

LOVE AT PLAY

BY

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FADE IN:

EXT. DAY. BASKETBALL COURT

Zainab is playing with Etuk. His inexperience is so obvious, it is almost comical. He battles to keep up with her but keeps stopping to gasp for breath.

ZAINAB

Are you okay? Do you want some water?

He nods, unable to speak. She runs off to get the water while he collapses on the ground. Shortly after, she reappears, bottle in hand.

There you go.

Passes the bottle to him and stands, watching while he gulps huge mouthfuls.

Easy now...you shouldn't drink that fast.

He nods, still panting.

I thought Ben said you can play? Or were you trying to let me win?

She raises a brow, suspiciously.

FLASHBACK. EXT. PARKING LOT

Etuk and Ben are standing by a car, bibles in hand. From the way they are dressed, we can tell they just left church. We see Zainab approaching her car from a distance. She doesn't notice them.

BEN

Ol'boy, see your spec!

He taps Etuk who takes a look and nods.

ETUK

She's beautiful. I'm not sure I've seen her before.

BEN

Her name is Zainab. My wife introduced her to me. She just joined our home cell.

ETUK
Awesome! God bless her.

Looks away, he has heard enough.
When is the next...

BEN
Are you spiritual at all? My guy,
that's your wife there?

ETUK
Huh?

BEN
Grabs his head and turns it to face Zainab who has got to the
door of her car and is now putting her bag in the back.
Don't miss your miracle my friend.

Before Etuk can react, he grabs his hand and pulls him along.
Sister Zainab!

ZAINAB
Stops short of entering her car and turns to see who is
calling her. She recognizes Ben and closes her door to await
them.

Oh, hi! Good afternoon.

Her smile captures Etuk's attention. He stands there gaping
at her while Ben engages her.

BEN
So good to see you, Zainab! How are
you?

ZAINAB
I'm fine, thank you. How is Madam?

BEN
She's good. She's having a chat
with pastor so I wanted to drop my
bible in the car and get her some
small chops.

ZAINAB
Awww...that's very sweet of you. Do
say hello for me.

BEN
This is Etuk, a very good friend of
mine.

He shoves him forward gently.

ZAINAB

Hi.

Stretches out her hand to shake Etuk's. He manages at the last minute to respond.

BEN

What are you doing later this evening?

ZAINAB

I usually shoot some hoops on Sunday evenings. Why do you ask?

BEN

As if I knew, I was just about to ask Etuk here to join me at the basketball court.

ZAINAB

Wow! Do you play?

She turns to Etuk.

ETUK

Um...

Gulps.

BEN

So what time will you be there?

ZAINAB

How does 5pm sound?

BEN

Great! 5pm it is! Do you use the court at Upbeat or some other?

ZAINAB

Upbeat.

BEN

That's good. I hope you enjoyed the service?

ZAINAB

I did, thank you.

BEN

That's good. I have to dash off before they run out of small chops.

All laugh.

ZAINAB
Wouldn't want to get you in trouble
now, would we?

She wags a finger.

BEN
Abeg Oh!

ZAINAB
Bye then.

ETUK
Bye!

BEN
Bye!

They stand back to watch her get into her car and drive off.
Once she does, Etuk turns to face Ben, incredulous.

ETUK
Did you just tell her that I can
play basketball?

BEN
No, I told her that I was planning
to invite you to join me.

ETUK
But...I can't!

BEN
Come, I can't help you there!

ETUK
So are you picking me up or am I
picking you up?

BEN
Who is going where with you? You'll
show up alone and charm her till
she can't remember her way home.
See premium chick that I connected
you to!

Etuk lifts his hands to his head and groans while Ben
playfully thumps his back.

CUT TO PREVIOUS:

ETUK
Full disclosure; I have never
played basketball in my life.

Fixes a comical gaze on her. Her eyes widen in surprise, then wrinkle as she bursts into laughter. Finally, she collapses beside him.

ZAINAB

Did you know I went to school partly on a scholarship I won for playing basketball?

ETUK

No way!

ZAINAB

I mean...you could have hurt yourself pulling a stunt like that. Why though?

ETUK

Ben obviously decided I need help in the love department.

He looks sheepish. She takes a look and laughs again.

ZAINAB

Come on...It can't be that bad. I'm sure you have a number of women in your dm keeping you busy.

ETUK

No body send me oh! But as pastor preached today, in all things we give thanks.

