BAW Podcast - Lizzie Damilola Blackburn

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**SPEAKERS**

Nelima Begum, Lizzie Damilola Blackburn

**Nelima Begum**

Welcome to the Being A Writer podcast Lizzie, how are you doing?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

I'm doing well, thank you. How are you?

**Nelima Begum**

Very well, thanks. We're really excited to have you on here. Obviously, season three of this podcast has kicked off by this point. So yeah, just really exciting stuff. And you've got exciting things of your own because your UK publication date is just a couple of days away. And so there's lots to be gearing up for, how are you feeling?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, I'm really, really excited. It's been a long time coming. And I just can't wait for yeah, for readers to get to know Yinka.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, me too. I'm really excited for everyone to read it because I loved it. And I'm really excited to speak to you today about your writing journey and more specifically A Debutante's Survival Guide. So let's just jump straight in and start from the beginning. When and where did your writing journey begin?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, so like most writers, I loved writing as a kid. I remember I used to write stories at home on my old computer, and it would take my parents ages to kind of like drag me away from it. But then I kind of stopped writing when I became like, I think when I turned 18, so from 18 Right up until like the early 20s because the Internet came around and you know, I got distracted by that. But then it took a heartbreak for me to go back into writing again. And so yeah, so I'm not too sure whether you're familiar with Wattpad.

**Nelima Begum**

Yes, yeah. It's like the OG writing community from online. (Both laugh)

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah exactly! So I started writing stories on there, like my emotions of my heartbreak. And then when I started doing that, I was like, oh, wow, I actually, like, enjoy writing. Like I kind of missed this and that's how I kind of got back into it. And then later, on, I set up this blog called Christian Dating Dilemmas, which kind of has like short stories of different Christians going through some sort of like, love crisis or love dilemma. And Yinka was on there. So that's how that's how her story began.

**Nelima Begum**

Incredible. I love that it, it started off as this great outlet for you to just hear how you were feeling. Yeah. Great. And it actually brings me on really nicely to the next question. Your debut novel Yinka initially began as a short story. So what inspired you to turn it into a novel because that's quite a big leap.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

So I decided to turn it into a novel when I met this amazing author called Jackie Lay at this blogging workshop I attended. And, you know, like all writers do, at some point, I wanted to get feedback on my writing. So I shared my blog with her. And in addition to her giving me some really helpful feedback, she said, 'You know what, I really love this Yinka character. I think she turned her story into a novel'. And so I did, but I kind of jumped into it blindly, because I had no idea the magnitude of a novel and what it entailed to write one. And so I think the first year and a half, I was basically just like starting and restarting and just winging it, really. And it wasn't until I made a decision to invest in myself as a writer that, that's when I start to see a change not just in my writing but in Yinka's story. And that's how things evolved from there.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. So you say that you made a conscious decision to invest in yourself as a writer. What did that entail? So what was I mean, what were your first steps after making that decision?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, so I think the lightbulb moment came for me when I read Story Engineering by Larry Brooks. And it's a brilliant book that I recommend to all writers. It basically breaks down like what storytelling is and how it's a craft. And, you know, to write a compelling story you need to have you know, interesting characters and conflict and stakes and motivations and structure, all the things I didn't have my draft. So for me, that was, you know, a huge resource for me, but also, I attended like workshops. There was a writing workshop hosted by Spread The Word. I also did an online creative writing course hosted by FutureLearn, I signed up to newsletters such as The Literary Consultancy, so The Literary Consultancy and Jericho, and Jared Jenkins like anything and everything I could grab my hands on, like, I just kind of did it. And I think a newsletter was great because it's a way to get like daily tips on writing without having to search for it on the internet. We don't have time so that was really helpful.

**Nelima Begum**

That's great. This podcast is really just going to be the plug for a whole bank of writing resources now. With regards to the feedback, I mean, when did you feel like you were ready for someone to see your work because that's also quite a big step, especially for a debut author or first time writer if this is like very new for them. When do you think you felt ready for someone else to kind of offer their opinion and their expertise?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, I guess everyone is different. But for me, I think I kind of reached out points where I wanted to get like, just a second opinion on my writing because, you know, I can think that my writing is perfect or is terrible. But actually, I won't know like, the areas where I'm doing quite well on and areas that could like need improvement if I don't get that extra feedback, especially from someone who has been doing it for quite a long time. So I think when I shared my feedback with, when I shared my blog with Jackie, I didn't know what to expect. So I was quite open. And I think that's kind of like the right attitude to have so that you know, we don't feel disheartened. You know, with the feedback, especially if you need to kind of work on some areas that you didn't think that needed to be worked on.

