

LIFO

By Akinwumi Akinwale (Nigeria)

Dear Dash-Dash-Dash-

“Leave out the names”, he said, “I’ll fill them in later. And keep them short please; we’ll be giving out more, it seems”

A NOTICE OF STAFF SHEDDING

He said it took twenty dreadful minutes to stick to that phrase. There is to be no word like sack or fire or terminate; relieve, maybe. The management just refused to sound harsh. After all, it wasn’t anyone’s fault.

Due to the prevailing global economic crunch—

I can yet remember the day it all started. All the big bosses came downstairs yowling, unable to contain their joy because our share price rose a quarter of its value in a single day. No one knew what anyone did right or which wind blew. That was the last merry day at Lagos Omega Capital. The day after, our clients started dying.

—our portfolio, as you are well aware, is much thinner and therefore requires fewer hands.

All we did was fear. We waited on the market. The jinxed charts kept plunging, broken arrows tending near free-fall.

“We need secretaries, we need secretaries”, he said. “Type, file, send, correspond, draft, draft, draft; God, even when we go down under, we’ll still need you three to file for bankruptcy”

That was the single nicest thing anyone could have told us and it so lifted our moods everybody in the building soon knew we were the only safe species. Yet we were the ones who drew the dreaded letters.

We therefore regret to inform you—

People slowly, gently began to secretly cry. Their gazes fastened on us, some pleading, some loathing.

I typed and typed as fast as I could go, uneasy under their stares not ever wanting to look up.

—that we can no longer afford your services.

Some took it gallantly; some broke down crying; some yelled in anger; one person was well ready to come to blows but there was nobody to fight. So he barricaded himself in his cubicle till work was over then docilely walked out.

Signed: Management

Nobody would willingly sign those letters so it fell to the personnel manager. He was murmuring over a stack delivered earlier as I came in to submit yet another.

“Take it slow for mercy’s sake!”, he muttered. A long list lay at his elbow from which he wrote the names over the dash-dash-dashes. “Give these to my assistant, please. Then I need you to type a stiff one”

“A stiff one?” I took the stack he handed over; a stiff one meant someone high up was going. The stiff, thicker paper meant senior management. “Who’s it?”

He shrugged and replied, “At least it’s not me”

I absolutely froze. I must have gasped. “What?”, he asked.

“Sir... it’s my name... on one of them”

He took the letter from me and swore.

“Damn... listen, listen Rike, damn! That was so insensitive... I didn’t know it’s in that lot. Really, really it’s nothing personal, really, will you listen!”

I turned out to be the weepy kind.

“Management decided three secretaries were one too many now that the company is halved already. You are the best we have, alright, but we wanted to reward longstanding. See, you came last; the last shall be the first— to go... Oh, how can I put it gently: it’s like inventory management; last-in-first-out, LIFO...”

I nodded and nodded, too stricken to be bitter immediately.

“You will please type that stiff one for me before you go, won’t you?”

I nodded and said ‘yes sir’ already putting my hand on the door knob.