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a rueful morning in May 2000, I opened an e-mail message that sent shivers down my spine. The information was terse and unceremonious: Agboola Oshinowo has passed on. We all know that death is an unnegotiable state of terminality. But, in the case of Agbo, an eerie deliriousness overcame me as I sat staring at the computer. The shock that I experienced was assuaged by a fleeting comfort, which was induced by denial. No. This message would soon be retracted; Agbo did not die. In the end, after speaking with Kolade, I resigned myself to that finality. Agboola Oshinowo, a warm, personable friend, a disciplined and motivated colleague, a loving mother and forceful but supporting wife, was no more. We inquire in vain why she had to be plucked at that point. We do not have the privilege of interrogating death, or the mystery of existence itself. But we have the capacity to commiserate, to memorialize and perpetuate the excellent deeds of a quiet but powerful woman.

I was forced to contend with Agbo at Yaba College of Technology in the mid-sixties. But it wasn’t until we arrived in Zaria in 1969 that I had the opportunity of gaining an understanding of her personality. Here was a lady with a simple but deceptive mien. Given her cultivated mannerisms and selective association, you would think that she was a recluse. But once you gained her trust, you would never have a warmer, more cheerful and honest friend, one with a strong sense of personhood and an admirable work ethic. Her marriage to Kolade, a colleague with an unpretentious candor, could not have been more productive. Agbo turned out to be a role model for many mothers: always concerned with instilling into her three children the same sense of fairness, discipline, hardwork and love that she herself embodied. Retirement from a creative career as art teacher at the International School, Lagos gave people like me the impression that she indeed was on to the second phase of a well planned life. How mistaken! Now, humanity is the poorer for it. On May 3, 2000, a piercing silence descended on the Oshinowo homestead. All the smile, the honor and the banter, all the hopes and aspirations vanished as Agbo drew her last breath. As we mourn, we are reminded of our own mortality. The giver has taken. But as we mourn, we celebrate a fulfilled life; a life that was full of sparkle and chuckle, insight and contentment.

Agboola Oshinowo, adieu,
dele jegede