**Nelima Begum**

So to keep an eye keep an open mind and just go into it just... open mind open heart. Be ready to accept anything really.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Exactly. Yeah.

**Nelima Begum**

It's quite a big deal to expose your work to someone for the first time and there is an element of vulnerability and doing that. Is there anything that you kind of used to tell yourself or do to get yourself through those moments where you were sharing your work?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah. I just reminded myself that the goal like ok, why am I sharing my work? I'm sharing my work because I want to improve. And so even if the feedback might be hard to swallow, it kind of fits into the main goal, like okay, they only saying this because they want to see me improve as a writer and see the story improve. It's not personal. So I try to tie it back to the main goal of why I decided to share in the first place, it wasn't just to receive like glowing feedback and just to hear, you know, how great of a writer I am. It was more so to get, you know, more improvement and feedback on to improve my writing.

**Nelima Begum**

Right? So all of it feeds into like the long term goal that you've got.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Exactly. Yeah.

**Nelima Begum**

Great, brilliant advice. So I want to move kind of towards your book now because obviously I loved it. I haven't stopped raving about it since I read it! Yinka is so vibrant and funny as a novel overall, but there are some really key themes that run throughout regarding things like self esteem, mental health, relationships, culture, family, faith, and more. How did you strike a balance because you've got all these really big topics but at the same time, you manage to keep it so light touch in certain areas with like a brilliant sense of humour as well.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, thank you. Um, I remember when I first started writing Yinka, like I knew I wanted it to be like a fun uplifting book. And I think my writing style and voice is naturally like witty and sarky. Anyway, by the same time I wanted it to be a story with depth and I wanted to touch on serious issues from colourism to religion, to mental health. So I did kind of have to strike a balance and I have to really give a shout out to my to my agent and to my editors, because they kind of really helped me with that. And also just kind of reading books by you know, authors who have who have had the same approach. So for example, Beth O'Leary, she has that kind of witty, kind of fun, you know, writing voice by the same time she does touch on like serious issues, as well. So reading her books definitely did help me too.

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic. Is there anything that you kept turning to like, any resources or anything that you used throughout the process of writing the novel? That kind of helps you hone it in and refine things a bit more?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

And it was mostly just reading like similar authors with similar kind of like, writing voice to mine. So Sophie Kinsella and Linda Kemp and Beth O'Leary, who I mentioned and also audiobooks as well really helps because it helps me kind of like, listen out, you know, listen to the rhythm of the sentence. And also, when it comes to comedy as well. You really have to make sure that your sentences are quite tight so that the punch line, you know, kicks in so I think listening to the sentences really just really did help me when I was writing Yinka.

**Nelima Begum**

That's really interesting, because Yinka and her circle, they feel very real. And it's as if they were built and people you already knew and conversations you'd heard. So it's brilliant that you've kind of introduced us that to that audio element of it all in your writing journey. How much of the story was second nature to you?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, so like, I did draw on things that I was familiar with, because I think all first time writers and all writers actually kind of draw on what's familiar because it's what you know, and it kind of saves you from having to do like intense research and research is the part that actually really like say, yes, so like, Yinka's Christian, I'm also a Christian, and the story is based in Peckham, you know, I grew up in Peckham for the first 13 years of my life, so I'm doing quite well. But at the same time, you know, Yinka I've been writing a story for like five years, so I got to know her over time and a story kind of evolved. And at times, he kind of went ahead and I had to catch up with her. So you know, it's not such a great cook, but you know, but I am and, you know, she goes and makes this plan to find a man, like physical plan, and I've never done that before.

