lives and she feels inadequate. That's a real thing for me. And then it's like, do you give your child everything you possibly can? Because my parents did, it's just what they had is not the same as what this family had or this family had. So that's been really interesting and difficult. Because it's reorienting yourself to what your identity is now. Because now you are, to be really blunt, you used to see yourself as a poor person. And I suspect you still do, but materially, you're not because of your career success. Is there a degree of feeling like a traitor to have moved classes? If that's even a thing? I mean, it sounds like talking about the case. No, no, no, absolutely that. There is a temptation to go, well, life is fair then because it worked out for, but it's not. It's not. Because you haven't worked any harder than your parents. No, I haven't worked any harder than anyone. And like I worked at this school in Western Sydney with kids who English was their second language and they had come from Sudan or Syria and some of them were refugees and their parents worked three times as hard as me in this part of Sydney where things are hard. And I look at them and the opportunities that have been afforded to me as opposed to them. And I feel uncomfortable even putting myself anywhere near that because I know that their lives, I don't want it to sound hopeless because I don't think it is, but this idea that everyone gets to go and that there's a fairness and this is an

arbitrary thing, but that we'll all end up at Watson Bay Hotel together is not. If you want it enough. If you want it enough, you too can have a \$22 drink at Watson Bay Hotel. That's just not how it operates. And I think about those kids a lot who even at school worked double as hard as I did because they could speak three or four languages and here I am speaking one. Then when they do start earning money, there is this often cultural practice of really sharing it within the family rather than putting it in a savings account or whatever. I look at that and I go, okay, so I know it's not fair, but I know that how it works is that some people are at the top and some people are at the bottom. And where do I sit with that? I feel sick about it. What's been the most surprising thing about having money? Freedom and this is something I suppose I've spoken to my parents about a little bit, but there is a correlation to happiness. There just is what you can afford in terms of, I remember being my early 20s, having hardly any money. And I was always working, but for not much an hour. When someone tells you you need to see a psychologist, you genuinely can't afford it. And then you can't afford the medication and then you can't afford the gym membership. And then you get slapped with something, you need to go see a dentist or something. You can't afford that. And it's all like this cumulative, not having to think about a mental health plan and going, okay, I can see my psychologist regularly as one of the greatest privileges someone can be afforded. And that to me has been a massive thing because we're not even equal on that. It's like, you can live 30, 40 minutes away in Sydney and your access to services is just completely different. That wasn't the end of our conversation because since she hadn't gone into labor yet, I wanted to keep Jessie in the studio to talk a little bit more about her pregnancy and how that affected her depression and how her depression affected her pregnancy because it's meant to be the happiest time in your life, right? Well, not for everyone, not so much. And in this extra episode for Mama Mia subscribers, Jessie talks about her experience with perinatal depression, which is obviously different to postnatal depression, which is what happens to some women after they have a baby. Perinatal or antenatal depression is the depression that hits some women while they're pregnant. And she wanted to talk about, I wanted her to talk about, how her mental health struggles followed her into pregnancy and whether that affected her ability to enjoy her pregnancy. I also wanted to know about how she was planning to cope after giving birth. Here's a little taste. And I had a psychologist say to me, you look for external validation everywhere. And what we find with women like you is that you're looking for external validation from a baby and you will not receive it. At no point will the baby look at you and go five stars. Yes, good work. Look at you. Performance review 10 out of 10. You can listen to that part of our conversation immediately right now via the link in the show notes. It only costs around the price of a coffee per month to become a Mama Mia subscriber. So please help support women's media and click that link and subscribe if you haven't already. Jessie's book, *Something Bad Is Going to Happen* is available now in all bookstores and a link will be in the show notes. This episode was produced by Cassie Merritt and Emeline Gazilles. The executive producer of *No Filter* is Eliza Ratliff with Sound Production by Madeline Juano. I'm Mia Friedman and thank you for having us in your ears. All Mama Mia subscribers, I don't know if you know this Mama Mia subscribers, but you get 10% off books at Booktopia. So if you're a subscriber, buy it from Booktopia. Also support independent bookstores everybody, but 10% off at Booktopia. We'll put a link in the show notes for you to go

and buy Jessie's book.