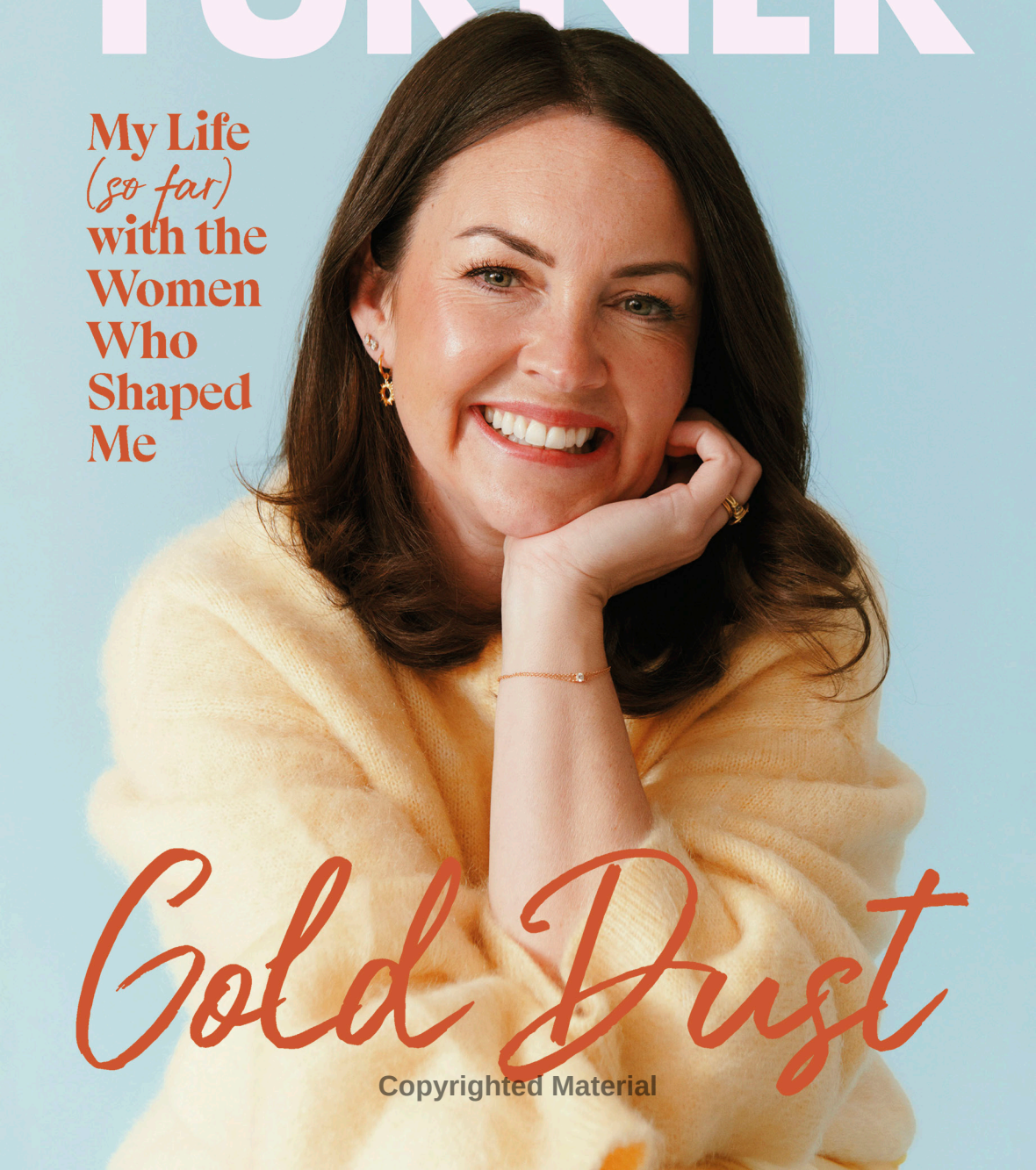
LACEY TURNER

My Life *(so far)* with the Women Who Shaped Me



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My Life (so far) with the Women Who Shaped Me

Lacey Turner



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One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

penguin.co.uk

Penguin
Random House
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First published 2026
001
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Set in 12.4/17 pt Calluna
Typeset by Six Red Marbles UK, Thetford, Norfolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-241-80985-3

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To my lovely family, thank you for making
anything & everything possible!

