In celebration of Women’s Month which runs throughout March, we are exploring bold ideas -- the daring is as much about the idea as it is about the woman behind it. We meet women who eschew the path of least resistance. Realising any idea, big or small, will require some heroic effort, so you may as well go for bold. Here’s to the women who, to borrow from poet, Maya Angelou, make us proud to spell the word W-O-M-A-N.
Riding a superbike is like therapy on one hand and an adrenaline booster on the other. It is such an exhilarating feeling that leaves one in tune with nature.
Men also cry; unabashedly, undisputedly, watching the enthralling stage play, *Man Enough*, mirror realities at Terra Kulture Arena in Victoria Island, Lagos. Holding the audiences spellbound as it delved into issues considered taboo in the society, *Man Enough*, the latest stage play from the stable of Bolanle Austen-Peters Productions (BAP), is truly “bold”. The unique thing about the play is that it is a work of art which, according to her, “is a very strong tool you can use to address social issues without being in anybody’s face. We all see ourselves when we put ourselves on stage, it undresses us. The hope is that we are a reflection of the society and people can take a lesson or two from watching the play”.

The production company, which is known for big musicals, big cast, big performances, showmanship, elaborate costume and lighting, stripped this play to an 7-man cast, produced and directed by Austen-Peters. It revolves around three male characters; “Bruno” “Onyilo” and “Thino played by Ayo Ayoola, Gideon Okeke, and Moshood Fattah, respectively.

Cash-strapped Onyilo, a regular guy with ambitious dreams, is under pressure: on one hand, he wants to own a film studio, and reaches out to Bruno, who would rather buy over his ideas. On the other hand, Madam Suzie, Bruno’s wife, played by Tana Adelana, would only help fulfill his dreams if he agrees to a romantic relationship with her. Meanwhile, Onyilo’s girlfriend or wife is pregnant again and their first child has been sent out of school for their inability to pay fees.

Torrid times for Thino too. Young, hardworking, and weathered Thino works in a Asian-owned factory, managed by a Nigerian who like him depends on the company for his basic existence. He works long hours for a pittance in a windowless room and every time he is sick or late his salary is reduced. At home, his ailing mother wails, insisting that she will die if he doesn’t find the funds for the release of his younger brother, a Yahoo-yahoo fraudster.

Bruno is portrayed as an old, egotistic, and rich alpha male. He would do anything not to be another Thino. So when he moved to Lagos, working at the wharf, sleeping “under bridge” and heard that madam Suzie was eager for love, he made his moves and
married his way out of poverty. On the outside, Bruno is a man’s man, but behind closed doors Suzie calls the shots and never lets him forget. In choosing to produce this play, Austen-Peters noticed that there are a lot of projects on the girl-child, but very few on the man. She started asking herself, what happens to men? It just does not happen to men. You do not hear of men taking care of them or helping them. I started asking myself, what happens to the men? I started asking myself, what is causing this trend?" The play also delves into an area most Nigerians hardly talk about: the maltreatment of Nigerians in their own land. Decrying the ugly situation, Austen-Peters says, "It is our desire for foreigners to come to our country. But the way some of them treat us, that is not our desire. It is our desire to balance out the narrative, stop making comparisons and let everybody just be human that is the level." She appreciated Paul Ugbede, the playwright, the lead characters and the rest of the cast, Ralph Okoro, Josephine Ewuru, Iyke Okechukwu, for delivering an authentic performance. "Man Enough," which enjoyed phenomenal response from the Nigerian audience, "will appeal to anybody, anywhere, under the sun as long as you are human. The story cuts across two or three things alike to our Nigerian face across the world, the difference is the level."
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AN INTERVIEW WITH THE
LAGOSMATCHMAKER

“It took me some time to be comfortable with the fact that I’m dating too,” she said as she finally turned toward me for the first time during our conversation over drinks. We were in a large, empty restaurant, on the busy street of Fola Osibo in Lekki. Unusually empty for Friday night, but suitable for what I hoped would be an insightful conversation. Didi Warmate arrived in blonde hair, black leggings, a black t-shirt and ordered a whiskey sour. I knew the conversation might be a tough one.

