

WRITERS' STUDIO: *EASTENDERS*

This document contains a choice of THREE story options.

Please select ONE option and write NO MORE than FIVE SCENES and FIFTEEN PAGES.

All submissions are being read anonymously, so please DO NOT put your name on the title page of the script.

Each option is a compressed A-strand story.

Please note these are entirely fictional stories created for this initiative, with no bearing on future episodes.

OPTION A (STACEY): Stacey is terrified to learn that Jean has a dark secret. But how far will she go to protect her mum?

Background info: Stacey endured her stalking hell with Theo (after posting pictures/videos/chats on 'SecretCam' due to the family's financial worries) and has also recently become a new grandmother, with Lily having Charli. Jean and the rest of the family supported Stacey over the last year.

In No.31, a harried STACEY gets ready for work as HARVEY, JEAN, and LILY (with CHARLI) bustle around her. Stacey is given pause for thought when she realises that Jean and Harvey are frosty with one another, and pushes them to reveal what's going on. Jean expertly covers before shoving Lily and Charli out the door. Alone, Stacey turns to Harvey and firmly demands he tell her the truth; she's got enough on her plate without having to worry about her mum as well. A reluctant Harvey eventually opens up that he thinks Jean has been shoplifting. Stacey baulks but almost laughs it off, until Harvey pulls out a load of expensive goods, insisting that Jean has been hiding things from him for weeks, and she keeps showering him with presents; she's denied everything but he knows there's more going on than meets the eye. The pair worry for Jean – last time she acted like this she'd had another cancer scare, and the potential of another bipolar episode hangs over them too. A worried Stacey urges Harvey not to go in heavy-handed – if something's up with Jean, then she knows her better than anyone and needs to handle it in the right way... but will Stacey be able to solve this herself?

On the bap van, EVE intuits there's something wrong with Stacey and presses her to open up. Stacey shares her worries over what she discovered this morning. Jean, on her way back from a cleaning job, interrupts the conversation, leaving Stacey to quickly cover. As Jean heads off (confident that Stacey is none the wiser), Eve is firm in telling Stacey that she needs to put a pin in this before it gets any further. Stacey privately dreads this – how can she confront her mum?

Later in no.31 Stacey manages to dispatch LILY and an uneasy HARVEY, leaving her and Jean to talk. Stacey skirts around the issue with Jean seemingly breezy, until Stacey broaches the issue at hand; she knows Jean is suddenly shoplifting. Ashen-faced, Jean tries to cover, realising Harvey has aired his suspicions. As a worried Stacey pussyfoots round the issue and tries to check on Jean's wellbeing, Jean strongly refutes that there's anything wrong, before eventually being pushed to admit it wasn't shoplifting – it was credit card fraud. Stacey rails at Jean's carelessness – this is even worse! Haven't they got enough to worry about? Jean sinks with guilt, admitting that this was a means of control when she's just watched her family almost implode after everything with Lily's pregnancy, Theo, and their dire financial situation. Stacey softens, but there's a bang at the door and HARVEY lets in two POLICE OFFICERS; they're here to arrest Jean Slater. A horrified Stacey looks to her mum, and seeing her palpable fear, turns to the officers – they've got the wrong woman. It was her – she's the one they need to take. With a loaded look to her stunned mum, Stacey doubles down and lets herself be led away – determined to protect her mum no matter what! **(C/H)**

OPTION B (LINDA): A struggling LINDA finds herself at loggerheads with ELAINE and is tempted to start drinking again. GEORGE gives Linda the boost she needs, but has he thrown more temptation her way?

Background info: Linda is still grieving for Mick and further anguish was thrown her way when Dean returned to the square. Linda was surprised when Elaine moved in, bringing along George and his family. Linda has been sober for some time.

In The Queen Vic Upstairs, LINDA reels when ELAINE reminds her she's forgotten Ollie's school trip this morning. As a gently chiding Elaine (who has a busy day of wedding planning) rallies GINA to help out and get him there in time before the bus leaves, Linda enters into a petty argument with her mum, feeling that Elaine is prioritising herself over running the pub and helping out with the kids (as she initially planned when she moved in). When a kind GEORGE tries to defend Linda, it only sets Linda and Elaine apart further, with Elaine appearing to have little sympathy for her daughter. George privately clocks that Linda's struggles lie deeper than just everyday work and parenting woes, as a stewing Linda eyes a bottle of brandy on the counter... Linda is aching with temptation, but how can she assuage her inner turmoil?