**Nelima Begum**

Thankfully, after that, that was one of my favorite parts that she's got this really thorough, like, five step plan almost and there's contingencies for everything. She's so thorough. So mentioned that research was your least favorite part, but when you had to carry it out, what were you doing?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, so there were some areas that I couldn't avoid not doing research. So for example, the therapy, like chapters, the therapy scenes, I did actually speak to like a real therapist. And when I spoke to her, I kind of presented like, Yinka's story and like the issues she was going through. And it was kind of like a mock therapy session, and she knew I was writing a novel so that was really helpful because she was able to give me like, credible advice, but also potential activities, exercises that she was kind of going through in the sessions and questions as well that she would ask to kind of like, challenge her thinking, and also include words from investment banking and before I became a writer, full time I was with for charity. So I knew nothing about the private sector investment banking, and but luckily my husband's brother, he worked at the time for JP Morgan. And he was able to put me in contact with someone who works in the operations team. So I met up with her for coffee. And that was really, really helpful because she gave him some she gave me some really good insight into the world of investment banking. And I was able to share some ideas with her as well. And she told me like quite bluntly, ok, that wouldn't really work. Yeah, that's fine. So yeah, that was really helpful.

**Nelima Begum**

That's really interesting that you kind of just set up all these meetings and stuff to familiarise yourself with parts of Yinka's life or the life you were building for her. You know, the first time you told me that I honestly was about to ask you, did you go to therapy as Yinka? Then you said no, I went to therapy as a writer about Yinka. But really interesting approach to take and again, very detailed and thorough and it definitely comes through in the writing.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Thank you.

**Nelima Begum**

So what was the process of building these characters like for you?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, so some of the characters came quite organically so for example, Yinka's aunties, I remember writing chapter one, and these voices came out of nowhere, and I really liked them and I was like, ok, I'm going to keep that. And I love the fact that all the answers are quite different because I wanted to, I didn't want to portray all Nigerian women as being the same. But also I watched Nollywood films. So Nollywood films are Nigerian films that really helped as well, especially the comedy ones, because because it's a rom com. You know, it has to be funny. So, the Nollywood comedy films are really helpful in terms of like, knowing when to dial up people's personalities and when it comes to the remarks as well because yeah, I had to make sure that Nigerians could relate to it and they could see you know, a fellow Nigerian auntie respond to that in that way, as well, so that was incredibly helpful. And for one character, Donovan, in my book, he has this kind of like South London dialect. So I've watched quite a lot of podcast with Black British male leads so The Wrap Party Podcast, 90s Babies, and that definitely helped because I was able to kind of like hone Donovan's voice and also like learn a new slang, a new way of saying things.

**Nelima Begum**

What's your favorite new slang word that you've learned in this process?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

I'm not too sure about the slang but it's like a way of saying, yeah, it's like yeah, sometimes go guys would say, boom, boom, and then say something else. So they will say it like when there's sharing a story.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

And to go to the next part, they might say, boom, and then this happens. Well, that's like the transition then. And so really, and as you said earlier, when you're writing comedy, like the dialogue has to be tight, and it really is. dialogue throughout the story is so sharp, and again, you've mentioned that podcasts and other forms of media informed how your character spoke. When you were deciding on each character, was there a way that you kind of came to a point where you knew what their tone and what their style would be? As you were fleshing them out?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, I think to be honest with you, I think it really came towards the end of the last edit because my newest editor, she's she was still saying that 'oh, Yinka's friendship circle all kind of seem alike'. So I really had to do some work with them individually. And like watching TV, TV shows such as Insecure and Girlfriends really helped because each of the girls have a very distinct personality. And I kind of wanted to have the same thing as well. So yeah, that was really helpful during that, but I think over time, yeah, I think the character just kind of came into their own. And I think once I knew, like, who they were, you know, their flaws, their triggers, what they liked... I could then kind of preempt or predict how they would respond in certain situations.

**Nelima Begum**

Interesting. So you just became very close to their own voices. And you just in some ways you could become them at any given time while you were writing.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah.