I wanted a different story. Before meeting Didi, I had read and watched all her interviews. Didi Warmate runs Lagosmatchmaker, an exclusive matchmaking business for her Nigerian clientele. It is a privacy-focused matchmaking platform for singles over 25 years to meet like-minded individuals. When it comes to where to meet a spouse Nigerian cultures dictate the criteria for what’s acceptable. Acceptable ways of meeting your spouse include friends, family, at a bar, etc. What is unacceptable, and highly unusual, is through a professional matchmaking online run by someone single. Even so, over 4,000 people are registered on her platform.

“How did you get to this moment of confidence?” I ask her. “I think about all the successful matchmakers I know, and a number of them are single. Even successful professional coaches in sports, many of them never played at the highest level. She says most of her work relies on guiding people through the dating process, and questions whether a married person should be trusted with that. “I think it helps that I’m engaged in the process too.”

“So what is your attitude toward love?” I ask her, trying to get her to relax and put down her phone. “Oh that’s the owner of the place,” she says as she gets up to greet a man, maybe in his early forties. He’s in jeans, a white button-down, and a short afro. Unconsciously, I change the topic once the hellos are done with.

She’s fighting numerous battles at the same time, but clearly she sees something others are missing. In Nigeria, like many other African countries, matchmaking has been a fixture in society. Many people can recount how they were set up by a family member or a good friend. Not in any casual setting, but in the form of an introduction with intentions of marriage. Nigerians are moving everyday into cities like Lagos, and still very much socialized into wanting to get married. The hecticness of an urban life, coupled with the fact that arranged marriages have fallen out of style, has created a signaling problem. Suitable partners can’t seem to find each other. Didi stepped in to fill that void, to “play God” one might say, at a great personal sacrifice. She not only does the research and vetting of each potential match, but also, like many aunts she’s there for guidance along the way. Didi takes on very serious and sensitive criteria her clients have for a match such as, ‘he must be from the same tribe’ or ‘his genotype cannot be AS’, etc. She does much of the sifting so her clients can feel all the magic. In the case that the match doesn’t work, clients can also blame it on Didi and move on, instead of wallowing in self-deprecation that tends to follow breakups.

Though young, she’s already had an illustrious career at the Nigeria Export-Import Bank, the Debt Management Office and now the Bureau of Statistics. Didi is also a published author. “Usually, I always lead with the bureau of statistics part”, she says nervously. I can only imagine the barrage of questions that would come
after introducing yourself as a matchmaker. Privacy is a guiding principle in her life. She's private about her clients at Lagosmatchmaker and about her own life. Given her staunch respect for privacy I wonder if she ever lets herself be seen?

Starting Lagosmatchmaker must have been against all odds, like the scene depicted on the cover of this edition. Such is the human condition that there may never come a time when you'll look at yourself and say with 100% conviction, “I am a courageous person.” Courage isn't so much a destination as it is a journey. Didi is able to look at the beginning of her business seven years ago and see where she made strides to get to where she is now, but with complete recognition that there will always be new things to test her.

“When you get discouraged, you now have to keep it away from the people discouraging you otherwise you just won’t continue.” That was as much as she was willing to give away as she sat with arms crossed and deflected most questions about herself. This, clearly, is someone used to being guarded.

“Someone sent me a picture this evening of the ring he wants to propose with, but I couldn't share it yet because he hasn't proposed.” Her eyes glittered with hope. She loves matchmaking and brings to it analytical rigour and passion for research thanks to her background in economics. She studies her clients’ files until they begin to feel like friends. She tells me that women need to go out more, let themselves be seen. She understands too that it gets difficult as you get older and become more passionate about your work. On one hand, I wonder if she'll take her own advice, and on the other hand, I know intimately how Nigerians might try to tear her apart.

Her job gives her constant inspiration and a bird’s eye view of relationships. She tells clients who come to her with a laundry list to focus on things that can’t change. This is a surprisingly small list. “So, you think people’s character changes?” I ask. “Let me not say character, but I know from personal experience that people’s habits change.” What is character but ingrained habits?

