



THE NEW MASTER

By
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DRAKE

"HOW dare you, sir?"
"I don't think I understand you, Doctor Tasker. How dare I?"

"Don't seek to evade me in casuistry, sir. I said how dare you, and I mean how dare you."

Mr Paget, the Fourth Form master, could not repress a shade of annoyance passing over his face.

"You have been taking sustenance to a boy who is under my displeasure, and have wilfully broken the rules of the school, and my express wishes in this matter are deliberately set aside . . ."

"If you mean that I have taken some food to a little lad whom you are treating brutally, I assure you I shall know how to reply to you," said Mr Paget, unable to restrain himself any longer. "I am not aware it is the rule at St Mary's to starve boys—."

"Do you mean then to add impertinence and insolence to your already unpardonable conduct? Then hear me. You can go at once, sir. Leave the college!" roared the angry pedagogue.

"As you will, Doctor Tasker," returned the master with a slight inclination of the head. "You have made yourself as unpleasant as possible to me for some time now because I could not help but take the part of the boy, Harold Lonsdale—."

"Enough of this, sir," thundered the angry Head. "I warn you to be gone lest I forget myself!"

"I will go with pleasure, Doctor Tasker. But you must hear what I have to say first."

"I will not."

"You will."

The Head strode to the bell to give the

alarm. Like a flash Paget was in front of him.

"Do you mean to persist in this folly then, Mr Paget," hissed the angry man, almost white with rage. "Am I to use force to you, sir?"

"Whatever you do, I am determined that you shall hear me. It is strange to hear the headmaster of St Mary's talking of using force, but I can only remind you that I am a strange man, Doctor Tasker—and I could use force too, when it is necessary—."

"Have done with your absurd prating, sir—."

"Certainly, sir. Then you will listen?"

The pedagogue did not reply.

With chest heaving, face pale as death, he stood clenching his hands like a wild animal at bay.

"I took a little food to Harold Lonsdale," said Mr Paget, quietly. "Because I have reason to believe that it is the first meal he has had to-day."

Doctor Tasker started.

"How do you know?" he snarled. "But what am I thinking of?" he laughed scornfully, making for the bell rope again. "I'll soon see who's master here, you upstart with a pedigree—."

"If you make another step, I'll knock you down!" said Mr Paget, in a quick tone like a rifle shot.

His warning had its effect on the elder man. Gritting his teeth he went back to his old position.

"Now," said George Paget. "You must listen. I am going away from here. I would have given the place up long ago if it hadn't been for that boy, and, Doctor Tasker, have a

care what you're about. If that boy is hurt after I go, be assured you will hear about it, and be made to smart for it. I am quite aware who has put him under your care, and I think I know the person's object, so take my advice in the spirit I give and be more kindly towards him."

A contemptuous smile flitted over the headmaster's face.

"I shall inform the police about you, sir," he began.

"I have a remedy for that Doctor Tasker, and I advise you not to attempt anything of the kind. The police have a way of inquiring into these things, and they may not be so kind to you as I am."

Doctor Tasker sneered.

"Your language is grotesquely inflated, Mr Paget," he said. "You have evidently been listening to gossip and you wish to frighten me."

"Gossip or not, I know that Lord Revelle, failing this boy, is heir to the Lonsdale estates."

"And—what of that, pray, Mr Paget," said the schoolmaster, who almost tottered.

"Only that the authorities would not like you to feed so distinguished a pupil as Harold Lonsdale on bread and water—"

"Sir!"

"To thrash him for every trifling offence."

"I'll stand no more of this," roared Doctor Tasker, this time reaching the bell rope. "Will you desist, sir, or am I to ring?"

"And confine him to the punishment room until the lad is quite ill," pursued George Paget relentlessly.

The infuriated man gave the bell-rope such a tug that the lever gave way and the thing fell clattering to the floor.

"I give you five minutes to get out of St Mary's," he hissed. "Jarvis will be here in a moment and I shall send him for assistance."

"It may interest you to know that Jarvis has been gone to the village this half-hour."

"You cur!"

"Take care, Doctor Tasker."

"You—"

But the gleam in George Paget's eyes effectually restrained the head of St Mary's.

Flinging a look of mortal hatred at his enemy, he banged the door open with his clenched fist.

"You shall repent this," he said.

And without another word he strode off to his study.

George Paget soon completed his packing, and when the Head came up to his room he was in the act of leaving it.

"Here you are, my men," said Doctor Tasker to the returned Jarvis, and the gardener who accompanied him. "You will see this person off the premises. There's your wages in place of the usual notice," he continued to Paget, as he tendered a cheque.

"Will you carry my bag as far as the gates, Jarvis, please?"

The headmaster fumed at this use of the house-porter, and the polite tone of the Fourth Form master stung him to the quick.

"Hang him!" he muttered under his breath, as he regained his study. "The presuming puppy to lecture me in my own place. But I'll—I'll—"

And resolving to act, Doctor Tasker sat down to write to the Agency for another master, complaining at the same time of the conduct of Mr George Paget. "I shall have to take the Fourth myself to-morrow," he mused as he finished the letter.

In due course the new master arrived.

The irascible headmaster was also informed by the agency that they were inquiring into the case of Mr George Paget.

"I hope our relations will be happier, Mr McDermott," said the Head after he had given the new man an idea of what qualities he most disliked in a Fourth-Form master.

"I hope so sir," replied the keen-looking man who sat opposite him in his study. "Are there any juniors whose conduct requires—?"

"Excuse me," interrupted Doctor Tasker, "I think I can anticipate you. There are several who require to be well-watched."

And the tormentor of Harold Lonsdale went on to explain his treatment of several youths among whom Harold was mentioned.