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic. I kind of want to explore the craft element of things. Now. And we've talked about this before. A lots of writers are often told, especially first time races when they're working on a debut to show rather than tell, did you grapple with that concept at all? And how did you get around it if you did?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah. So um, when it came to editing, so it was I had my editors. I didn't know that in some areas, I was doing more telling rather than showing. And so my US editor she pointed out like paragraphs where I was just kind of just telling the reader like what's happening, especially in the therapy scenes, like I remember I wrote an essay about colourism and how it led to slavery and racism. And so, yeah, my editors were like, ok, you're kind of preaching to the readers. Like I have to kind of trust the readers that number one, they're not they're not stupid. They would get it and actually, sometimes less is more. And I really had to strip it down. And when it came to dialogue after question myself like, ok, is this coming from me, or is this coming from Yinka or, you know, to other characters? If I felt like it was coming from me, I was quite strict. I would like either revise it or take it out, or st in a way where it's more natural. And so I really had to use subtext as well. So whether that's like body language or facial expressions, or even things are not unsaid, but you can kind of read between the lines. I just really had to trust that the readers will get it.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, that I was actually just about to ask you. Do you think a lot of it is trust that hopefully your readers will just pick up on this?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, yeah, I think so. Yeah.

**Nelima Begum**

Well, that's I just find this really fascinating because on the one hand, yeah, you have to there's, you have to kind of stop yourself from saying too much at times. And sometimes it's hard to strip it back.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, exactly. Like any time... I don't like it when I read books and I can literally just like hear the author's voice that I can see that they're trying to get a message through. I think it's best to let the characters do it if they want to do it. Because you have to be true to our characters. Sometimes, they might not kind of have the same views as you. So it's really about you know, letting the characters kind of lead away.

**Nelima Begum**

Of course, and as you said, like letting the characters come into their own because while they are your characters, they're not always just a vessel for you to kind of go on and on and on so striking that balance is key. We were lucky, I mean, we were fortunate as TLC to come across your brilliant work via the TLC Pen Factor competition, or Writers' Day in 2019. It feels like so long ago now. Did you regularly submit your work to competitions and what did you learn in doing so? Because I know that's quite a big deal for any writer.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, so in the past, I have submitted to a few not a lot but a few competitions that an early draft of Yinka, and yeah I didn't get anywhere. But the reason why I did it was because I just wanted to you know, just throw my hat in the ring. Yeah, you're gonna love to lose. I think at one point, I did ask for feedback as well when the person got back to me and provide me some feedback, which actually helped me to kind of revise the first chapter of Yinka. So I think it was scary, but at the same time, I wasn't really expecting much for me, I just thought to myself, let me just kind of do it anyway, because you never know what will happen. By I remember, I did apply for Spread The Word set of stories competition back in 2017, or 2018, I believe, and I ended up winning the Westminster our short story competition, which was really, really, really amazing. And even though, you know, I hadn't submitted Yinka, I think it just kind of gave me a boost of confidence that you know, my writing is improving, especially because I had been doing quite a lot of work on trying to improve my writing before I entered.

**Nelima Begum**

Of course, did you I mean, were you submitting to any and every competition that came up or was it kind of just something that came in waves for you so whenever you felt like you wanted someone to see your work?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, I think it was more so on like how much time I had until the deadline. What the prize was, like sometimes a prize was like maybe, I don't know, getting editorial feedback or you get a chance to speak to an agent. So I kind of took all those factors into into consideration.

**Nelima Begum**

Raising new mentioned before with regards to submitting to competitions or just even putting your work out there, you've got nothing to lose. I think a lot of writers, certainly in our experience at TLC rejection is something that puts a lot of people off and rejection is indeed a large part of the writing journey overall, especially for debut authors, because it's your first time that you're, you know, putting your work out there. How did you work through those moments where things maybe didn't go as you expected them to or wanted them to? And what did you tell yourself?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, so thankfully, I didn't go through that process of having to like submit to agents and query. I know like what that process is normal to receive lots of rejections because I got my agent through, after winning The Literary Consultancy's Pen Factor Competition, because Nelle Andrews, my agent, she was on the panel of judges. But in terms of like, I think the main rejection came from myself. So that kind of like inner critique, and even with the TLC competition I wasn't trying to apply for it because I felt like I wasn't good enough. Yeah, I kind of felt like 'Who am I, like I'm a bit of a fraud'.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh no! So there's a really harsh inner voice there.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

So yeah, I think rejection came off myself. So I kind of like, pulled myself out before even trying. And I just really... Do you know what, I have to say my faith got me through it, because I felt like I had to remember that the story, Yinka's is bigger than me. And I just knew that is the story of like, you know, a woman feeling the pressure to settle down and resonate with so many people out there. So I kind of had to put my, my fears to one side and think about the bigger picture and a bigger goal and I was even just praying to be longlisted. I wasn't praying to win. So when I won, I was like, 'Oh my gosh, wow'. And it just kind of like reminded me that ok, never discount yourself ever again because you just never know, you know, when you do try what could happen.

