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*THIS IS AUSTRALIA'S FAMOUS MAGAZINE FOR BOYS!*

# The Carcroft Cad!

By FRANK RICHARDS



SMACK!

Roger ought not to have done it. Nobody knew that better than Roger himself, a moment later.

But he did it.

He smacked Levett's head!

They did not smack heads at Carcroft. It was not done. It was quite unknown. Offenders were whopped, sometimes quite severely; the sound of cane meeting trousers was by no means uncommon. But a fellow's head was never smacked. The oldest inhabitant had never seen it happen; Roger, in fact, made history that morning at the door of the Burrow.

It was rather unfortunate that Roger came along at that moment. There was a little crowd of the Fourth round about the doorway of the junior day-room. Levett, of that Form, was by way of being an artist. Often he drew caricatures of the beaks which were quite clever, and made the fellows laugh; but which were, of course, never displayed to the eye of authority. This time Levett had pictured no less a person than Roger himself, in the act of whopping a hapless junior, with an expression of ferocity on his face that rivalled the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner. It was quite well drawn, and the juniors thought it funny, and they were all laughing as Levett held up his work of art for inspection.

Perhaps it was the loud laughter that drew Roger's attention. Nobody expected Roger there. It was the unexpected that happened.

Had Roger's cane been under his

arm no doubt he would have told Levett to bend over and touch his toes. But his cane was in his study. And he acted hastily. Only too clearly, a moment later, he realised that himself. But then it was too late. On the spur of the moment, he smacked Levett's head.

It was a sounding smack. It rang like a rifle-shot. Louder still rang Levett's startled yell, as he staggered under the smack.

"Oh!" gasped all the fellows present.

Only a moment before they had been laughing. But there was no sign of merriment now. Sudden gravity descended upon them.

Levett put his hand to his head. No doubt he had a pain there. An awful moment of dead silence followed. Roger's face was a study—first red, then pale. Every fellow knew that he instantly regretted that hasty smack. But what he had done, he had done.

For a moment, which seemed like an age, he stood; then he turned and rustled away, not even giving attention to the offending picture still clutched in Levett's hand.

"Oh, gum!" murmured Bob Drake. "Did you ever—!"

"Well, Levett was asking for it!" remarked Vane-Carter. "But smacking a fellow's head—that's the limit!"

"The rotten brute!" breathed Levett. "I wish the Head could have seen him! I'd like to know what the Head would think—!"

"Oh, rot!" said Harry Compton. "Roger lost his temper for a minute. After all, if you guy a beak—!"

"You've got off cheap really," remarked Dick Lee. "It would have been six on the bags if Roger had had his cane handy."

"He can't smack a fellow's head!" snarled Levett.

"Nothing in it to damage, old bean," said Bob. "And as for smacking heads, you smacked Turkey's head yesterday."

"So you jolly well did, Levett!" exclaimed Turkey Tuck, warmly, "and I'm jolly glad that Roger smacked yours, so yah!"

"If the Head knew—!" muttered Levett viciously.

"Oh, can it!" grunted Bob, "nothing to do a song and dance about. Roger's a good old bean, even if he does boil over every now and then. Forget it."

Levett gave the Carcroft Co. a bitter look.

"You fellows can grease up to Roger, if you like," he said, between his teeth, "but I'll make him sorry for smacking my head—you'll see. He got me just over the eye—I shouldn't wonder if it goes black—"

"Rot!"

"Rubbish!"

"Can it!"

Levett stamped away—still with his hand to his head. There was little sympathy in the looks the Carcroft juniors cast after him. Levett, evidently, was going to make the most of this incident—he had many old scores against Roger. Roger made him work—which Levett hated. Roger had whopped him for smoking in his study; and Levett hated whoppings even more than work. By losing his



temper and smacking Levett's head, Roger had, so to speak, delivered himself into the hand of the enemy—and Levett was not the fellow to let his chances, like the sunbeams, pass him by. He went slowly toward the staircase, his hand pressed to his head—which was certain to draw attention.

