

The Duke Gets Even

When a big-time racketeer shows off to a gold digger you can look for action, and here you have it in a rapid-fire short story



They all trooped after Mitchell . . . raced the motor, looked at the speedometer, felt the radiator. . . They could find no catch in it at all . . . but a brand-new Vernier Eight for a thousand dollars! . . . Something fishy!

By PATRICK S. BILKS
Illustrations By JOE KING

EUNICE laughed as she listened to the speed cop's motorcycle chug away back into the night.

Duke Mitchell, at her side, glared down at his speedometer. It was still, now, and at zero. He started to swear, but instead, raced the engine madly, snapped in the clutch and lurched back into the stream of cars headed down the Albany Post Road for New York City.

She mocked him. "So you're the little cop-squelcher, the duke, himself, in person—this is not a movie—and you let a hick town cop take a ten spot off you for doing over 35 miles an hour!"

He chose to ignore the last crack. "I was doing over 65. Anyway, Eunice, you know I can't afford to get into trouble with the law. It wouldn't help my game at all." His manner became boastful. "There's not a jail house in the East that's got my record, and I don't figure on giving them a chance to get me—at least not when a lousy ten-spot will keep me out of trouble."

He looked at her face in the dim glow of the dash light. There was something there he didn't like. He saw disbelief. And in spite of his 42 years, Duke Mitchell was a big school boy sticking out his chest and trying to shine up to his girl. He was goofy over Eunice.

SHE, on the other hand, could take her men or leave them. She was a prominent member in good standing of the Chorines' Protective Association and often graced the front lines of the more ritzy revues. Although she was a notorious gold digger, Eunice Bordell gave only big timers a tumble.

Mitchell had made his little pile and he was no fool. He was "laying low" for a while and enjoying the fruits of his labors. His last racket had been within the law—well, almost within the law—selling real estate by a clever system of misrepresentations, and he crowned his efforts by finally doing his partner, Sol Bronstein, out of his share of the profits. The mob laughed at Bronstein and slapped Mitchell on the shoulder.

Duke Mitchell first met her—five and a half feet of shimmering, blond beauty—at the opening of the Nine o'Clock Revels at the Gotham six months before and he had made the going pretty easy for her ever since. She was known to be his girl and now—now, he felt her slipping from him. He thought he detected contempt in her tone.

THAT burned the Duke up. He took it out on the accelerator. Sixty-five, 68, 71, 70, 73, 71—this kind of thing for over six miles, not even slowing down for crossings.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Eunice," he finally said, "I'm going to get that ten back with interest—ten thousand per cent. I mean ten thousand per cent! I'll make that hick town of Abington come through good and proper."

He went to bed with a well-worked-out plan of revenge on his mind. It was a dapper, youngish-looking man of 42, arrayed in pearl-gray topcoat and spats, who hummed a tune from the Nine o'Clock Revels as he waited impatiently at the paying teller's window of the Hudson River Trust Company on Broadway.

A short time later Duke Mitchell pushed jauntily out through the revolving doors of the bank and into the grimy sunlight of a Broadway Saturday morning. He stepped up to the curb and raised his cane to summon a taxicab.

He gave the cab driver the name of a "club" on West 49th street. The hackman knew the place and maneuvered through the mazes of traffic up to the door. Mitchell told him to wait.

PRESENTLY he emerged and ordered: "The Vernier Motor Salesroom—Gibbons' place. You know where it is?" The driver knew. "Sure, near Fifty-fort."

As the cab wormed through traffic Mitchell produced a small bottle from his inside pocket and took a sip. The fiery rye burned as it went down. He slipped the chauffeur a bill for a tip in full view of a group of salesmen in the window of the Gibbons-Vernier Company.

Would the salesman show him a car?

"How about that big yellow and maroon roadster in the window?" Duke asked, stepping over to examine it.

"Yes, sir. This is going to be the thing at all the resorts this winter. You know you can have any color combination."