**Nelima Begum**

I love that. And I think it's really interesting that you've touched on the topic of rejection that comes from ourselves, because a lot of the time we concern ourselves with rejection that comes from you know, the industry, the agent, the publisher, the writing competition. Very rarely do we kind of take an introspective look at ourselves and say, Well, what if I'm holding myself back? Yeah, but how did you did you get better at telling yourself that you could do it like did you get better at handling that really harsh inner voice as time went on?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

It still comes that even though you know I'm going to be published soon in the UK. And I'm currently writing book two like it still comes. And I have to remind myself of all the, of how far I've come and all the wins that have come along the way. But I think it's just part and parcel of being a writer. I don't think you can ever fully like shut up that voice is always going to be there and I think it's just part of being human really.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, I agree. Obviously, depending on what you're working on, sometimes there's a lot of writers say there's more pressure with Book Two but who knows? I mean, the voice is just always there. In working with your agent, the fabulous Nelle Andrews,, what did you learn about your writing? Because was that obviously that's a very collaborative process compared to when you're initially working on your book.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, she was fantastic like she's literally godsend - when she looked at that early draft of Yinka she felt like the story was amazing and had so much potential, but also, it just didn't seem as focused and it seemed like every character had their own storyline. So, you know, Yinka does in its current form, it has a lot of subplots, but in its early draft,it had times 10 of that. So yeah, it was a beast. So she really helped me to kind of like refine the narrative. And also she was really good at just giving me like a pep talk as well because like I said, there were many times where I felt discouraged. There are many times I felt I couldn't reach the end. And I felt bad as well, because she, you know, she invested in me, she signed me on without having seen a full manuscript and I didn't want to let her down and she just, you know, really encouraged me and would say you know, 'I believe in you Lizzie, you can do it, and just take it step by step'. And yeah, here we are. So yeah, I just really her for believing in me.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

It's amazing. Were you going away and making changes yourself each time?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yes, yeah. And she was great because she provided really comprehensive editorial notes, like pages. So that was kind of like my my Bible, my go-to like I'd refer to it like 'Ok. Have I covered this, have I looked at that?'

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. Yeah, is there one thing throughout that process of working with her that has kind of just stuck with you that maybe you apply to all of your writing now?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah. One advice that she gave me was you know, when you write a story, try to make her try to make the plot kind of like time bound so that there's a sense of like urgency and pressure, and that way the readers will feel more invested in the story because they want to see whether things will work out within the timeframe.

**Nelima Begum**

I'm not gonna lie when I was reading the book I felt that sense of pressure for Yinka and kept thinking, is she going to get the date, she really needs the date, who's going to come through for her?! But it was great. Honestly, I really enjoyed reading it. And you're just days away from publication in the UK. Have your family and friends read the book cover to cover and did anyone see themselves in your story? Like, were you getting calls and messages like, 'Are they based on me?'

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Good question. So my mum, like she doesn't read fiction. She only reads the Bible, but she read Yinka cover to cover and she read it within a week. And she was so proud of me. Like she said, I think when she was like, maybe halfway through, she called me and said, wow, I'm so proud of who I really respect you for like writing a story and I just can't believe all this came from your head. So that was like very, like heartening to hear that from my mum. And also my husband as well like, even though he's been with me from day one from writing Yinka like he he hadn't read it until it's like its final form. So yeah, he loved it. And I'm just so nice to kind of like see his reaction as well while he was reading it. So, you know, he would laugh out loud or he would chuckle at certain points because there were some bits that are kind of based on him. So for example, one of the love interests in the book has like a really bright pink bottom lip, which looks amazing on like dark skin. And my husband has that so when he saw little features like, 'Oh, you're funny.'