“The person changed”, Didi says is the number one explanation for divorces among her clients. Divorce rates in Nigeria are on the rise. Probably because more and more women are increasingly capable of earning salaries to keep themselves and don’t need men to stand their ground in society. Consequently, staying single is now an alternative to a negotiated marriage.

It’s 8:45 pm when our interview concludes. As I pack up to go Didi asks me if I’m going home straight away. “No, I’m going to meet a friend for drinks,” I say, trying to avoid judgment. I know what’s expected of me at my age and marital status but it takes time to let ourselves be fully seen. Didi knows that better than anybody.
Living in a busy city, I’ve come to form rituals to help me survive, only when a vacation can’t be secured. This particular ritual provides me quiet moments of meditation and full presence, which itself is a kind of escape from the frightful busybodied-ness of Lagos. On weekends, I sit back on my Eames chair with a good book, not for study, but for unfiltered pleasure. That’s what the Eames Chair was made for. This magnificent signature of the contemporary home is one of the most significant designs of the 20th century.

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Recipes from our mothers always hold a special place. Probably because of the stories that tag along with the recipe rather than any “secret ingredient”. My mother was the wife of an expat in Paris when she first ran into this recipe, at one of the many cooking classes she went to.

She gave up her career to devote herself to her family. Mealtimes were always an adventure. I remember them like it was yesterday, especially every Thursday. When I came home from school, there would be something deliciously French to try. We were strangers in a strange land, and food was the way we got to know the country.

The cheesecake recipe has been modified from its original, because well Lagos is not Paris, and access to some ingredients can send you on a wild goose chase.

**RECETTE**

11 pieces of Jacobs crackers  
20 pieces of digestive biscuit  

Grind the digestive biscuit and the crackers until fine  
Mix with a quarter cup of melted butter  
Press it hard on the cheesecake baking pan  
Bake for 10 minutes or until slightly brown

Bring it out and cool for about 5 minutes  
In a bowl mix or mixer, blend together cheese, sugar, lemon, and egg. Add the egg one after the other  
Pour the mixture on the crust and bake at 160 celsius for 25 minutes until it is a bit shakily at the centre  
Bring it out, cool it for 5-10 minutes  
Pour the topping and decorate with strawberries or a combination of strawberries and other berries. Enjoy!

**Ingredients:**

**CRUST**

1½ cups of (11 pieces of Jacob’s crackers  
20 pieces of Digestive Biscuit  
¼ melted butter  
Baking pan greased with butter

**CHEESE MIXTURE**

500 to 600g of St Moret cheese or Philadelphia*  
2 eggs, ¼ spoon lemon  
½ cup of granulated sugar

**TOPPING**

1½ cup of creme fraiche*  
½ teaspoon of vanilla essence

*you can find these items at Deli’s Supermarket in Victoria Island
I was in Chicago for the summer, on a grant to write a script about black women finding love. I would take romantic walks, but nothing could quell the intense imposter syndrome I had about my writing project. So, in lieu of trying to restart my creative fire, I fell down a YouTube rabbit hole. As it always happens, it began with an innocent search: “How to get rid of hyperpigmentation.”

Women with 4C textured hair can relate the kinky coily hairs getting trapped under your skin, causing irritation and dark spots. These dark spots have plagued me all my life. I had a seemingly endless summer to kill, so why not figure out how to get rid of them? My search led me to a video posted by Gothamista. Gothamista is the social media handle of Rene Chow, a beauty influencer, who from her days as a buyer for the beauty section of department stores, knows almost everything about skin.

One Gothamista video led to another, and before I knew it, my simple search for hyperpigmentation solutions launched me headfirst into the world of skincare. With every new discovery, there’s always an inflection point, where you have to make the decision to go boldly forth or wallow in self-imposed ignorance.

Let me break down my skincare routine for you before my awakening:

Have shower, apply lotion, slather chapstick, pray to God.

I really had never thought about my skin as something that needed a little extra love.

I think as Nigerian women, we often fall victim to this mindset: becoming comfortable with forgetting ourselves. Taking time for yourself can seem like a selfish, Western idea, but I argue that it is an absolute, worldwide, culture-crossing, necessity. The little ways in which you check in with yourself, and prioritize your wellbeing can find harmony with the responsibility many Nigerian women bear as the emotional glue of the household.