ZAINAB

Aha...I have an issue with that. How can we give thanks in all things? Should I thank God that Nigeria is trying to kill me?

ETUK

No, but you can thank God that Nigeria has made you more resilient and resourceful than you would have been if you never had to live in such a difficult terrain.

ZAINAB

Hmm...

ETUK

For instance, what do you do for a living?

ZAINAB

I'm a dentist.

ETUK

Eh! Dentist? Thank God Oh!

Pretends he has an aching tooth.

I think I need to visit your clinic tomorrow.

ZAINAB

Scoffs.

Sorry, I'm a pediatric dentist.

ETUK

Even better, it means you have gentle hands.

ZAINAB

Shakes her head.

You don't happen to be a standup comedian, do you?

ETUK

Worse...

ZAINAB

Worse?

ETUK

I am a poultry farmer.

ZAINAB

How is that worse?

ETUK

My sister, if you don't buy my chicken, I won't make money. Comedians laugh to the bank by telling us jokes.

ZAINAB

Bursts into laughter again.

ETUK

But we thank God.

ZAINAB

Well, I guess I should be grateful
I had a good laugh even though I
was expecting a sparring partner.

Rolls her eyes at him and rises to her feet.

ETUK

Rises as well.

Oh, I have a better one for you.

ZAINAB

What's that?

ETUK

Please give me the honour of taking
you to dinner, I can't tell you how
much that would mean to me.

ZAINAB

Hmmm...
Dinner...

ETUK

Yes.
And it's a good thing I can't play.
See, I will not play with your
heart.

ZAINAB

Inclines her head, impressed.
Are you always this poetic?

ETUK

We thank God Oh!

ZAINAB

Laughs.

ETUK

So what do you say?

ZAINAB

I'll have dinner with you but my
week is full. How about next
Saturday?

ETUK

Saturday sounds great. I mean...my
chickens will barely notice I'm
gone.

ZAINAB

Smiles.

Oh, I look forward to meeting them.

ETUK

They should be grateful a hot chick
like you stepped into their abode,
no pun intended.

ZAINAB

Yeah, right.

ETUK

Could I get your number?

Whips out his phone.

ZAINAB

Oh, sure.

She does the same and they exchange numbers.

I have to run some errands. It was
nice to meet you.

ETUK

Thank you so much.

They shake hands. The handshake lingers a while.

ZAINAB

Bye now.

ETUK

I'll call you.

ZAINAB

You'll have to let go of my hands
first.

Points her head in the direction of their hands.

ETUK

Oops! Sorry!

He lets go and rubs his hands together.

ZAINAB

I'll see you later.

ETUK

You certainly will.

He stands and watches her pick up her bag and ball and leave.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. DAY. BEN'S HOME

Etuk and Ben are chatting in Ben's living room. Ben is still wearing his basketball gear. Ben is casually dressed.

BEN
So how did it go?

ETUK
We thank God.

BEN
Which one is we thank God? My guy,
I swear, if you fall my hand, I go
conduct deliverance on top your
head!

Enter Deinye. She serves them drinks and plops on the sofa next to Ben.

DEINYE
Who are we conducting deliverance
for? Let me get my olive oil.

All laugh.

BEN
No mind this guy.

ETUK
She's having dinner with me on
Saturday.

BEN
You don't mean it?

Etuk nods. Ben springs up and gives him a fist bump.
Now you're talking!

DEINYE
Nice one.

Smiles and raises a glass. All raise their glasses and clink them.

So what did you think of her?

ETUK

She's smart, she's warm and she's a go-getter.

BEN

My friend, stop blowing Grammar! That height and those looks have been your prayer point for years.

ETUK

Na my prayer point, bros but this babe is an IJGB. She's a dentist and she thrashed me on the court. How I wan take convince am?

BEN

Look my wife na! If no be Jesus, she for look my side?

DEINYE

You're not even serious. (To Etuk) I hope you have contacted a florist?

ETUK

Florist? Why?

DEINYE

To send her flowers tomorrow morning. You don't want to give her a whole week to forget about you.

BEN

Kai! That's why I married you.

Reaches for her and hugs her, beaming.

You have sense. Guy, you see why you need a wife? Make dem help your life.

ETUK

We thank God!

BEN

Do you buy any flower you see or there is a special one? Because if you leave me, na hibiscus I go pluck outside.

DEINYE

Rolls her eyes at him.

You stalk her social media and find out the type she likes.