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. And obviously, just from what you said, it sounds like having that support made a tremendous amount of difference.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Oh, for sure. Yeah. I couldn't have done it without them. Especially when it comes to just like having time to write like I'm so lucky to have a very understanding husband who gives me that time and also holds me accountable as well. So he asked me 'Ok, have you finished that chapter? Ok, why not?' So yeah, yeah, he's been really really helpful. My whole entire family and friends have been.

**Nelima Begum**

I love that. Were you part of any other like writing networks of any kind? Just to have that, like that sense of community at any point?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, no, I wasn't actually I think I did look for one in Milton Keynes but couldn't find any. So yeah, I was mostly like solo but I was very lucky to have my husband because he's into, like filmmaking, that's his profession. So he understands like stories and storytelling. So I had someone to kind of bounce ideas with.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. So just find that person that you can kind of connect with on that level. And accountability is really important. So was he like they're the deadlines like, the week is nearly over, have you finished this?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, but the funny thing is, there's no like repercussions. Like, ok, try harder next time.

**Nelima Begum**

It's subtle. It's awesome. Yeah. How do you think being a debut author has changed you?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Oh, wow. Like my entire life is changed. I think my life has changed since winning The Literary Consultancy's Pen Factor Competition. So yeah, thank you guys!

**Nelima Begum**

Aww we're all going to be gushing when we listen to this!

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Yeah, I'm just like, I think every day I just wake up grateful. Like there hasn't been a day that's gone by where I haven't said, you know, thank you. God. Thank you so much for this blessing because I'm living my dream and not many people out there get to do that. So I'm just like, constantly grateful. And I'm just so happy as well. So happy that Yinka story is going to be read by you know by people out there and I just hope it you know, resonates with them.

**Nelima Begum**

Well, I loved it, and I can't wait for everyone else to meet Yinka as well because she's quite a powerhouse. And that was a brilliant note to round off on. So we have this new thing that we've been doing since since season two, where we have just a few quickfire questions to round off with. They're questions where you don't have to think - just say the first thing that comes to mind. So, which character in the book do you think you most relate to?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

I'm probably Yinka because she is, she can be a bit awkward at times, and I feel like I've been in situations where I've felt like that like, a bit out of place.

**Nelima Begum**

She handles the awkwardness really well, really makes it her own. Yeah. What has been your pinch me moment in all of this, like just in your entire writing journey overall?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Oh, wow. Just one? Well, you could pick a few. Ok, so winning the TLC Pen Factor Competition is definitely up there. Getting the agent, Yinka being preempted within 24 hours. Yeah, just like there were, so many, the reception I've been getting and the lovely reviews and people who have said 'Thank you so much like for writing the story, I feel seen. I love your writing style. What's your next book?' So, yeah.

**Nelima Begum**

They're all waiting already waiting. Which brings me nicely onto the next one. What are you currently working on?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

So I'm currently writing book two. I can't say too much about it, but it's kind of loosely connected to Yinka's world. So I think fans be happy to hear that. And it's still just as hard as writing book one. But there you go. That's, being a writer for you.

**Nelima Begum**

Good to know. Solid truths. What's the greatest writing advice you've ever received?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Oh, gosh, like so many. I think if you strip it all back writing is basically just like, time and focus. That's all you need. Just need to sit down and get the words on the page and get the story out and with writing, there's different stages. So especially when you do the first draft, don't worry about editing - time and focus. Get the words on the page. Get a story out and trusting the process as well.

**Nelima Begum**

Amazing. And what's the number one thing in your opinion that debut authors need, to survive?

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Oh, I think self belief and motivation because you will get periods of time where you just want to give up and you just question yourself. So you need to have that kind of like self belief kind of rooted in your core. But also, I think all writers should invest in themselves like you are, you know, worthy to be invested in so you know, if you have to spend some money to invest in yourself as a writer, whether that's doing a course or attending a workshop, like I say definitely do it if you can.

**Nelima Begum**

Excellent advice to round off with thank you so much for your time Lizzie, this was an absolute pleasure.

**Lizzie Damilola Blackburn**

Thanks so much for having me! It's been really fun.