

BOLA'S DIRGE

Written by

Ebuka Njoku

Script for the UN MDGs Prize for the Homevida Short Film
Competition

PRE-TITLES

The beat of a talking drum begins this. It starts out slow and sonorous but builds with intensity and rhythm, each beat is intercut from the drum to the face of a girl to a bust of the sculpture of a woman. The talking drum tells the story of a girl who has lived a difficult life, and as it builds to a crescendo-

CUT TO BLACK.

BOLA'S DIRGE

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

We open in a dark, dank room that is empty save for a single metal chair in front of a foldable metal table. The room is soulless and lacks any discernible character. A door opens and a flood of light spills into the room. A young lady walks into the room- BOLA ADEYEMI, 21 but looks 16, average height, average build... an average beauty. She sits on the chair and looks straight into the camera, a deep, questioning gaze.

VOICE (O.S.)

Please state your name for the record.

The voice of the INTERROGATOR is as nondescript as the room we're in. It seems to come from behind the camera, but it could also have come from anywhere in the room. Bola looks on like the question wasn't directed at her. She scoffs and leans back in her chair. There is an awkward silence.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)

Please state your name for the record.

Silence still, then Bola blurts out:

BOLA

What am I stating my name for?
Where am I? Who are you? Why am I here?

Silence.

BOLA (CONT'D)

The people in the other room told me "Welcome" and that I should "hold on for registration".
Registration for what?

Silence.

BOLA (CONT'D)

(in Yoruba)

You people haven't seen anything yet.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)
Please state your name for the
record.

Bola looks directly at the interrogator, directly at us; she
contemplates. She caves in.

BOLA
My name is Bola Adeyemi.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)
How old are you Bola Adeyemi?

BOLA
I'll be 22 in December... I'm 21.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)
What do you remember about your
birth?

SMASH CUT:

BIRTH

A cacophony of voices- English, Pidgin, mostly Yoruba. A
woman is heaving in pain, wet hands move in towards us and we
hear a shriek- the sound of a baby taking it's first breath.

BOLA (V.O.)
Pain... excruciating pain.

From the baby's POV we see her sweating MOTHER, laughing and
crying at the same time. The voices are jubilant, the MOTHER
raises her hands to carry her daughter.

BOLA (V.O.)
Warmth.

CUT TO:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - SAME

Bola's head is down, almost in penance. A faint smile comes
across her face.

BOLA
Safety.

She looks up to us.

CUT TO:

Mother's sweaty face as she sings praises to God and blesses
the child in her arms.

CUT TO:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

BOLA

I remember happiness, my mother was happy. I was afraid and I was in pain. But my mother was happy. And that is all that mattered.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)

What was the most significant moment of your childhood?

BOLA

Malaria.

Bola is surprised at how quickly she says this. She looks slightly confused and embarrassed.

BOLA (CONT'D)

I mean... my brother died from malaria, that was the most significant moment of my childhood.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

BOLA'S POV:

A bowl of water with a small towel in it is balanced delicately in small hands and is carried to a bed where Bola's BROTHER is laying with a high fever and her mother is sitting beside him worried.

BOLA (V.O.)

I was no more than 9 and my brother was 5 years old. The apple of my mother's eye.

Her mother snatches the bowl from her hands and shouts on her to bring the anointing oil. She looks at her brother with his small frame writhing in pain.

BOLA (V.O.)

We prayed, we saw three chemists and we bought a lot of drugs... we bought a lot of fake drugs.

SHOT: A small stool beside the bed with an assortment of medicine.

SHOT: Anointing oil being liberally rubbed on a forehead.

SHOT: A pastor and mother praying furiously in English and in Yoruba.

The pastor sits down in a corner as Mother wails and starts to take off her clothes, Bola's brother lies lifeless on the bed. Mother's shouts fade off and the beat of the drum comes in.

WE TRACK SLOWLY in as Bola walks towards her brother.