Both Ben and Etuk go "Oh!"

She pulls out her phone and opens Zainab's social media. They crowd around her as she scrolls.

There you go. She likes Lilies and Carnations. Go for white and pink to be safe. I'll text you my florist's number.

ETUK
Ol'boy! Na wetin you dey see?

BEN
Guy, I have the woman's number on speed dial. If I mess up, before my baby fit vex, piam...flower don land for her domot! Everywhere stewww!

All laugh.

ETUK
Nods solemnly.
I'm taking notes.

DEINYE
Are you guys ready to eat?

BEN
Why do you think he came? He could have given me the news over the phone.

ETUK
And miss Deinye's party jollof? Hian!

DEINYE
How did you know I made jollof rice?

ETUK
That is why I sent you the chicken! I no wan hear say dem shoot bird the mama fly.

All laugh.

DEINYE
You won't kill me with laughter.

BEN
As in...

ETUK
We thank God.

All rise and head to the table, still chuckling.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. DAY. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Zainab is reclining in her chair having a conversation on phone. Cut to Ini who is sitting at her dining table working on a computer while they chat. On Zainab's desk is a fresh bouquet of white and pink lilies and carnations.

ZAINAB
He just sent me the most beautiful
flowers ever.

Leans in and breathes in their scent.
I didn't know these bros have game.

INI
Let's hope he keeps it up. That's
how some of them are in the
beginning.

ZAINAB
Makes a tut sound at her.
Remember we are ditching the
cynicism this year?

INI
Sorry.

ZAINAB
Better. Anyway we chatted for a
while yesterday and he's not bad at
all. Maybe Nigeria has something
for me after all.

INI
That serious?

ZAINAB
What?

INI
I mean, you just met him.

ZAINAB

But he's cute though.

INI

That his name sounds familiar. Give me his full name let me search him out.

ZAINAB

FBI!

INI

Darling! After that idiot planned a wedding under my nose, while I was living with him and doing the books for his business, my eyes became red. No time for nonsense!

ZAINAB

You need to let it go.

INI

I have. Text me his name. I can search while we talk.

ZAINAB

Okay.

A notification sounds. We see Ini look at her phone and begin to search Etuk's name on her screen while they converse.

So how is your niece? I hope she likes her new braces.

INI

She loves them. Thanks babe. They told me you didn't charge them a dime.

ZAINAB

My pleasure. Your family is my family, you know that.

INI

Thank you. Once this my business takes off, I will buy you a big goat.

ZAINAB

Goat? Ini? Seriously? Of all the things in this world!

INI

Yes na! In my village when you want to hail an important person, you go with a live goat.

ZAINAB

I can't even...just stop!

Laughs.

INI

What of Dipo? Does he still reach out?

ZAINAB

I blocked him. He doesn't get to treat me like a 2nd option. That is not why Jesus died.

INI

At all!

There is a pause during which Zainab pulls out a folder and gets some work done.

Hold on, Z, I think this guy is the guy who broke Dunni's heart.

Zainab freezes.

ZAINAB

Huh?

INI

You remember Dunni? She used to sing in the choir in school.

ZAINAB

I think I do.

INI

This Etuk looks like the guy she was dating. Is it okay if I ask her?

ZAINAB

She would rather not know but not knowing is not an option. I guess so (almost whispering).

INI

I'm not trying to be a debby downer. It's just to be on the safe side.

ZAINAB

Yeah, sure.

She taps her fingers, anxious.

Maybe I should call you back. I
have to prepare for my next
patient.

INI

Okay love. Talk later.

ZAINAB

Take care of you.

Ends the call and lets out the breath she had been holding.
Rising, she goes to her window and parts the curtains to peer
out of the window. We see her emotions play on her face.
Obviously she is praying nothing incriminating turns up in
Ini's search. Her desk phone vibrates and she picks it up.

She's here? Send her in.

A young couple enter with their daughter. She is not excited
about the visit at all. Zainab flashes her winning smile at
her.

Is that Winnie? Say hi to Dr. Z
come on!

She rises and approaches the child who turns away. Her
parents give Zainab an apologetic smile.

MOM

Good afternoon Doc. Forgive her
manners.

ZAINAB

Good afternoon Madam, Sir. You're
welcome.

DAD

Hi.

He extends a hand to shake hers. Seeing his wife is
distracted, trying to encourage Winnie to say hi, he holds on
for longer than necessary. His manner is flirtatious.