Langley of the Sixth called to him.

"What's the matter with you, Levett? Have you hurt your head?"

"No, Langley! Mr. Ducas hurt it!" answered Levett.

"WHAT!" ejaculated the captain of Carcroft.

"Mr. Ducas smacked my head—"

"Don't talk rot!" snapped Langley.

"A lot of fellows saw him."

Langley stared at him, and turned away without answering. Levett, suppressing a grin, went on up the staircase, his hand still to his head, over his eye. A dozen fellows stared at him as he went.

Levett went on to his study. The door of No. 7 Study in the Fourth closed on him, and he was not seen again till the bell rang for class. In the quad, the Carcroft Co. discussed the matter.

"Poor old Roger!" said Bob, "jevver see a man look such an ass—the minute after he'd done it! Any fellow but Levett would let it drop."

"That cad will spread it all over Carcroft!" said Compton.

"He'd like old Roger to be called over the coals by the Big Beak," said Bob. "Look here, let's kick him before we go in to class."

"Good. Let's!" agreed the Co.

But when they saw Levett again there was a surprise—so surprising that they quite forgot to kick Levett.

"GREAT pip!"

"What the dickens—!"

"Oh, haddocks!" gasped Turkey. "Levett's got a black eye!"

"Phew!"

The Fourth were gathered at their form-room door, waiting for Roger to come along and let them in. All eyes turned on Levett as he came up the passage, last on the spot. All eyes fixed on him, in amazement, almost in horror. Herbert Levett, of the Fourth Form, had a black eye!

He had said that he believed that it was going black. Now it had gone black. Purplish black was all round Levett's right eye. It was black, but far from comely! Like the sable arms of the rugged Pyrrhus, it did the night resemble!

"Levett!" gasped Harry Compton, "what—what—look here, how did you get a black eye?"

"You know how I got it!" grunted Levett.

"You've had an accident—since—?" began Bob.

"I haven't had any accident—since!" sneered Levett, "Roger's paw got me just over the eye, and he's blacked it. Nice state for a fellow to be in, because his beak can't keep his temper."

Vane-Carter whistled.

"Oh, gad! Fancy Roger's face—when he sees that!" he murmured.

"Here he comes!" breathed Bob.

There was a tense silence as the portly figure of Mr. Roger Ducas appeared in the passage. He came up to the form-room door, and unlocked it—not, for the moment, noticing Levett in the crowd. The juniors went in and took their places, in a state of barely repressed excitement. They wondered what would happen when Roger noticed that black eye.

Undoubtedly, Roger would desire that head-smacking incident to be forgotten as soon as possible. It could not fall into oblivion too soon. But it could not be forgotten—it could not fall into oblivion—now that it had resulted in a black eye for the fellow whose head he had smacked.

Black eyes were rare—very rare indeed—at Carcroft. A black eye was certain to leap to all other eyes. Every boy and every master at Carcroft would know, sooner or later, that the master of the Fourth had given a member of his form a black eye! It was awful to think of.

Bob Drake whispered to Levett as he went to his place:

"Look here, Levett, don't be a rotter! Roger will be awfully sick. Spin a yarn about a punch-ball like a decent chap."

Levett's only reply was a sneer.

Mr. Ducas glanced sharply over his class. He was aware at once of something unusual in the atmosphere of his form-room. Then he spotted Levett's eye. He gave a sudden start, and both of his own eyes seemed to pop at Levett's eye.

"Levett!" Roger's voice was not quite so firm as usual. "What is the matter with your eye?" Evidently he was deeply perturbed.

"I'm afraid it's gone black, sir!" said Levett, meekly. "It's not my fault, sir—I couldn't help it going black."

"Have you had an accident, Levett?"

"No, sir."

"You have been fighting!" said Mr. Ducas sternly; but all the Fourth knew that this sternness was not the genuine article. They knew that Roger knew as well as they did where Levett had got that black eye.