BOLA (V.O.)
He died before he had a chance to
live.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Bola looks on- directly at us. Her face is plain, it is hard to read any emotion off her. She shrugs.

BOLA
What else do you want to know?

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)
Do you have any regrets?

Bola begins to talk but stops herself. She leans back and exhales.

BOLA
Can I have some water please? Do
you have a cigarette?

The interrogator pushes over a glass of water to her and also a pack of cigarettes and some matches.

BOLA (CONT'D)
How did you...?

She stops herself and takes a sip of water. She picks a cigarette from the pack and lights it. She stands up from the chair and walks around. She walks in and out of shadows.

BOLA (CONT'D)
So what is this place? Who do you
work for? Why do you want to know
so much about me?

Silence.

BOLA (CONT'D)
Have I been kidnapped? If I have,
then you've made a terrible
mistake. Nobody is going to pay any
money for me.

She lets out a dry, weary laugh. A lonely laugh. She doesn't get a response.

BOLA (CONT'D)

What is your name? What do you remember about your birth? What's your most significant childhood memory? Do you have any regrets?

She comes back and sits down.

BOLA (CONT'D)

Huh? Nothing?

She downs the glass of water, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. She takes a long drag from the cigarette and crushes it. She mutters something under her breath.

BOLA (CONT'D)

That's it, I'm not taking this anymore. I am leaving.

She gets up and looks round the room for the door she came in through, she can't find it. She begins to panic, pacing round the room. We hear the sound of the drum, it's rhythm taunting her, teasing her. She hears it too.

BOLA (CONT'D)

What is this? What kind of joke is this? If you don't let me out of here soon all hell will break loose.

INTERROGATOR (V.O.)

Do you have any regrets?

Bola turns round and comes back to sit. She looks squarely in the camera. The talking drum beat starts, slow... steady and sure.

BOLA

Why is it important if I do? Everybody in this world has regrets. Our lives are full of regrets.

Silence.

BOLA (CONT'D)

Yes, I do!

CUT TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Bola is standing with her back to us in a checkered school uniform. A spectacled man is sitting behind a desk.

PRINCIPAL

I cannot allow you stay in class
with other students who have
actually paid their fees.

BOLA (V.O.)

I regret not completing school and
having to work at the Buka, but
what could I do? We were poor, and
it was just the two of us, my
mother and I.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUKA - DAY

At roadside bukka, Mother is coordinating Bola and two other girls in the serving of food to the teeming customers. Most of the customers are leery-eyed men who crack lewd jokes at the girls. Mother sits on a chair and fans herself. She's aged, and she doesn't try to hide the lethargy anymore.

BOLA (V.O.)

I regret not listening to MURI,
maybe if I married him, things
would have turned out different.

CUT TO:

MURI, a dark, skinny but clean shaven man in mechanic overalls stands beside Bola and tries to cajole her-

MURI

Baby, I love you; I want my people
to come and meet your people.

SHOT: His greasy palms.

SHOT: His shiny, completely shaven head.

SHOT: His calloused feet in rubber slippers.

BOLA (V.O.)

Would you blame me for wanting
better?

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Mother lies on a bed, there's a IV line in her hand. She's asleep.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - HOSPITAL - DAY

A DOCTOR in his 40s with a salt and pepper beard is talking to Bola.

DOCTOR

Your mother's condition is stable now but she will need dialysis and also drugs for her hypertension. The accountant will give you a bill...

He notices Bola is quiet.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(places his hand on hers)

There are ways that we can handle this, you are a very pretty girl.

Bola pulls her hand back.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

The doctor checks on Mother's IV line and also her blood pressure, he looks a little worried and scribbles something on his chart. Looks at Bola and smiles. He leaves to attend to another patient.

MOTHER

The doctor likes you.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Bola is still looking at us, with tears down her eyes.

BOLA

I regret the doctor.