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Introduction

The power of a woman

I honestly never thought I'd be able to write a book. Even though I've been lucky enough to have had my share of magical experiences in life, I've certainly never considered myself to be anything special or out of the ordinary.

But when I started to think about it over the last year or so, it dawned on me just how many of those experiences were shaped by women. Defined by them. Even more than that, they happened *because* of them.

Whether it's the nuggets of wisdom given to me along the way, the love and support I've always been surrounded by or the immense courage, talent and kindness which have constantly inspired me, these wonderful women have played a huge part in getting me to where I am today and making me the person I am.

Without them, I'd be lost. They're as precious as gold dust – hence the title of this book – and a constant reminder of how special this world can be.

Don't get me wrong, I have some fantastic men in my life too and I love them dearly, but I've always been a real girls' girl and it's the women who have carried me.

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And the more I thought about that, the more I felt an urge to tell those stories, because so much of the work women do gets taken for granted and goes unnoticed.

Since taking some time away from *EastEnders* in 2025, I've been a stay-at-home mum to my three children – and my goodness, it's been relentless. There's always a bedroom to tidy, a load of washing to put on, a nativity costume to whip up out of thin air or a tired little person to comfort. And the amount of information our brains can hold is insane – mums are like walking, talking Rolodexes of who's got what on which day, who is doing the picking up, who's dropping off, what we need for the food shop, who has homework due, and oh, we're out of Pritt Stick again.

It's a wonder we don't combust.

The mental load and emotional labour women take on are invisible tolls, and yet without them, families, workplaces and communities would buckle. That tenacity, and the power of the female experience, is something *EastEnders* has consistently reflected – when the show was created by Julia Smith and Tony Holland back in 1985, its aim was to centre women and to highlight both their struggles and their strength. It is and always has been a female- focusedshow – each family with a remarkable woman at the helm – and I'm so proud to have been part of that storytelling for more than two decades as Stacey Slater.

I come from a long line of strong women myself, who all have similar traits to many of those Albert Square matriarchs, which is one of the reasons I think I've always felt right at home there. My gorgeous mum, my amazing sisters,

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my irrepressible nan – we naturally take the lead, and the men in the family have to follow or they get left behind!

I also happen to have worked alongside some absolute queens of showbiz during my time in Walford – Barbara Windsor, June Brown, Wendy Richard and Pam St Clement, to name just four – and have learned everything I know from the very best.

Then there are my daughters, Dusty and Gipsy, who have shown me so much about the person I am and who I hope to raise as fabulous and fearless young women themselves.

And my dance teachers, Gloria and Yvonne, who were there at the beginning when I first found the confidence to perform and discovered a passion I never knew I had.

So many women have opened these doors for me, like the best advent calendar *ever*, helping me to build a life making a living out of doing something I love.

I wanted to shout about how vital they have all been to me, and this book is a great big thank you to each of them because the world needs to know just how incredible they are.

But it's not only about the women in my life. When I began writing, I realized this could be something more – a celebration of women everywhere and a space to recognize the unsung female heroes who keep the world turning and the plates spinning.

Maybe these pages will get you thinking about the women in your own life. Perhaps this book will spark conversations about the ones you love and rely on most of all but who don't always get acknowledged.

More than anything, I'd like every woman who reads this

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book to walk away feeling appreciated and seen. I hope you recognize some of yourselves in my words and stories and take heart from that.

Oh, and in case no one else has told you today, take it from me: you're bloody amazing. Pure gold dust, worth more than you probably know.

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1

My mum

Bev

If I had to spend the rest of my life stuck in one room with only my mum for company, that would be absolutely fine by me.

'You two live in each other's pockets!' my sister Daisy always teases, with a roll of the eyes.

Trust me, if I could fit my mum in my pocket, that's exactly where she'd be.

There aren't enough words in the world to describe how much I love this woman; she is literally my favourite person ever to have graced the planet and, as far as I'm concerned, she can't do any wrong. I FaceTime her at least ten times a day (and often find myself left in the fruit bowl at her end) because I've always got questions to ask her and she knows the answer to pretty much everything.

Sometimes people mistake us for sisters, and I'm never quite sure if that means she looks young or I look old, but she's always cared for her skin as if her life depends on it and drilled that into me, too.

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When I was about ten, she took me to Tesco and bought me my first exfoliator, cleanser and moisturizer kit with a packet of cotton wool pads.