But McDermott, with the sharpness of his race, easily discerned that the impression desired was that Harold Lonsdale was really the person to be watched.

"By the way. Have you met Mr Paget?" queried the Head, as he rose to terminate the interview.

"I have met him, sir," returned the other in a very non-committal tone.

"Just so. Well I wish you better success, Mr McDermott."

"Thank you sir."

And the Irishman bowed himself out.

There was a curious glitter in his eye as he went to his room, and it being too late in the day to begin his tutorial duties he went out to make an inspection of the school.

He was interested in many things, but strangely enough he seemed to want to linger in the vicinity of the punishment room.

The juniors were bitterly disappointed at losing Mr Paget.

But though the new master was at first taken very cautiously, before the day was over the boys realised that he was a "good sort" too.

But their hopes were dashed to the ground when after a week it could not be denied that he, too, was interested in the case of Harold Lonsdale.

"He'll not last long," they said. "And it's a jolly shame."

Doctor Tasker, however, had somewhat profited by George Paget's lecture.

His thrashings of Lonsdale had almost ceased, or were really very light since the old Fourth Form master left.

"And that's something anyhow," said Berry Fay, the leader of the Fourth. "I say. I think what I heard Jarvis say one day, must be true, chaps."

"Then Paget laid it down to him before he went?" said several youths.

"Yes."

"Hope so," rejoined the lads, heartily. "The leathering of Lonsdale has gone on quite long enough."

But the new form master had been seen talking with Lonsdale.

"This must be stopped at once," said the Head to himself as he saw them together. "They are far too intimate for pupil and master."

Precisely how he should do it, Doctor

Tasker had not yet decided.

His experience with George Paget had not improved his confidence in being able to do what he liked with his assistants. "I must think out something crushing," he thought.

"We will talk of this again, Lonsdale," Mr McDermott was saying, meanwhile, in the quadrangle.

"Yes, sir. And thank you so very much. But I hope you will excuse me saying that the last master of our form lost his position through taking so much notice of me, sir."

"That is all right, Lonsdale, thank you," returned the sharp looking man. "I shall not lose my place. We will have another talk after tea to-day if you will come to my study."

"I shall be delighted, sir."

"Very good. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

But Harold Lonsdale did not keep his appointment.

Early in the afternoon he was told to present himself in the Head's study, and he did not appear in class again that day.

Nor on inquiry by the new master, had any of the juniors seen him at tea.

"Aha!" said McDermott, as a short time afterwards he found the door of the passage that led to the punishment room locked. "So that is your little game, Doctor Tasker, is it?"

And taking a key from his pocket he noiselessly entered the passage.

Half a minute sufficed for him to get to the punishment room, and entering that in turn he found Harold Lonsdale groaning on the floor.

"Mr McDermott!"

"Do not be surprised or alarmed, my lad," said the Irishman quietly. "Now tell me what is the meaning of this. What have you done?"

"Nothing, sir."

The form master seemed not unprepared for the reply. "Well tell me what happened, Lonsdale."

The poor lad with a great effort pulled himself together. "You saw how I was sent for of course, sir?" he began.

McDermott nodded.

"Well, sir. As soon as he saw me—oh, I beg you will not say anything, sir. I really meant to say the Head. The Head told me to go before him to the punishment room, and after he had locked the door he flogged me till he was breathless."

"And you are to be kept here with only that bread and water to eat till to-morrow morning, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. He said he had warned me times without number and—."

"That will do, Lonsdale. I think I know the rest. I'm afraid I cannot get you some tea without it's causing suspicion, but I'll see that you have your proper bed to-night. And a proper meal, too."

"Oh sir! You'll lose your—."

"Make the best you can of the German, Lonsdale. I know you are only just beginning the study of that language. But it's as well not to give the Head any further cause for thrashing you, and leave—the rest to me," said Mr McDermott quickly rising.

"Certainly, sir."

And late that night Harold Lonsdale was spirited to his bed and he sank into a troubled sleep as he thought that there were some good masters in St Mary's after all.

To say that Doctor Tasker was surprised to see Harold Lonsdale in class next morning, would be mild.

"Come here, sir," he roared as he caught sight of his victim.

"Stop where you are, Lonsdale."

As Harold Lonsdale hesitated a silence as of death fell on the whole school.

"Mr McDermott!" expostulated the schoolmaster when he had gained control of himself. "What can you be thinking of? Lonsdale, come here at once!"

Force of habit made the junior move forward a step or two, when the quick dry

voice of the Form Master rapped out once more. "Stay where you are, my lad."

For a moment the infuriated headmaster was speechless with amazement.

"I have had quite enough of interference from under-masters in the past, Mr McDermott," he said through his clenched teeth, picking up his cane as he strode towards the trembling lad. "But I will show you both who is master here!"

And without more ado the angry man lifted his cane to strike McDermott.

Quick as lightening the new master dodged the blow and seizing Doctor Tasker's wrists his disengaged hand flashed to and from his hip pocket.

There was a sharp click and the school was electrified to see that the cad was securely handcuffed.

"What is the meaning of this tom-foolery, sir?" bellowed the pedagogue. "Release me at once, I say. Mr Stretton! Mr Beasely! Assist me, if you please!"

"If they can," returned McDermott complacently.

"You can go, sir," went on the Head.

"And I'll take you with me."

All at once the truth dawned on the schoolmaster and he sank into a chair, with an ashen face. "What am I arrested for?" he said endeavouring to preserve as much dignity as he could.

"For cruelty and persecution to this boy. Your accomplice, Lord Revelle, has been watched by us as well and—."

"You really are the—?"

"New master—from Scotland Yard," said Detective Officer McDermott bowing.

And a few minutes later Doctor Tasker was conducted out of his own school for good—the "new master," on one side and a police officer on the other.



THE END