"How much did you say this was? I mean cash."

"Thirty-eight eighty-five delivered equipped, sir."

"Well, I have special reasons for wanting this car delivered immediately. Is it all ready to be driven on the street right now?"

The salesman concealed his surprise behind a polite smile. "Ah—I believe so, sir. Are you ready to take it now?" The salesman appraised Duke's haberdashery and neatly-tailored appearance. He also caught the faint odor of the liquor on Mitchell's breath. A sport if there ever was one!

"YES, I'll pay cash. Will you take a check? Mitchell is the name—F. X. Mitchell." He added this as if the mere name should allay any years or doubts that might possibly enter an uncharitable mind.

He handed the bewildered salesman an engraved card and went on to explain rather hurriedly and with just the slightest touch of impatience that he was a silk buyer from Cleveland and that his wife had taken his car on an extended trip to Canada. He intended to go down to the tracks in Maryland and—well have a little fun here and there.

"Very well, sir. Just take a seat over here, please, while I have the mechanics look it over, fill the tank, and get everything ready."

The salesman went back to the shop and beckoned Mr. Long, junior partner of the firm, to follow. He directed the two mechanics to fill the tank and start the motor of the roadster. He then turned and explained the situation to his chief.

"He looks all right to me, Henry," he concluded.

"Oh, sure, he would look all right to you. But you know the rule of the house on checks, I personally, don't like his looks."

Together they approached Duke, who was sitting in an easy chair near the roadster.

As they came up he reached into his inside coat pocket and flashed forth a check book and a long, pink, authentic-looking slip of paper. He spoke before they did. His tone was soothing and seductive.

"You fellows needn't worry," he said, waving the pink slip. "This is a cashier's check on the Hudson River Trust Company. I can write you my personal check for the rest."

Mr. Long examined the check. It looked good. "It's a rule of the house that all checks must be verified before the goods are delivered. If you wouldn't mind—"

"Sure, sure, go ahead," Mitchell heartily agreed. "Call up the bank. Mr. Reed will tell you all about me. He's head teller there and knows me very well."

While Long called up the bank, the salesman eagerly, greedily made out the bill of sale. Duke Mitchell wrote a check for \$1385.

Yes, the account of Mr. F. X. Mitchell of Cleveland ran well over \$10,000. A cashier's check for \$2500 had been issued to him that morning. The account was over a year's standing. Everything was satisfactory.

IN a very short time Duke Mitchell was feeling his way up congested Fifth Avenue. The long, shiny beauty throbbed under his careful pressure on the accelerator.

He stopped at an inn just north of Yonkers and sat down to a rather elaborate meal. Everything from soup to nuts. He had plenty of time. Just two o'clock. Give the bank employes plenty of time to go home. Mitchell always made sure everything was "in the bag" before he started anything.

It was late in the afternoon when Duke Mitchell pulled up outside the expansive window of the Vernier Sales Company of Abington-on-the-Hudson. He climbed out of the roadster and walked briskly into the salesroom. A tall, blond young man with a varsity-football-team look about him came forward.

"Who's in the market for a good car?" began Duke, cheerfully aggressive. "A thousand dollars cash takes that brand-new Vernier Eight roadster out there in front. I just bought it this morning. I got to get back to Chicago quick and I need cold cash. You'll never get a buy like that in your life again. Go out and look her over. She hasn't done 45 miles yet."

They all trooped out after Mitchell and, in turn, raced the motor, looked at the speedometer, examined the tires, lifted the hood and felt the radiator.

"Can't tell much by the speedometer," Walt whispered one of his cronies. "You know they can fix them things so that it don't show no mileage at all."

Walt finally looked up at Mitchell.

"Say, mister, she sure looks O. K. to me. What is the matter with it? Split cylinder block or something?"

"The car is exactly as I bought it this morning. I paid \$3885 for it and I'm willing to let it go right now if someone shows me \$1000 cash. Here's the bill of sale and everything."

