

OFF DUTY

Heated Rivalry's Bianca Nugara dishes on her smoothie order and getting recognized in Zara

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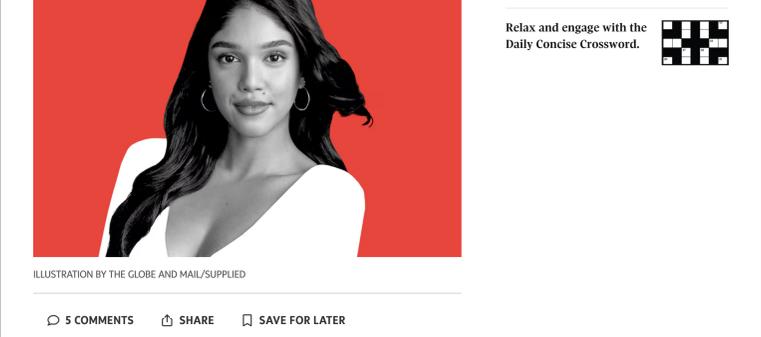


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Toronto actor Bianca Nugara recently made her mark as Maria in *Heated Rivalry*, the smoothie-slinging, no-pucks-given wingman to coworker Kip Grady, played by Robbie Graham-Kuntz. As the hit show continues its cultural hat trick, generating buzz for its progressive scripts and steamy hockey romance, Nugara is also expanding her fanbase.

Cast in the third and final season of Hulu's campus drama *Tell Me Lies*, she plays Tegan, a party-girl college student. According to *Deadline*, the series is trending upward with almost 150-per-cent more views than its debut. The result of both TV triumphs has been an onslaught of Maria and Tegan memes – and a newly elevated profile for Nugara.

During a brief break from filming in Los Angeles, the Canadian-Sri Lankan star opened up about juggling two hit shows and what life looks like when the cameras aren't rolling.

Heated Rivalry proves that consent is sexy

How does it feel to be recognized for Heated Rivalry and Tell Me Lies?

Seeing people resonate with my work validates me, but I'm still working through imposter syndrome. Right before New Year's, two girls spotted me while I was shopping at Zara in Markham, Ont., and asked, "Are you Maria from *Heated Rivalry*?" It was so cute. Moments like that make me feel like I'm on the right path.

Are you following the memes about you?

I love them. My friends send them to me constantly. The smoothie shop meme is my favorite – I look like I'm crawling on the smoothie counter, and leaning in and the text is "gurrl." I don't even remember doing that, but I still laugh at it.

Do you have a go-to smoothie order?

Yes, I love smoothies more than coffee – which I don't drink. I'll always have a Revitasize smoothie called Green 42. It has kale, cashew, banana, vegan protein, maple, vanilla and chia seeds in it. It's like \$12, which is expensive, but it's my treat. I usually go to the Markham location when I'm home.

Author Rachel Reid postpones release of Heated Rivalry sequel Unrivaled due to health reasons

What are your favourite food haunts in L.A.?

Home. I prep my own meals: a lot of ground beef, avocado, konjac rice or noodles, kimchi, sauerkraut and microgreens. For spices, I keep it simple with turmeric, garlic and herbs.

Drink of choice?

A mocktail with pomegranate juice, magnesium powder, lemon and ice – it's like my own made-up version of ice wine. Lately I've been drinking it while putting together a 1,000-piece puzzle of an ancient artifact or while I play *Fortnite*.

You're currently working in L.A. – the extreme wellness capital. How do you keep yourself balanced?

I stay active. I do a lot of cardio and use the StairMaster at the gym. I'll take a few SoulCycle classes too. When I'm back in Toronto, I box twice a week at Relentless Boxing in Scarborough with an amazing trainer called Ronnie. He tailored workouts to my goals, which were all about strength. He would help so many people who didn't have the funds to train there and give them a break. His way of boxing taught me discipline, control, and how to channel energy positively.

How are you handling working in the U.S. while there is so much tension around employing immigrants right now?

I was raised in a Catholic household. I disconnected from that for many years, but now I'm finding comfort in a higher power as an adult and just praying for the best for everybody. Even in moments where there's competitiveness in auditions, I'm wishing fellow actors well. Going back to kindness – which is really Canadian – is helping me in this climate.

What's your go-to ritual for retail therapy?

Running to the skincare section at Sephora if I'm in any mall because no makeup will make me feel great if the skincare is not skincare-ing. My staples include the Haruharu Rice Cleanser, mineral sunscreen and The Ordinary's Natural Moisturizing Factors + Phytoceramides. For evenings, I'll use Code of Harmony's Ceru Blue Barrier Balm.

How would describe your sense of style at the moment?

Stolen from my mother! So much of what I wear is taken from her closet – her fearless approach makes her my number one fashion icon. She used to do makeup for weddings and taught at a beauty school called Marca College in Brampton, Ont. She is very DIY but sophisticated and would take days talking about a design she'd make, sketch it out, then go to Fabricland and once the dress was finished, she'd try the look on with different wigs... some of those I took.

Books on your shelf right now?

The Great Alone by Kristin Hannah, which explores complex relationships and world-building. For spiritual guidance, I love *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz, which is about finding confidence, perspective, and projecting love. I also admire Viola Davis for her perseverance and grace; her biography taught me a lot about self-belief, and overcoming limiting beliefs. I'm working through some of those insecurities now and the book helped me gain more confidence in my work.

Favorite vacation spots?

Switzerland. The scenery looks like a postcard, the colours are vibrant, and being with family was special. Visiting cousins and reconnecting with my roots over there inspired me to start learning German. Both my parents are Sri Lankan Burghers – brown people with European ancestry, descended from Portugal but moved all over Europe.

Who would you like to play in a biopic?

Timothée Chalamet – every time I watch him, I'm fascinated by how committed he is to every moment and every role he plays.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

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