'You have to do that every morning and every night,' she said.

And I always have.

She was a model when she was younger and has always taken pride in her appearance – hair nicely blow-dried, nails neatly painted and makeup expertly applied. There's an old black-and-white photo of her stepping off an aeroplane, taken before I was born, and she looks just like a movie star. I love looking at that picture because it's a glimpse into the past, and a version of her that existed before me and my two sisters, Daisy and Lily, came along.

It also shows how put together she's always been, even when getting off a flight. When Mum gets dressed, she gets dressed 'properly', as my nan would say. You'll never catch her in a tracksuit unless she's cleaning the house (although she could wear a bin bag and still look lovely), and clothes are important to her. Her shoes are never scuffed, her blouses are always crisp and her skirts perfectly steamed.

She looks after her clothes because whatever she's bought, she's saved up for – they're investment pieces to her, and items that have been dry-cleaned stay in the protective plastic cover until they're worn again.

She still has a lot of her old outfits up in her loft, which is bursting at the seams because she rarely throws anything away. It's like Aladdin's cave up there. She has a gorgeous 1960s-style black dress with two pockets and three buttons

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which probably belongs in a museum it's so pristine and beautiful. I have a red leather pencil skirt that belonged to her – one she wore for her twenty- first birthday. It's tiny, a size 6 at the most, and has never fitted me (and nor will it!), but I can't get rid of it because, for me, it's a little piece of history.

Oh, and she always smells divine. She wears Amber by Laboratory, her signature scent. Daisy lives over in Dubai, and whenever Mum goes to visit her, I say, 'Come here and let me smell you!' before she leaves. She laughs and tells me I'm ridiculous, but I just want to breathe her in, knowing I'm not going to see her for a couple of months – two months of torture for me because I miss her so much.

She's funny without even meaning to be, like when she mispronounces words but doesn't realize. She can't say 'Charlotte Church' – it comes out as 'Churlotte Charch' and it has us in bits every time. When we were younger, if Daisy and I were arguing over something or other, Mum would come in to tell us off but get her words jumbled up, and we'd go from tearing each other's hair out to howling with laughter. Tempers cooled as quickly as they'd flared and then Mum would get the giggles too, which summed up our relationship. She was more like another sister than a mother, and growing up in such a female- led household shaped me in ways I only started to understand as an adult. That's what love looked like to me.

We've always been close, as thick as thieves from the day I was born at Edgware Hospital on 28 March 1988. Nanny Chick – Mum'smum – was there throughout the birth while my dad, Les, stayed on the other side of the door because he's

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a bit squeamish when it comes to things like that. He tried his best to be present when Daisy was born two years later, but it was hopeless. He fainted and ended up being removed from the room, which was probably best for everyone.

In those early years, there wasn't a lot of money and it was a struggle for my mum and dad to make ends meet. Dad owned a small cleaning business – that's how he'd met Mum, when she worked for him – and it would go on to become very successful, but back then times were tight.

Mum has told me that, when I was about six months old, she took me to the market where she spotted the most beautiful white baby dress with a lace collar. She couldn't afford it and it broke her heart to have to walk away, but rather than going home and feeling sorry for herself, she found another cleaning job in the evenings – and with her first pay packet, she went straight back to the market and bought the dress.

And that was how things were throughout my childhood. If money was in short supply but there was something Daisy or I (and, later, Lily) wanted to do – whether that was swimming, dancing, horse riding, gymnastics or drama – Mum would make it happen even if that meant taking on another job to pay for it. When I look back, it's mind-boggling how she managed it, because there couldn't have been enough hours in the day for her to work as much as she did and yet still be so present for us as kids.

Her main job was at the Santander bank in Borehamwood, Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m., but she'd often squeeze in a cleaning shift before starting there in the morning and then a couple more in the evening. Daisy and I

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would regularly come home from school, have our dinner – always a hearty homemade meal like lamb chops, mash and broccoli –then we'd get bathed and put on our pyjamas, slippers and dressing gowns. With our freshly washed hair slicked back into buns, we'd pile into the car and Mum would drive to the office block she was cleaning that night, and the two of us would amuse ourselves with the photocopier while she emptied the bins and swung the Hoover round, before heading home for bed.

