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DAILY TRUST

FRIDAY COLUMN

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Long Journey's Final Journey

By Adamu Adamu

His name was Adamu Jibrin; but unless you were handing his file or doing something formal in which he was involved, that name would hardly ever come up, because he was known to all as Long Journey. Everyone that is, except me.

For one, I never liked cross-cultural nicknames, but that was not my only reason. When he was introduced to me by Mohammed Haruna as "Long Journey," I thought he said "Long Johnny." I immediately assumed it was an adaptation of Long John [Silver] of *Treasure Island* by this group of youthful adventures from Layin Shaba, the area surrounding the street where Mohammed and his circle of friends grew up.

But Adamu Jibrin didn't look any inch like that one-legged buccaneer. Later, as we came to know more of each other, Adamu appeared to me in attitude and physique to be more like Robin Hood's Little John, that bulky, powerfully-built, kind and helpful companion to the famous English outlaw. And so I thought, it should have been Little Johnny.

I was waiting in the office of Mrs. Amina Ibrahim, a friend of mine and senior special assistant to the president, when Dr Isma'ila Iro, another friend, rang wanting to "confirm about Mohammed Haruna." Before I could get the message the line went off. He rang again to say that he heard that Mohamed had been killed by armed robbers. My heart missed a beat. The line went dead again. I was frantically trying Mohammed's number when Isma'ila rang back to say that he had spoken to him, but that one "one of our Citizen people had been shot dead." My heart missed another beat because the Citizen people could only

He was a dependable friend; and he was always there for everyone. It was not necessary for you to ask Long Journey to help; it was enough for him to realize that help was needed. He was so considerate that he would think it his duty to save you the embarrassment of having to ask.

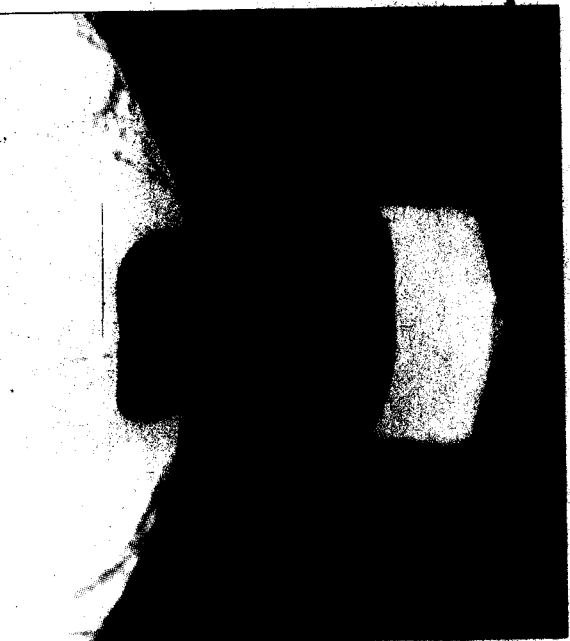
In the office, he approached his duties as marketing officer of Citizen Communications with the tenacity and methodology of a retired soldier—ambush and capture, and keep attacking target until it surrendered. For him the Citizen Distribution network was battle-

meant in that context.

Long Journey was older than me. He was bigger. He was stronger. He was a friend to Mohammed even before I knew either of them. Nonetheless, he just disappeared. He was so respectful and so self-respecting—and very decent. That was how he always was. You would never catch him intruding. He didn't know that we relished his company even more than we relished Mohammed's; and I am sure Mohammed himself would be the first to acknowledge that he relished Long Journey's company more than his own solitude. He just made every place lively; and when you were with him you never liked it if the hour of your next appointment approached.

Just before he died he cracked one of his wildest, wise, witty, no-holds-barred jokes to Mohammed Haruna. Long Journey had just broken his promise, but it was not that type of word-of-honour thing, but that it was of solemn undertaking which people graduating from idle age into grey-bearded elderly-ness usually made. Long Journey apologized to Mohammed and said he just accidentally went down a slippery slope. In the context in which this was made, nothing so off-the-cuff could have been wittier or more apt.

It was a great loss and trauma that such a soul had to go the way he did. Like almost all other beleaguered Nigerians, Long Journey discovered, as he lay dying, that he was painfully on his own. There was no government to protect him; and after he had been so unjustly felled, there was no government to see that the perpetrators of his murder were pursued and caught and justice done.



another beat, because the *Citizen* people could only be Long Journey or Mohammed Ndallman, the *Ustaz* of the House.

