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## Winning Entries

### 2021 BLINKPOT AWARD WINNER:

Philip Rybeck, 'Winter Window (A Skylight's Secret History of Human Isolation)'

A WORD FROM THE JUDGES. As a group, we were adamant that the winner of the first Blinkpot Award must have evidenced a solid story, and this submission really ticked that particular box: somehow managing to give us four stories for the price of one! The writing is quite lyrical on occasion, borderline poetic almost, but is impressive in how it manages to cram such an epic, swathing tale into a mere 100 words. Something that is normally (and very sensibly) advised against in microfiction, but which works brilliantly here. And which provides a fantastic springboard for future competitions.

### Winter Window (A Skylight's Secret History of Human Isolation)

I collect clues like others collect stamps.

Thumbprints in pink cement; fine corner-pane fractures; fading spatters on 70's blinds. Intimations that feed starved muse with myriad 'maybe' yesterdays. And conjuring images of...

*...cloth-capped Victorians, rushing final touches with calloused, bone-frozen hands.*

*...wartime tears, violently resentful of Jack-Frosted glass where long-gone children's names once were scratched.*

*...a young mother, playing seasonal games and spilling her thimble of sherry as she hides/escapes.*

By blaze of winter monochrome, I assemble this impossible jigsaw. Imagination in overdrive, while my own scars of quarantine soak unseen into tapestries of shared experience.

Another chapter beginning.

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**2021 BLINKPOT AWARD 2nd PLACE:**

Noor Us Sabah Tauqeer Ahsan, 'If Jane Austen Was Pakistani'

A WORD FROM THE JUDGES: We really, really enjoyed this piece. It's so much fun, and so clever, but tells a great story. The story of a relationship between daughter and mother, within a very specific, shared culture. We particularly like the way this relationship was explored in an intra-cultural fashion, as opposed to presenting mere observation: taking great delight in its comforts and exasperations both. The piece was also helped to second place by the fact it managed to put a goofy smile on every single one of our faces! Enjoy.

**If Jane Austen Was Pakistani**

If Jane Austen was Pakistani, she would've been Jahanaran Aslam and penned this: *it is a fact universally acknowledged that a single woman in possession of a beating heart must be in want of a man.*

My mother's sole solution to my pleas has always been: "Get married."

Mama, I want to go on a world tour. "Get married", she said. "A honeymoon-cum-tour is the idea."

I want to do a PhD from America. "Get married", she said. "Living in America with a husband is acceptable."

I want a dog. "Get married", she said. That one took me a minute.

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**2021 BLINKPOT AWARD 3rd PLACE:**

Michelle Christophorou, 'Remembering Edinburgh Festival, 1996'

A WORD FROM THE JUDGES: This is one of those stories that you come away from kind of coo-ing, almost as if it were your own memory rather than someone else's. And that, quite simply, is the story it tells. A single memory of an occasion that made a singular impression on the teller, punctuating what was clearly a pretty rough time with a single moment of relief. Perhaps even pleasure. And as the reader, you find yourself right there. Drawn into its joyful melancholy. Yet, you infer so much by what isn't said. There's a lot more to this tale than first meets the eye!

**Remembering Edinburgh Festival, 1996**

An early night for me, to mourn the latest break-up. The hordes who kip in this Stockbridge townhouse, owned by a friend-of-a-friend's mother (the one with frostbitten

toes, but that's another story), off to Lee & Herring or the Kamikaze Freak Show. And I wake to you – vaguely familiar from the telly – playing guitar, seriously badly, on the end of the bed. I laugh at your minor-presenter charm, and we sing Joni Mitchell for what seems like hours, until our fellow squatters pile into the room with eyebrows raised.

That's it. All there is.

The one untainted memory I own.

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**2021 BLINKPOT SPECIAL COMMENDATION:**  
Georgia Cook, 'Pond Life'

**THREE WORDS FROM THE JUDGES:** warming, engaging, thought-provoking.

### **Pond Life**

Every winter, like clockwork, my grandmother's pond would freeze, leaving a thick stopper of ice.

"What happens to the fish?" I asked once. There were goldfish in the pond.

"They're down there," she said. "Under the surface, sleeping. See?" and she pointed to a smudge of orange, deep below the ice.

Every morning my grandmother boiled the kettle, took it down to the pond, and poured it over the ice. I watched the steam rise, watched the hole it made, jagged and black, watched the little orange smears dart back to life.

Revived by water, frozen by water.

Like clockwork.

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**2021 BLINKPOT SPECIAL COMMENDATION:**  
Kathryn Aldridge-Morris, 'Modern Problems Require Modern Solutions'

**THREE WORDS FROM THE JUDGES:** sassy; joyous; empowering.

### **Modern Problems Require Modern Solutions**

She corners me at the anti-aging counter. Briella. Asks me what I want my mascara to

do for me.

What do I want my mascara to do for me?

Put a restraining order on Tony. Pay off my rent arrears. Help me find a job. Just give me something to fucking smile about.

She's waiting for an answer. Therein will lie the key to my transformation. I reply, 'To destroy the worm-like mites feeding on the oils and debris along my lash line. Stop them breeding at night, then crawling back inside my lash follicles. You got anything for that?'

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## 2021 BLINKPOT SPECIAL COMMENDATION:

Kathy Hoyle, 'My Devil'

THREE WORDS FROM THE JUDGES: stimulating; well-crafted; absorbing.

### My Devil

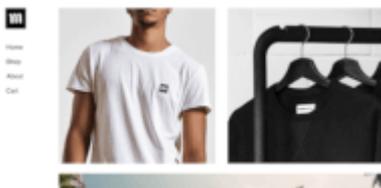
My Devil is charming and molten-eyed. His hair curls at the base of his neck. It feels fur-soft in my fingers. His delicate words hush mine into silence.

My Devil is gentle when he dismantles my heart. I watch him write out the terms of my free-will on parchment, then burns it in a pyre while he hums a lullaby. I do not try to quell the flames.

Later, when he flays me, I bask in the attention.

My Devil casts me into purgatory.  
An echo of voices chant, why didn't you leave?

The question burns like hellfire.



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