If you need help accepting this narrative, think of self-care as the first step to providing support for others. After all, how much help can you really be, if you are crumbling inside?

I might be a little bit of a consumerist zombie. But damn, do I have great skin. In the vein of “Down with consumerism and overproduction of non-essential products”, I am going to break down my post-awakening routine for you. Simply reading it is a step towards self-care and its own small quiet revolution. I’m rooting for you.

THE ROUTINE

My skin type: Dry

Cleanser
Honestly, I don't double cleanse. I use a water-based cleanser and call it a day.

Vitamin C
This is the first product I use after I get out of the shower. Vitamin C is an active ingredient and needs time to absorb into your skin before mixing it in with other products.

Toner
Toner preps your skin for the rest of your routine.

Essence
Essence is like a less concentrated serum. I always look for one containing hyaluronic acid, or a similar working ingredient, like snow mushroom, or birch.

Moisturising serum
Serum is like a concentrated essence. The molecules are smaller, so it's really able to absorb into the deepest layers of your skin.

Eye serum
I use eye serum instead of eye cream, but they function as essentially the same thing.

Moisturiser with sunscreen
Moisturisers don't actually hydrate your skin, they create a film to prevent water loss. Meaning, if you've got zero hydration, to begin with you're going to feel as though your moisturizer isn't doing its job. I use a lightweight, but still heavy-hitting moisturizer with sunscreen, so I don't have to add another layer to my face.
GIVE EXPRESSION TO YOUR DESIRE

Joann Otaru on Riding a Superbike
Riding a superbike is like therapy on the one hand and an adrenalin booster on the other. It is such an exhilarating feeling that leaves one in tune with nature.

I presently own a Honda CBF919 otherwise known as a Honda Hornet. It is a street bike and a naked bike, this means it is devoid of fairings. It has an engine displacement of 900cc. Because it’s a street or road bike, it is very convenient for everyday commuting. Its maneuverability is excellent especially when one has to make tight turns. Being an upright bike, it is very forgiving and puts no pressure on any part of your body.

I started to ride quite early, 39 years ago. I was what you would call a tomboy. After a break, however, I got back into active riding about 9 years ago. The trigger was a younger brother-friend of mine, Nmutaka, who would always post his road trips on his Facebook page. I kept resisting the urge until I could resist no more. The rest, they say, is history.

The one thing that keeps any biker going is the camaraderie in the biking circle. The kinship. This is common among bikers irrespective of race, tribe, religion or whether you know the biker or not. The bond is biking. In the biking world, we have a creed akin to that in the military, “Never leave a biker behind.”

Every moment on the motorcycle is special.

The idea to start Amazons Motorcycle Club came about when we, the founders, felt we had to give women a voice. It was an opportunity to find an avenue to empower fellow women and to encourage them to be the best they could be. The Amazons motorcycles club encourages women to give expression to their desires, break free of stereotypes and live life to the fullest irrespective of what society or anybody says. It was also created to give back to society by way of corporate social responsibility and works of charity.

Most women shy away from riding motorcycles for several reasons. The first being fear. Not everybody can overcome the fear of being exposed on the road with other vehicles while riding a motorcycle. Again, given the state of our roads, lack of emergency response and good healthcare facilities, most people (not only women) are discouraged to ride.

The second reason is a stereotype. Some women think it is a man’s thing to ride superbikes and as long as they cannot get beyond that mindset, they can’t ride. The third reason is social influence. They worry about what society will think of them.

In the spirit of doing it afraid, one of the things we do as a club is to encourage other women to ride if they so desire. We’ve had members go pick up other ladies and take them on rides just to encourage them to ride. It is heartwarming to note that the number of women riders in Nigeria is on the increase.
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Oyinkan Braithwaite’s novel, “My Sister, The Serial Killer” catapulted her into the limelight. She is a graduate of Kingston University in Creative Writing and Law. Following her degree, she worked as an assistant editor at Kachifo Limited, a Nigerian publishing house, and as a production manager at Ajapaworld, a children’s educational and entertainment company. Now she writes full time and maintains a busy schedule as her debut novel enjoys a global readership. We wanted to get to know her beyond work, so we asked her a few questions:

What was the last thing you did that required some courage?
I addressed an audience, alone on stage, for 45mins.