My dad was working long hours building up the business, leaving the house at 6 a.m. and not coming back until we were fast asleep, so we only really saw him on the weekends. It was Nanny Chick who picked up the childcare when Mum was working and couldn't take us with her.

Both our parents grafted to give us the best they possibly could, but Mum in particular was determined to send us to private school and she moved heaven and earth to make that a reality. My dad, on the other hand, didn't believe in private education –if you wanted to learn, he said, you'd apply yourself regardless of where you went, and the three of us girls kind of proved his point because I was the only one who came out with a GCSE to my name.

But it mattered to my mum. It wasn't just about the standard of education; she wanted us to have a nice life with good friends and all the things she'd never had as a girl growing up in Islington, North London, with three brothers and my nan who was scrimping and saving to make ends meet.

I think Mum was probably told 'no' a lot as a kid, and wanted to give her children the opposite of that. When

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she got us into that private school, she'd park her rusty old banger at the bottom of the hill when she dropped us off so we wouldn't be embarrassed in front of our more well- to-do friends. My God, we were late for that school every single day because Daisy was such a pain in the arse about getting out of bed. Mum would be French-plaiting our hair in the car, her knees on the steering wheel, while testing us on our times tables and spellings at the same time.

That woman can multitask like no one else.

Thanks to her we all knew our times tables backwards, sideways and upside down, and she'd make up little songs for our spellings which I still remember (and use!) even now.

But none of us had any idea of the sacrifices she made to give us that lovely life because she absorbed every bit of pressure herself, never letting us see the struggle or feel the weight of it.

At the age of seven, I ran away from home. I packed my fake Louis Vuitton vanity case and stormed out the front door to sit at the end of the road by the hump I wasn't allowed to go past.

'You coming in?' called Mum.

'No!' I replied. 'I'm never coming back!'

'Well, I suppose I'll just have to get Mr Thomas to come and collect you . . .'

Mr Thomas was an entirely fictional man who was always just a phone call away whenever we were naughty.

As soon as she said 'Mr Thomas', that was it.

'No!' I shouted. 'Don't call him, I'm coming back!'

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For some reason, 'Mr Thomas' became 'Ugly Betty' for my youngest sister Lily – there's a thirteen-year gap between us and Mum would often rope me into the ruse.

'I'm going to call Ugly Betty . . .' she'd tell Lily if she was misbehaving. Then she'd quickly send me out of the house with my mobile, and she'd call my phone and I'd have to play along.

I do something similar with my kids now. On the way to the soft play there's a derelict block of flats, and I tell them it's the naughty home when they're playing up. 'Do you want me to drop you there?' I ask them, and it works every time. Or at least it did.

I had my friend in the car when I said it recently and she added, 'Oh yeah, I've been there and they make you eat poo!' I mean . . . talk about ruining my story. It was fairly believable to the kids (and effective too) until she added the needless extra detail.

The threat of the imaginary Mr Thomas was as severe as Mum's style of parenting ever got. From what I've been told, my nan was pretty strict with her, and Mum never wanted to be as rigid or controlling, so she gave us a lot of freedom and flexibility to do what we wanted. As long as she knew about it and where we were, it was generally OK.

When Dad told us we were grounded, Mum would look at us and secretly shake her head so we knew we weren't. But it meant that no one in the house really listened to my dad, and he must have found it frustrating when he was trying to put boundaries in place only to be constantly overruled. If I was wearing something he thought was too revealing and he gave it the old 'You're not going out dressed in that!', Mum would

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pull me to one side and whisper, 'Just pull a tracksuit over the top and ditch it once you leave the house.'

When I was fifteen and started seeing Matt (the man I'd later marry), Dad would bar him from the house, but Mum would tell him to wait in the alley and come back again once my dad had left. She was less about setting rules and more open to seeing things from our point of view, so we had very few of the hormonally charged arguments that are common between girls and their mums. There was the occasional slammed door and the odd raised voice, but things always calmed down again quickly and she only grounded me once, when I answered her back.

I didn't do it again.

She was much softer than Dad, but she was always fair and us girls could tell her anything. Sometimes I think my youngest sister Lily tells her a bit *too* much information – stuff she doesn't *really* need to know – but Mum is an open book, so we never felt any embarrassment about squirmy subjects like puberty or periods.

When I started mine at thirteen, she was out at the races at Ascot, so I found the little emergency bag she'd put together for me containing towels and tampons – she'd already told me everything I needed to do in case I was on my own when it happened, so I was well prepared.