They all sized him up curiously as he handed the yellow piece of paper to Walt. They peeped over Walt's shoulder to read it. The Gibbons Company of New York. Witnessed and everything. Something fishy. Must be one of those Chicago racketeers. A brand new Vernier Eight sport roadster for a thousand dollars! Walt hedged:

"I haven't got a thousand dollars myself but I can get you five hundred now and five hundred—say tomorrow."

Duke frowned as he answered: "Get the five hundred and then we'll talk business."

"I'll see what I can do, mister. Go inside and have a seat. I'm going to run up the street to see a friend of mine. I think he can fix me up."

WALT disappeared into a florist shop on the next block. Five minutes later he was hurrying down the street back to the salesroom.

After a bit of stalling Walt asked Mitchell if he could drive it around a little. Sure thing, Mitchell went with him and he took a few turns up and down the road. He passed the salesroom five times, then drew up again at the curb.

"I think she'll do," said Walt reflectively. "Let's go inside and I'll make up a bill of sale for you."

As Duke stepped inside the door he was seized on both sides by the wrists and, in less time than it takes to tell it, manacles were snapped on him by two brass-buttoned members of the Abington township police. He struggled faintly and cursed his captors.

"Not so fast, big boy, not so fast," spoke up one of the officers. They both gave him a quick but thorough frisking. They found no weapons. They plainly showed their disappointment and pushed him violently toward a chair.

"Sit down there," growled the officer. "Oh, you guys are brave, aren't you? Pushing a poor defenseless citizen around. Take these bracelets off, you stupid donkeys. What did I do to deserve this treatment?"

"That's what we're going to find out pretty soon, see." And the officer, a big, raw-boned fellow, pushed him in the face so hard that Mitchell's head whacked against the back of the chair. They were playing right into Duke's hands.

A SMALL crowd was gathering outside the window and some few came inside the store to allay their curiosity. Walt was trying to get the Gibbons-Vernier Motor Company on the wire.

"O hello. . . . This Gibbons-Vernier Company? . . . This is the Halliday Vernier Sales Company in Abington. . . . Abington-on-the-Hudson. . . . no, ABINGTON. . . . yes, that's it. . . ."

When Mr. Long at Gibbons learned that Mitchell was trying to sell the car for a thousand or less he burned up the wire. "Hold him, hold him," he shrieked. "He gave us checks in payment for that car this morning. Take care of the car, will you? He's from Chicago, is he? He told us he was a Cleveland business man. He's a crook, that's what he is!

"You took 'em over like Dempsey took Firpo, didn't you, honey?" Elaine attempted to smooth his wrinkled brow.



As Duke stepped inside the door . . . he was seized on both sides by the wrists . . . and manacles were snapped on. . . . Mitchell fought all the way to the station . . . and howled to high heaven.

I'll be up there myself Monday evening." Mitchell fought every foot of the way to the station house. His collar was torn off his neck and he was a sorry looking sight with his bloody nose. In vain did Duke protest that he had an important date in New York.

When he got to the jail Mitchell demanded a trial right then and there. They just laughed at him and slammed a cell door in his face.

He then started to raise his cries to high heaven. He played to perfection the part of the outraged citizen.

This finally got on the nerves of the keeper, who told him he'd sock Mitchell in the jaw if he didn't pipe down.

Mitchell dared him to sock away, and he did. Police had to come downstairs into the cell blocks to separate the two.

It was a moral victory for the Duke. Once more alone in his cell he rubbed his bruised jaw meditatively and reflected that they'd pay for all this, and through the nose.

The county papers carried stories of the "slyk Chicago gangster" that had tried to "pull a fast one on a prominent Abington business man." Two of them had editorials the next day warning New York and Chicago gangsters away from Westchester County. The New York Sunday papers copied the stories in part. Lots of fine publicity that Abington-on-the-Hudson would pay for later, and pay for dearly.