What have you done for the first time?
I visited Pakistan for the first time.

What makes the biggest difference in your life?
Family and friends

What apps do you use the most?
Instagram, Procreate, WhatsApp and Notes

First thing you do in the morning?
I send a good morning message to my fiancé.

Who is your guru?
Jesus

What do you crave at the end of the day?
Snacks

Which song is currently in your head?
FairPlay by Kiana Ledé

What’s something you wish you understood more about?
The Nigerian government and politics in general

How do you define success?
Being better than I was yesterday

What’s an idea that you can’t seem to shake?
That Santa Claus is real.

What should we know about the next book?
I have no idea what it’ll turn out to be.

Last box set or Netflix binge?
Durarara!!

What’s worth paying for?
Peace of mind and chocolate

To whom did you address your last handwritten letter or note?
My fiancé
A Wedding Made in Mumbai

As soon as I got out of the airport, the whole place felt instantly familiar, the noisiness, and busyness of the place but the air was a bit worse. I began to worry if I had actually left Lagos.

I understood Mumbai, although I don’t how much anyone can claim to understand these megacities. There was a familiarity to the striving, tensions, and richness. I was in the financial capital of India for two days to attend my friend’s wedding so I squeezed in a walk around the city.

Indian weddings can be jam-packed with events, so most of my acquaintance with the city was earned from that long trek in the morning. I walked around Lower Parel, India’s entertainment district. It felt like walking around Marina, surrounded by skyscrapers and very energetic. The second half of the trip was spent at the most remarkable wedding.

If you’ve never been to an Indian wedding, I highly encourage it. It’s going to be grand. It can be stressful to coordinate, especially for a well-traveled family with friends all around the world; I’ve known the bride for 14 years.

The wedding took place at the luxurious St. Regis Hotel, located near Lower Parel railway station in Mumbai. Mumbai is like Lagos, prosperity and poverty sit side by side. In the midst of a city on the edge of chaos, where people respond to a lack of housing with makeshift slums, a few hundred metres away, you might find five rolls Royces pulling up to the tallest building in the city.

The wedding was proof that Indians love to party just as much as Nige-rians, in fact, they seem to look for any reason to. The first event was the Mehndi, which really only seemed like an opportunity for the female guests to be adorned with henna. There was a kind of symbolic arrival of the groom with traditional dancers and drummers to meet his bride.

After a few glasses of champagne and an outfit change we meet again in the evening for the Sangeet. Easily the best part of the wedding for me. As soon as the wedding is announced, family and friends start preparing a dance to honour and celebrate the newlyweds. The joy in the room is palpable.
The actual wedding ceremony took place at sunset on the rooftop in a canopy adorned with marigold garlands. The bride was in a rich red sari, and her bridesmaids in pink. As far as magical goes, this was high up there. From watching the bride and groom perform the Hindi traditional rights from the Agni Puja, where the priest lights a fire to serve as a witness to the couple’s vows, to the Ferras, where the couple circles the fire four times to represent the four goals of life: righteousness, wealth, desire, and salvation.

The royal vintage-themed final reception was the perfect way to end. The entire hall was draped in thick, heavy red velvet curtains, evoking opulence without stress. There was dancing and dinner and belly laughter with strangers, a wonderful evening really. The spectacle felt like a rich chocolate cake, the type you dream about the morning after.

Before I dashed off to the airport, I stopped by The Gateway of India, a 25-minute drive from the hotel. This particular monument was built in 1911 to commemorate the first British monarch to visit India, King-Emperor George V, and Queen-Empress Mary. Nigeria and India famously share the same colonizers, and I wanted to see what it meant to Indians. My worry was that it would be underwhelming in the way these great tourist sites can be, but it was not, the detour was worth it. It was just as triumphant as the host city. I hope to come back soon, less pressed for time, to enjoy this great sprawling city.
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