

HOLDING ON, LETTING GO

A monologue

Late night suburban railway station. Muffled passenger announcements.

Walter enters. He is wearing an overcoat and carrying an old-fashioned leather briefcase. He stands on the platform, looking to his left and then to his right.

Sound of train approaching from a distance.

Walter peers into the darkness seeming to see a figure.

Walter (softly) George? George? Is that you?

Train nearing the station.

(louder) George? (louder) George!!!

Sound of train roaring through the station. Pause.

(to himself) No. No, of course not. Stupid.

Walter places his briefcase carefully on the platform, straightens himself and shakes his head to clear his mind.

Beat.

There I am, standing in front of his desk. Standing and waiting like a schoolboy. Finally, he looks up.

"Oh, yes. William," he says. "Walter." "What?" "Walter." "Very well. Walter. We don't know each other, Walter. I don't know you. You don't me." That's true, I thought.

I watched while he looked for a document in his filing tray. Trimmed beard, dark suit, carefully loosened tie. I find it difficult to estimate the age of the young. Mid-thirties maybe? About the age that George would have been. Might have been.

"I don't know exactly what it is you do in the company," he says, "and I don't know how well — or badly — you do it. But, in situations like this, when a company's in trouble — serious trouble — I've always found it best to bring in people I've worked with before. People I know and can trust to do the job."

In situations like this? How many times has he found himself in a situation like this? Once? Twice? Three times at the most.

Before his arrival, HR sent out an email to the whole company. The subject line read: "Turnaround Whiz-Kid to join Siskin & Mooney". It continued: "Following Mr Quirk's recent departure to pursue other interests ..."

Another panic move by the Directors, I thought. HR's email created a stir among the boys in the workshop and the girls in the office. Everyone hopes for a saviour, don't they?

The 'Whiz-Kid' label can't have pleased him too much. He shut down the HR department the day he arrived. Outsourced the function. That's what company saviours do, isn't it?

"I couldn't find your name on the organisation chart," he says. "No, you won't find me there." "You do work for the company, don't you?" (His little joke.) "For the present I do," I said. (My little joke.) A hollow pause. Jokes, it seems, should only flow one way.

"Very well. What exactly is your job title?" "I've had so many over the years," I said, "but I don't think I have one at the moment." "A job description then?" "No." "I see." No, I thought. No, you don't see.

Train approaching from a distance.

Beat.

"Take a seat, Walter. Make yourself comfortable." That's what Mr Mooney always used to say. Very 'old school'. "I can rely on you, Walter, can't I?" "Yes, Mr Mooney," I said. "You see, we can't let the taxman take it all, can we?" "No, Mr Mooney." "So I'm leaving you to manage the company's 'discretionary' accounts." "Yes, Mr Mooney." "No need to tell anyone else." "No, Mr Mooney." "And you'll enjoy those day trips to Zurich, won't you, Walter?" "Yes, Mr Mooney."

Deposits in the good times. Withdrawals in the bad. The entries hidden in the company's perfectly-balanced books.

"If things get difficult, Walter," Mr Mooney would say, "you won't desert me, will you? Don't go joining the French Foreign Legion!" (Mr Mooney's little joke.) "And don't throw yourself under a train." (Mr Mooney's other little joke. He didn't know, of course. How could he? I never told anyone.) "Don't worry, Mr Mooney," I'd say. "I won't be using my season ticket to take the train to Fort Zinderneuf. Not yet awhile."

Mr Mooney would chuckle and call down for his chauffeur; and I'd go back to my office where I'd stay a little longer every evening. Postponing the moment. The time when I'd have to go home.

Another train roars through the station.

"Your boy, George," said Mr Mooney. "He's applied for a job in the workshop." "Yes, Mr Mooney." "But he's not like his dad, is he, Walter? A bit 'troubled', isn't he?" "Yes, Mr Mooney." "To tell you the truth, Walter, I don't feel he'd be safe in the workshop." "No, Mr Mooney. I don't think he would."

Our boy. So much more 'troubled' than we thought.

I don't blame Denise. I don't blame myself. Denise did what she had to do. There are people who need to share their grief, and others who need to grieve alone.

Beat.

Mr Mooney saw the writing on the wall. Sales falling. Costs rising. He sold all his shares, and I went to Zurich to make a final withdrawal for him. "I don't need it all, Walter," he said. "Only enough to pay for the yacht." And off he sailed into the sunset.

I'd have liked him to come to say goodbye in person, but he left me a note instead: "Everyone's relying on you, Walter. The boys in the workshop and the girls in the office. Keep things going for as long as you can. Don't even think about Fort Zinderneuf!"

Mr Mooney's protégé, Mr Simpson, was out of his depth from the start. Not a clue what to do. A rabbit in the headlights. I knew he wouldn't last.

Mr Quirk was smart, sharp, streetwise. And a crook. He sniffed about a bit but he couldn't unearth the 'discretionary' accounts. He embezzled what he could and then he left 'to spend more time with his family'.

Beat.

Denise still can't bring herself to speak to me. That's what her sister tells me whenever I call. Denise must believe I'm somehow to blame. Her sister certainly does. Having someone to blame helps relieve the pain, I suppose. Yes, it's unfair but life's unfair. Death, too, for that matter.

A train approaching from a distance.

There were evenings when I'd find myself standing closer and closer to the edge of the platform. Then I'd remember the boys in the workshop and the girls in the office. "Everyone's relying on you, Walter."

Another train roars through the station. Pause.

"How long did you say you've worked for Siskin & Mooney?" he says. "Forty years." "As long as that? Well, as I'm sure you realise, the company's in no position to be generous."

I'd come to hand over the folder. The one I had in my briefcase. The keys, the codes, the aliases, the passwords. I thought I should. But I didn't have a chance because now it was he who was handing me an envelope. "Details of your settlement," he says. "And a cheque. Take it away. Open it later. And don't spend it all at once!" Another little joke.

Walter picks up his briefcase and takes out an envelope.

"Think of it as a new beginning," he says. "I'm sorry?" "A new beginning." That's when I changed my mind. "No," I said. "No. I'm going to think of it as an ending."

Walter tears up the envelope and throws it onto the tracks.

That didn't please him at all. When I left his office, he didn't stand up or offer to shake my hand.

Beat.

I know. It'll be hard for the boys in the workshop and the girls in the office. But — if they can only open their eyes — they'll see they have their lives in front of them. *(taking out the folder and throwing it onto the tracks)* Besides, what's left in Zurich wouldn't have lasted very long.

A train approaching from a distance.

(looking to his left) You were right to rely on me, Mr Mooney. I didn't desert my post. *(looking to his right)* Deep down you must know your sister's wrong, Denise. You must know I cared as much as you did. I did. I do. But I couldn't find a way to show it. I've been holding on, Denise. Holding on, Mr Mooney. Holding on for as long as I could.

(looking left) George? *(looking right)* George?

Noise of the train, louder and louder.

George ... George ...

Walter hurls his briefcase onto the tracks.

Crescendo.

THE END