"Oh no, sir!" answered Levett, "It was when you hit me, sir—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"When you hit me this morning, sir, at the door of the day-room!" said Levett, with cat-like meekness.

Roger seemed to choke for a moment.

Every fellow in the form-room—with the exception of the cheery Levett—felt sorry for Roger. It was an awful position for a beak. He had smacked Levett's head—a hasty smack. Levett chose to describe it as "hitting" him. And Roger, in the peculiar circumstances, had to let Levett get by with that.

The subject dropped at once.

Probably Roger, just then, would have liked to give the injured youth the toughest "six" that ever had been administered at Carcroft School. But, of course, he couldn't. He could only ignore Levett—which he did.

But Levett was not easy to ignore. He had his beak, in fact, in the hollow of his hand; and he was the fellow to rub it in. During the hour's lesson, Levett made it a point to put his hand to his head, not once but many times. Every now and then he breathed a low moan or gasp.

Perhaps he hoped that Roger would dismiss him from the form-room—Levett would much rather have smoked a cigarette in his study. But Roger seemed blind and deaf. He passed Levett over in the lesson—that was so much to the good, from Levett's point of view. Otherwise he remained grimly unconscious of him till the hour was up.

But as the Fourth filed out, Levett paused to speak.

"Please, sir—" he began meekly.

"Well?"

"May I go to the matron and ask for something for my eye, sir?"

Roger breathed hard—so hard, that his form expected an explosion. But he answered quietly:

"You may, Levett."

"Thank you, sir!" said Levett, demurely.

And he followed the form out—smiling.

"STOP him!"

"Hold on, Levett!"

"You rotter, hold on!"

Harry Compton and Co. all exclaimed together, as they cut after Herbert Levett in the quad.

After class, Levett was taking his black eye for a walk!

Many fellows adorned with a discoloured eye would have chosen to keep it from the public gaze. Not so Levett. He fairly paraded that black eye. Half Carcroft had seen it already—and the other half were going to see it.



It was spreading like wildfire through the school, that a Fourth form man's beak had given him a black eye. It was so unheard-of an occurrence that it did not merely interest—it thrilled Carcroft. Fellows of all forms came to look at Levett. Fags of the Third and Second almost mobbed him. Even great men of the Sixth went out of their way to glance at him. Fellows passed on the news breathlessly in studies and passages; Levett's beak had blacked his eye!

Roger, glancing from his study window, could see Levett. It was easy for fellows to guess what Roger was feeling like. Levett was putting him through it—quite an unusual and happy experience for Levett in dealing with his form master! Ragging Roger was, as a rule, about as safe an amusement as twisting a tiger's tail. But Levett was getting away with it. What could Roger do? Absolutely nothing. A fellow could walk in the quad after class, if he liked; and if he had a black eye, naturally he had to take it with him. He couldn't leave it in his study! Roger's glance wandered occasionally to Levett in the quad, and his feelings, probably, were deep. But he had to "take it."

Harry Compton and Co., and other fellows who did not share Levett's grudge against a form master who made fellows work, gave him rather grim looks. Levett did not care—rather, the disapproval of the Carcroft Co. added zest to his enjoyment of the situation. But when, at length, the proprietor of the only black eye at Carcroft strolled, in a casual sort of way, past the window of the Head's study, the Co. went into action. They knew Levett's game—Dr. Whaddon was to see that black eye.

There could be little doubt that the head, if he saw it, would be startled and shocked to behold a Carcroft fellow with so unusual an adornment. It was practically certain that he would make an inquiry—and his inquiry would be made of the boy's form-master. Roger's position would be quite excruciating.

That appealed to Levett. It did not appeal to fellows who, upon the whole, rather liked old Roger; and who, in this queer matter, were kindly taking him under their benevolent protection. They cut after Levett, encircled him, and he had to stop.

"You can cut that out, Levett!" said the captain curtly.

"Right out—unless you want another black eye to match that one!" growled Bob.