When finally I got Mohammed Haruna, he sounded confused and was incoherent except for the sentence he continued repeating: "*Wallahi sun kashe* Long Journey. *Wallahi sun kashe* Long Journey." He repeated this about five times. "O.K. Mohammed till I come," I said. It was only when I arrived Kaduna that I realized the whole thing took place in Abuja.

Certainly, no one among the *Citizen* collective, and, I am sure none from among the many others who knew him, would receive the news of his demise—this most revolting of murders—without experiencing an overpowering surge of anger and a genuine sense of deep personal loss and anguish. It was as if something had been cut away from your being; and you immediately become aware of a painful void, like a Whitlow on your soul.

As Mohammed described him Long Journey was truly a gentle giant. I didn't know his height exactly but he always towered over me, and I myself stand six feet tall. He was big, fit and trim—and strong. Looking at him, you knew that he could very well beat the hell out of you if he chose.

But he would never do that. You could not only put your finger into his mouth and take it out unscathed, you could even pull out a tooth if you wanted. He would probably only smile. But Heaven helps you if Long Journey should be forced to anger. His hatred of injustice, *raini*, his prodigious strength and courage and ultimately the effect of *allurar soja* would all combine; and, in that circumstance, the best thing for you was to run away.

In all our almost 20 years of acquaintance, I only saw him pushed to near anger once. But I am sure even Mohammed couldn't have seen this happen more than a few times. He was slow to anger—and his few times of anger were almost always fully justified—and he was slow to pacify but quick to forgive injury.



Late Adamu Jibrin

ground, the highways leading to collection centres were supply lines, and unsold copies were like booty. And he collected everything with military precision and delivered to management almost with a salute.

He would pop up to say he had just come to say "Hello." He would think nothing of trekking from Kawo to Barnawa just to strengthen ties of *zumiunci*. Those living with him in Kaduna would appreciate the distance covered, and understand why he was so called "Long Journey."

A good father to his children and a veritable babyphile to all toddlers in the surroundings and a loving husband to his two devoted wives, Long Journey was also devoted to prayer. In the office, as we struggled to tear ourselves away from deadline and rush to the mosque, Long Journey, along with Mohammed Ndallman, would have long surpassed us at prayer; and Long Journey in particular surpassed all of us in giving succour to all who needed it. And in our religion relieving a person from distress is better than a thousand years of worship.

Long Journey was never presumptive in the sense of giving himself even justified airs. There were moments when, at our approach to Mohammed, Long Journey would withdraw. He would go in the manner of a departure made to acknowledge that the seniors had now come. I never understood what seniority

People are being shot on the highways and as many are being killed in the supposed privacy and safety of their homes. What happened to Long Journey took place only a stone-throw away from the presidential villa. There they are celebrating the success of their so-called reforms while the people of the country just see a government unable to guarantee the security of its citizens, which is the most basic duty of any government.

This is a duty in which this government has failed with distinction. But it is not this failure which is painful. What is painful is the acceptance of the status quo by everyone including the government itself. It is happening everywhere every day, but you can't help asking what it was that Long Journey had done?

Sometimes I feel that we journalists could perhaps be justifiably put on the spot, and we could be mortified or even liked, seeing that we took delight in stirring hornets' nests. And by expressing our views it was possible that some people would take offence and attempt to get at us in the futile belief that cutting down the writer would signify the death of the written word, or it could somehow exorcise a guilty conscience. We uncover uncomfortable truths. We expose corrupt conduct. We check excess in the exercise of power in our land. And we step on toes.

If the robbers had come after Mohammed, wrong as that would be, it would still have been more in order of what was to be expected. But, for Heaven's sake, what had Long Journey done?

I could now imagine Mohammed's confusion, incoherence and pain as he looked at Adamu Jibrin's body slumped over a pool of his own blood. *Allahu akbar! La ilaha illallah!* With these as his last words, he fell and died a victim of an incompetent, insensitive and absent government, and a martyr so wronged by an uncaring nation.

We are his witnesses here and we shall be witnesses for him in the hereafter. We pray to God to reward him for all his good works and for his many acts of never-ending kindness. May He forgive all his sins, overlook all his mistakes, and transform all the sins he might have committed into acts of credit for him and rest his soul in perfect peace. Amen.