You didn't tell me Winnie's doctor
is a super model.

MOM

Oblivious of the tension.

That's how we roll!

Zainab extricates her hand from his grip, careful not to let her notice her husband is crossing the line. She then takes out a goofy mask and approaches Winnie.

ZAINAB

I'm the tooth monster and you,
Winnie are mine! I will huff! I
will puff! And I will tear your
house down!

She roars at Winnie comically until she bursts into laughter.
That's my girl! Would you like to
get into my chair so I can find out
why your teeth hurt?

Winnie nods.

Good girl. And I have Mr. Daps here
to keep you company. Would you like
to hold him?

She extends a huge bear.

Winnie nods and accepts it.

MOM

Say "Thank you"!

WINNIE

Thank you.

ZAINAB

You're welcome. What's your fave TV
show?

WINNIE

Elena of Avalon

ZAINAB

Nice!

She turns on the TV which is positioned so Winnie can see it.
Then she washes her hands and dons her work gear. The parents
move to one side to give her room while close enough to
reassure Winnie. There is silence while Zainab examines her.

WINNIE

Dr. Z?

ZAINAB

Yes?

WINNIE

Why do my teeth hurt?

ZAINAB

Well, do you like sweets and chocolates very much?

MOM

Ah! This one? If you don't give her chocolates she can cry for Africa. Before she does her assignment, chocolate! To pick up her toys, chocolate! Even to attend her piano tutorials, you have to give her chocolate. I'm just tired.

DAD

Doc, is it bad?

ZAINAB

Chocolates are not bad on their own. It's just that she is eating so much of it that she's providing a feast for the germs that cause dental caries. And I guess she is not brushing as regularly as she should.

DAD

I said it! (To mom) You have not been brushing her teeth!

Before Mom can speak, Zainab interrupts.

ZAINAB

Winnie is actually old enough to brush by herself. All you need to do is ensure she does and reduce the junk food.

To Winnie.

Winnie, when you don't brush at night, those bad guys called germs will throw a party in your teeth and shout hurray! Then they'll start dancing.

She dances and demonstrates as Winnie laughs.
Let's dig a hole! A very big hole!
Make it bigger, make it deeper.
It's a goal!

All laugh.

That hole is what we call a cavity and that is why it hurts when you chew. We are going to fill it and make you all better, okay?

Winnie nods.

Do you like apples?

Winnie nods.

So Mom can use apples as a reward
instead of chocolates all the time?

Winnie hesitates.

Okay, some times?

She nods.

Yay! Okay, just give me a minute
and your teeth will be as good as
new.

DAD

Thank you doc.

MOM

Thank you so much.

ZAINAB

My pleasure.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. NIGHT. ZAINAB'S ROOM

She is lying in bed chatting with Ini.

INI

Babes, Dunni confirmed that he is
the one Oh!

ZAINAB

What?

INI

For real.

ZAINAB

So what led to their breakup?

INI

I don't know. They dated for about
a year. He suddenly broke up with
her. She said he gave a flimsy
excuse.

ZAINAB

But...that is not the end of the world. I mean, people break up all the time.

INI

I agree. Just ask him about it and see what he says. I know she couldn't get over him for years. She just got into a new relationship recently but she confided in me that she would have given him a 2nd chance if he asked her.

ZAINAB

Hmm...I don't know if it's first date material.

INI

True! It's just that some of these men are scum. You need to weed out the bad ones quickly so they don't block your way.

ZAINAB

Tell me about it. Would you believe my patient's dad made passes at me today?

INI

What!

ZAINAB

Right in front of his wife for that matter.

INI

That's terrible!

ZAINAB

He called me an hour after they left to ask me out.

INI

The nerve!

ZAINAB

I told him I would record the call and send it as a voice note to his wife. He got off my phone so fast, you would think LASTMA was tailing him.

Both laugh.

INI
Serves him right.

ZAINAB
Don't mind him. I'll pray about
what you told me. I'll let you know
if I decide to ask him or not.

INI
Ok, darl. Have a good night.

ZAINAB
Ciao!

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. EVENING. RESTAURANT.

Zainab and Etuk are seated at a table, sharing fruity
cocktails.

ETUK
Have I told you you look especially
stunning tonight?

ZAINAB
Yes, more than 3 times.

ETUK
I have?

She nods.

We thank God.

She chuckles. The waiter shows up and serves their meal. They
thank him.