Later in The Queen Vic, Linda finds herself getting snappy when a small misunderstanding arises with ONE OF OUR REGULARS. George firmly handles the situation. Linda is defensive with George, who sympathises that she has a lot on her plate, especially now Dean is back, and that it's nearing the anniversary of Mick's death. A hesitant Linda eventually admits that the last year has been hellish; she's struggling. Linda has to be strong for Ollie and Annie, but she's an island; Elaine moved in and became her partner 'to help' but it's difficult and she is making her feel like a failure on top of everything. Linda is pleased for Elaine's happiness but everyone's lives are moving on whilst she's still stuck in a rut, being forced to face her demons every day. George vows to speak with Elaine and suggests Linda take the rest of the day off... A grateful Linda concedes, but we sense her troubles still run deep.

Linda sits in her bed, stewing over a picture of Mick and the kids. When her call to Sharon rings out, Linda finds herself feeling lonelier than ever. She's interrupted by George, who brightly reports that Elaine is back after a day of wedding lingerie shopping, and he's had some stern words – Elaine's offered to bath and put the kids to bed tonight so Linda can chill out. Linda's gratitude is palpable but she ends up breaking down; her mum has never understood what she's going through and even she and Sharon feel poles apart right now. Linda has nobody. As a kind George tries to bolster Linda, she opens up and reveals a bottle of wine under the duvet – she knows it's a bad idea but she's desperate to make this anguish go away even if for a few hours. Stoically handing the bottle to George, Linda thanks him for being the one person who has made her feel seen lately. George, enveloping her in a warm hug, assures her he doesn't judge her – even with everything she's gone through, he knows what an amazing mum, daughter, and step-daughter she is; his life in Walford hasn't always been sunshine and rainbows but Linda's the person that's brought this mad house together and she should give herself some more credit. Emotional, Linda drinks in his words and allows herself to be held for a moment. But misreading, she leans in, tenderly trying to kiss George. He pulls away shocked, leaving a jolted Linda now coming to her senses – what has she done, and how is she going to live with herself after this? **(C/H)**

OPTION C (SUKI): Suki fears she might be pregnant with Nish's baby – but how will she break the news to Eve?

Background info: SUKI and EVE are having an affair, though Suki is still at no.41 with an oblivious husband NISH and living a double life. VINNY is accepting of his mum's sexuality and aware of her private turmoil, but also knows the danger she'd face if she tries to leave Nish. After PRIYA made it on the scene as Nugget's mum, she is living at no.41 and has a difficult relationship with Suki.

In no.41, SUKI privately struggles when an upbeat NISH tries to plan a romantic weekend away sometime soon. As Nish senses her reticence and stress, Suki tries to cover RE her and PRIYA being at loggerheads over the messy house and Priya's constant shirking of work. VINNY clocks his mum's troubled mood, and garners she's even more brittle than usual. When the men have left, a goading Priya makes thoughtless digs about it being Suki's 'time of the month', before gleefully backtracking that actually, it's more like 'the change' at her age. But as Priya waltzes out of the door, we're on a shaken Suki – have Priya's words given her a worrying idea?

In the Minute Mart, a tense Suki sends Priya off for an early lunch, eyeing pregnancy tests on the shelf. But she's interrupted by an arriving Vinny, concerned at what he witnessed this morning – he can see she's about to break at living her double life. Vinny tries to get his mum to open up and reels when she eventually admits she thinks she could be pregnant...with Nish's child. Suki, terrified at the prospect, confides she cannot imagine any of the outcomes to the potential situation. Vinny can't help but try to implore her to consider that keeping the baby is an option; but a resolute and pained Suki is certain that if the hypothetical is true, neither Eve or Nish can ever know...

In no.41, a poker-faced Suki tries to dispatch of Nish, who gently chides her mood swings but is still keen to whisk her away so they can have some proper time together – he even suggests a whole family holiday with Ravi, Priya, and the kids. When he leaves for a meeting, Suki lets in arriving EVE who is pleased to see her, but attuned to the danger that such a meeting could illicit. Eve worries about Nish's ongoing control of Suki, and vows that they'll break free eventually. But Suki eventually relents and admits (having taken the test in private) that she's pregnant with Nish's child. A flabbergasted Eve cannot comprehend the situation, but is brilliantly stoic in assuring Suki that they can deal with this together, however she needs to (i.e. running away and bringing the child up together, or Suki terminating/giving up for adoption). But Eve is dealt a curveball when Suki – desperately wanting to live the dream with Eve but also pained to think of how she's let her other children down – resolutely says that she's made her decision. She loves Eve, but has to put this baby first, and give it the upbringing her other kids should have had; she cannot risk the danger it would bring by having Eve still in the picture. Both women are crushed with this heartbreak – but has Suki made the right decision? **(C/H)**