As soon as she got home, I told her I'd started and I remember her showing me how to put a tampon in without batting an eyelid. That's how I'll be with my daughters; I want them to feel able to come to me about anything at all, without any awkwardness or judgement.

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And I hope to be as good a listener as my mum. Matt and I have been together since our teens, but like most young couples we had our on and off periods in that time. Whenever we had a row, the framed photo I had of us on my bedside table would be face down. Mum would come into the room, clock the downturned photo and go, 'Oh dear . . . come on, what's happened?'

She never really gave advice, sometimes it was just a little 'what can you do?' shrug of the shoulders, but it was enough that she was there. She was always there.

But never in an overbearing way. She isn't the type to poke her nose in or dictate what I should or shouldn't do. When I was young she somehow struck the perfect balance between wrapping me up in a sense of security and also stepping back and letting me get on with it. She gave me the space to learn and grow and figure things out for myself.

I stand on my two feet now because she taught me how.

When I was two and a half, we moved from our little two-up two-down on Danziger Way in Borehamwood to a bigger house five minutes away. Tilehouse Close was a small cul-de-sac just a stone's throw from the *EastEnders* set, and our family home literally backed onto Albert Square. You could hear the director calling 'action' and 'cut' and I'd see the glow of the overhead lights during the night shoots, a novelty that never wore off.

Being so close to the buzz of activity always gave me tingles, but I couldn't ever have imagined that one day I'd be there, right in the heart of that excitement myself.

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Everyone in my family watched *EastEnders* religiously, over and above every other soap, long before I started as Stacey Slater in 2004. I've never seen a single episode of *Coronation Street* or *Emmerdale* – I didn't even watch *Hollyoaks* when Daisy appeared in it back in 2011. But *EastEnders* was appointment viewing in our household, and we'd all sit down together for every episode, glued to the screen, dissecting it straight after.

Telly viewing back then wasn't like it is today. Streaming means everyone watches their programmes at different times and I think we've all lost something there – that communal experience which was so key to family life. My nan still treats TV the old- fashioned way. She'll say, 'Oh, I need to be home for 6.30 p.m. because *Strictly*'s on,' and I tell her she can record it or catch up on iPlayer but she says it's not the same.

I tend to agree with her.

Weekends as a kid were always for family, and we never deviated much from the same cosy, familiar routine. After my dance class on Saturday morning, Mum would drag me and Daisy to Chapel Street Market in Islington, where we'd have a rummage around the clothes stalls and then go for pie and mash at Manze' s – a North London institution for more than 100 years until it closed down in 2019.

We were each allowed to put a line on the Lottery at the newsagent's, and then we'd head to my nan's to join the rest of the family – the uncles, aunties and cousins – for what remained of the afternoon. Saturday nights were spent in front of the telly watching *Gladiators*, *Noel's House Party* and *Blind Date*, which me and Daisy would play along with, sitting

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with our backs to the TV, picking which 'date' we wanted and only turning around at the end to see who we'd chosen.

Every Sunday, Dad would cook a roast dinner, and while the meat was in the oven I'd help him with odd jobs around the house to the sound of Celine Dion, Dina Carroll and Whitney Houston blasting from his record player. In the evening, bellies full from dinner, we'd all settle down in front of the telly again with cheese and crackers before bed.

Mum put so much effort into making our house absolutely beautiful. The lounge had a bottle-green leather sofa and pink walls with mouldings that were filled with a dark pink patterned fabric. At the time I thought that was such a weird design, and whenever I had friends round I'd almost apologize for it: 'Yeah, so my mum has fabric on the walls . . .'

But now I realize how stylish it looked. She's always liked a tastefully decorated house.

We had a posh dining room that was never used, and a kitchen next to it with wooden units, a green blind at the window, a little breakfast table at the back, a tiny wall-mounted telly in the corner and patio doors that opened onto the garden. Attached to the side of the house was a double garage, half of which my dad converted into a playroom.

Upstairs, all the bedrooms had elaborate floral curtains with pelmets, but they were just for show. None of the curtains actually shut – we had blinds behind theminstead – making them the very definition of window dressing, but it all looked so perfect, just how Mum liked it.

The soft furnishings were handmade by a local lady called Jacqui, and the curtains, cushions and throws in the bedrooms

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