"I suppose I can walk where I like!" said Levett.

"Yes—if you like to walk our way!" said Lee. "Come on!"

Levett did not want to come on. But the Carcroft Co. had persuasive methods, and he turned his back on the Head's study window. With the three round him, he walked back as far as the fountain in the quad—a safe distance.

"Now," said Compton, "get this clear, Levett! You're not going to show off that black eye to the Big Beak. Got that?"

"Mind your own business!" suggested Levett.

"Will you steer clear of the Head?" demanded Compton.

"No!" answered Levett coolly. "I won't."

"Will you stay this side of the fountain?"

"No."

"Will you go into the House?"

"No!"

"I think you will!" said the captain of the Fourth. "Duck his head in the fountain, you men—I fancy he'll go in then; he'll want a towel."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three pairs of hands propelled Levett to the big granite basin, in which was a foot of water. He struggled frantically. Certainly it was not pleasant to have one's head ducked in water. But Levett's alarm seemed really extraordinary. He could hardly have become more excited, if the Carcroft Co. had been proposing to drown him in the fountain. He struggled, he twisted, he yelled, he howled.

"I say—leggo—I'll go—I—I—yaroooooch!"

Splash!

What Levett was trying to say was cut off, sharply, as his face disappeared under water. His incoherent remarks terminated in a wild gurgle.

COMPTON! Drake! Lee! Release Levett instantly. How dare you. Such a scene as this in the quad—angle—!"

It was Roger.

Ragging in the quad was against all the rules. Ducking a fellow's head in the fountain was really miles beyond the limit. The Carcroft Co. had rather forgotten that, in the urge of the moment. They were reminded of it by Roger's sharp bark. Levett, splashing, spluttering, kicking, gurgling, had drawn a crowd round. And he had drawn Roger.

"Oh!" gasped the three.

They released Levett instantly, as

bidden. Levett stood spluttering breathlessly, water streaming down his face and into his collar. He blinked with watery eyes. Roger gave him a look—and jumped.

It was the first time that the Carcroft Fourth had ever seen their beak jump. But they saw it now. Roger jumped—almost clear of the ground. His eyes fastened on Levett's face as if glued there.

"Wha-a-t—?" he fairly gasped.

For a moment, the juniors did not know what was the matter with Roger. Then they saw what he had seen, and there was a howl of amazement. All eyes popped at Levett's face. On that face, mingled with the streaming water, were inky streaks. And Levett's black eye had disappeared.

There was still a darkish tinge round that eye. But it was no longer black. The plunge in the water of the fountain had cured Levett's black eye—as if by magic.

Roger stood gazing at him—speechless. Roger was well known to be quick on the uptake; but, for a long moment, Roger was dumbfounded. Then he grasped it.

"Levett!" You young rascal! You had no black eye—upon my word!—your eye was—was discoloured by ink—INK! You inked your eye, Levett, to make it appear black—you—you—you!" Roger fairly stuttered.

Harry Compton and Co. goggled at Levett. They had not the slightest suspicion. Nobody had had any. Levett's black eye had looked quite natural—it had deceived even Roger's eagle eye. Not for a moment had it dawned on anybody that Levett had manufactured that black eye to take a rise out of Roger, in revenge for the smack on his head. But the truth was revealed now—now that the black eye had been washed off in the fountain.

"Levett!" gasped Roger. "Follow me to my study—at once!"

He strode to the House. Levett, in the lowest spirits, trailed after him, dripping as he went. They left the crowd in a roar behind them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Every fellow was laughing—excepting Levett. Levett did not feel like laughing, as he followed Roger into the House. Still less did he feel like it, in Roger's study, whence many ears heard the rhythmic sound of cane on trousers.

When Levett came out, grinning fellows asked him what it had been like. But Levett could not tell them—he was beyond words! For a long, long time, Levett seemed to be understudying the farmer of Hythē, who sat down on a scythe, and did nothing but wriggle and writhe.