ZAINAB
So, poultry farming, why?

ETUK
It's an interesting story.

ZAINAB
It is?

ETUK
I lost my job in the bank 5 years
ago.

(MORE)

ETUK (CONT'D)

I assumed it would never happen since I studied Banking and Finance...yeah, right. Anyway, I started going to church every day at 8am to pray for another job.

ZAINAB

Really?

ETUK

Yes Oh! I did this for about 3 months until one of the pastors noticed me. He asked me what I was doing. When I told him, he burst into laughter.

ZAINAB

Like...

ETUK

He asked me what David did when there was a delay in being crowned king as prophesied by Samuel.

ZAINAB

Ummm...what did he do?

ETUK

He gathered a band of discontent men and formed a raiding party until his time came.

ZAINAB

That's true.

ETUK

I didn't know what to do. I had no skill outside of banking. My savings were running out fast. The next day, I was taking a walk in the evening close to my home when I overheard the mama put...You know what is mama put right?

ZAINAB

Of course.

Makes a face

ETUK

Sorry, I didn't want to assume. Anyway, she was telling someone that the owner of the poultry where her chicken supplier gets his chicken, wanted to sell it and travel abroad. I heard a voice within me scream "Those are your chicken!"

ZAINAB

No way!

Laughs.

ETUK

For real! I approached her and asked to be hooked up. The owner agreed to let me pay in installments. I got to work and learned how to manage the farm. Today, I have 3 farms in Lagos and Ogun. By his grace, this year, I intend to launch 3 more.

ZAINAB

Wow!

ETUK

Yeah.

ZAINAB

That's a really interesting story. I now see why you give thanks in all things.

ETUK

My sister, no be God?

ZAINAB

I can't even...please don't make me choke.

She is trying to laugh unsuccessfully. He rises and thumps her back lightly, then offers her water.

Thank you.

ETUK

Sorry.

ZAINAB

Thank you.

Time passes.

CUT TO END OF MEAL

Plates are cleared. We see Etuk thank the waiter for the bill, pay and tip him generously. Zainab watches, debating whether or not to ask him the question on her mind. They rise. She precedes him to the lot.

CUT TO PARKING LOT.

ETUK

Thank you so much for having dinner with me.

ZAINAB

Thank you for picking me up.

ETUK

It's the least I could do.

He unlocks the door and holds it open for her to enter. She pauses so he does as well.

ZAINAB

I know this isn't first date material so pardon me.

He stops, surprised.

Did you once date a girl named Dunni.

ETUK

Shocked. Hesitates.

Dunni? Wow! How do you know her?
It's been ages.

ZAINAB

Yeah, we kind of know each other.

ETUK

Lets out a breath.

I...

ZAINAB

I'm not trying to put you on the spot. If you prefer not to discuss it, I'll let it go.

ETUK

Takes her hands.

Zainab, I told you I am not here to play. I can't have any shadows hanging around us. You're the woman of my dreams.

ZAINAB

Smiles.

ETUK

So what did she tell you?

ZAINAB

She told my friend Ini that you broke up with her using some flimsy excuse and she was heart-broken.

ETUK

Heaves a sigh.

Okay. I expected that. I am going to tell you the truth and just hope to heaven that you will believe me. We dated for about 1 year. I realized one day that I was not willing to marry her and so continuing the relationship would be dishonest..

ZAINAB

Puzzled.

Huh?

ETUK

She had different expectations than I did and my silence was an implied consent. I couldn't do that any more. Not after the encounter I had.

ZAINAB

Encounter?

ETUK

I'll tell you all about it another day.

ZAINAB

Were you in love with her?

ETUK

No.

ZAINAB

Heaves a sigh.

That's a tough one. I would feel
the way she felt as well.

ETUK

You would?

ZAINAB

Yes. I mean, who wouldn't?

ETUK

Does that mean I don't stand a
chance with you.

ZAINAB

She hesitates, appearing to be weighing his question. He
stands there, hands folded in front of his face, barely
breathing.

I respect the fact that you manned
up and told her the truth even if
it hurt her.

ETUK

Lets out a whoop and hugs her, nearly lifting her from the
floor. She laughs. When he releases her gently, she smiles in
his arms.

I feel like I won the lottery.

ZAINAB

Mimicking his voice.

We thank God Oh!

He bellows with laughter. They get into the car and we watch
them drive off.

FADE OUT.

THE END.