Sunday afternoon the "Duke" had two professional lawyers, Doctor Rinkind, before he left, had filled eight pages with notes on contusions, abrasions, shocks and what not—all suffered by the prisoner while in the hands of the Abington authorities.

Counselor-at-Law Marcus Soblow was, meanwhile, listening and questioning Duke Mitchell on matters of technical importance. They both took a most cordial leave of their client. The thing had run off like clock work.

LATE the next morning, the chief of police, a sadder and a wiser man, looked across his desk and over the brass rail that represented the bar of justice in Abington, at Connor, his lieutenant.

"Connor, I guess they just got us dead to rights on this business, but what's done is done. It gives us an awful black mark. There was no excuse for that rough stuff. They tell me that bird can collect plenty from this township and it looks like he's not going to leave any stone unturned."

"That quack doctor of his says his patient has become mentally unbalanced or something from the treatment we gave him. We know it's a lie, but what can we do? I'd like to give him a little treatment right now!"

"He can get a dozen witnesses to say that he's been raving ever since we arrested him. Crazy like a fox, that bird is!"

"Yeah, when they told me that the bank cashed the checks I knew it was all up. Those two cops ought to get a medal. Bright boys." Connor shook his head mournfully.

Outside the station house Duke Mitchell and Eunice, who had come up the night before, were holding a family reunion.

I wish they'd hurry up and bring that car. I'm sick of looking at this burg.

"A fine lot of high-binders," he snorted, his temper suddenly rising as he thought of the rough treatment he had had to undergo just to get even with a motor cop. Duke was used to getting his without any rough stuff, and his jaw was no more badly bruised than his pride. Eunice stroked his arm.

"Never mind, honey," she cooed, "you took the hayshakers for a ride all right, didn't you? You sure made good on that little promise!"

Duke Mitchell swelled visibly. "Ten thousand per cent," he muttered. "That's what I said I'd take 'em for, baby, and that's what I'm taking 'em for."

"Just leave it to Duke, baby. What he says he'll do, he'll do, and that includes the sweetest big time tonight at Ravanti's that you ever had."

"The only thing makes me sore is that it's the community that will have to pay, and not that wise cop. I wish he'd have to pay the damages personally. I don't suppose he'll even get demoted. Wise guy!"

"Well, anyway, he knows now when not to monkey with the buzz saw. . . . Duke cut himself short."

"Here comes the car now! Get a flash of that!" Duke enthused.

As he spoke, the long, underslung roadster, with polished nickel gleaming in the dull sunlight, eased silently along the curb and came to a stop in front of them. The uniformed police officer at the wheel got out and smiled up at Mitchell.

"SOME bus there, bud. Everything is just as you left it." Then he added sotto voice: "Even that half-pint of booze in the left-hand side pocket. There's a law against that, I think. Transportation, you know."

Duke was suddenly very pale around the gills. He remembered the rye he had bought Saturday. Ye gods, to think that everything should go wrong now at the last minute! Maybe he could—well, it was just a chance. He mumbled something about being "a regular guy."

"I'm a regular guy, all right," said the copper, "but that don't buy me my groceries. Think I'll have to pull ya in."

But even as he spoke he pulled out of the breast-pocket of his uniform a small booklet labeled "Police Traffic Rules and City Ordinances of Abington." He opened it and handed it to Mitchell.

Mitchell understood. He slid his right hand into his pants pocket, withdrew it, and, in the most unobtrusive manner imaginable, slipped a crisp ten dollar note between the pages of the booklet which he was pretending, all the while, to read. He handed the booklet back to the officer who took it with a dignified nod and said to Duke: "O. K. buddy; see y'again some time."

Mitchell drove without a word for the first few minutes, enjoying his new-found freedom. Then Eunice broke the silence. "Say, Duke, didn't you recognize that cop?" He looked at her with narrowed eyes. "That wasn't that motorcycle—yeah?"

All the way back to New York he drove like mad.



Although she was a notorious gold digger . . . Eunice Bordell gave only big-timers a tumble.