WHIP PAN to the side of the room and we see Bola bent over the doctor's table with the doctor behind her heaving loudly as he thrusts into her. She looks directly into the camera, directly at us.

BOLA (CONT'D)

What would you have done?

WHIP PAN to the other side of the room and we see Bola standing by a door with a man in a vest and a wrapper looking round suspiciously.

BOLA (V.O.)

I regret the landlord.

The beat from the drum takes a wild turn and increases in tempo.

BOLA (V.O.)

I regret the many other men that followed.

MONTAGE: Different men in front of a black background in different states of undress. Rapidly cut to the beat of the drum.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAWN

Bola is lying on the table with her legs up, like she is about to have an exam from a gynecologist. We JIB DOWN till we see just her face.

BOLA

I regret my first abortion.

We hear the doctor asking for instruments, we hear the drilling sound, and the cutting... and the suction. Bola looks away.

FADE OUT.

BOLA (V.O.)

And the three others after that.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A flashy car pulls up and the passenger's window winds down. We track slowly towards it to see a middle-aged man.

MAN

Fine girl, how are you?

BOLA (V.O.)

Prostitution is a slippery slope.

MAN

Come in.

BOLA (V.O.)

But it pays well.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAWN

The room is marginally brighter, a weight has been taken off. Bola tries to compose herself.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)

Do you know how you got here?

Bola looks up, the look on her face is that of surprise. The question catches her unawares, she tries to remember.

SHOT: A laboratory test result for blood work, at the bottom it reads: HIV ANTIBODIES: POSITIVE.

SHOT: A bottle of anti-retroviral drugs.

SHOT: A positive pregnancy test stick.

BOLA (V.O.)

I tested positive, for HIV and I was also pregnant. I didn't want to have an abortion for the fifth time. The doctor told me the baby could be safe if I took my medicine regularly.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A modest living room of a two-bedroom flat. Bola is eating with another lady on the floor, her drugs are beside her. The other lady smiles at her.

BOLA (V.O.)

I made a friend, KEMI. She took me into her house. She didn't judge me, she was kind to me.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

The room is much brighter, almost white. Bola looks more puzzled as she puts everything together.

BOLA

Everything was getting back to normal, Kemi helped me get back on my feet. I started working at a salon. I went to the hospital to have the baby. They said the baby was fine.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Kemi walks in with a heavily pregnant Bola, a NURSE comes to attend to her, she is calm and polite.

CUT TO:

Bola on a stretcher - she is screaming in pain, different faces come across to look at her. A NURSE tells her to breathe another tells her to push. The fluorescent light above them flickers.

She pushes, the doctor tells her she's doing great, a nurse wipes off sweat from her face. We hear the familiar cry of birth. The doctor yells at a nurse to get blood, he complains that he cannot stop the bleeding. The faces above us turn from assurance, to worry, to panic. The fluorescent light continues to flicker, the baby continues to cry. Bola stretches her hand out, she wants to touch her baby.

BOLA (O.S.)
My baby.

It is a whisper.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY.

The room is completely white now. Tears roll down Bola's face. She realizes. She understands where she is. She tries to talk but she can barely utter a word.

BOLA
Am I dead?

A door opens behind her leading to a dark room. The interrogator hands her a file.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)
Please take this file and go
through that door for processing.

BOLA
I asked you a question!

Silence. Bola looks down at the file, it has "BOLA ADEYEMI - 09122013-A" written across it in a perfect, almost typed handwriting.

BOLA (CONT'D)
Is that all I am? A statistic? Some
figures in a fucking report?

Silence.

BOLA (CONT'D)
Tell me! Am I just another girl who
died in childbirth? Or another HIV
victim? My name is Bola Adeyemi,
and I am 21 years old!!!

The tears are rolling down her eyes freely now.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)
Please go through that door for
processing. That will be all. Thank
you.

Bola pauses for a moment. She wipes her eyes and carries the file. She walks towards the door. She doesn't look back.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.