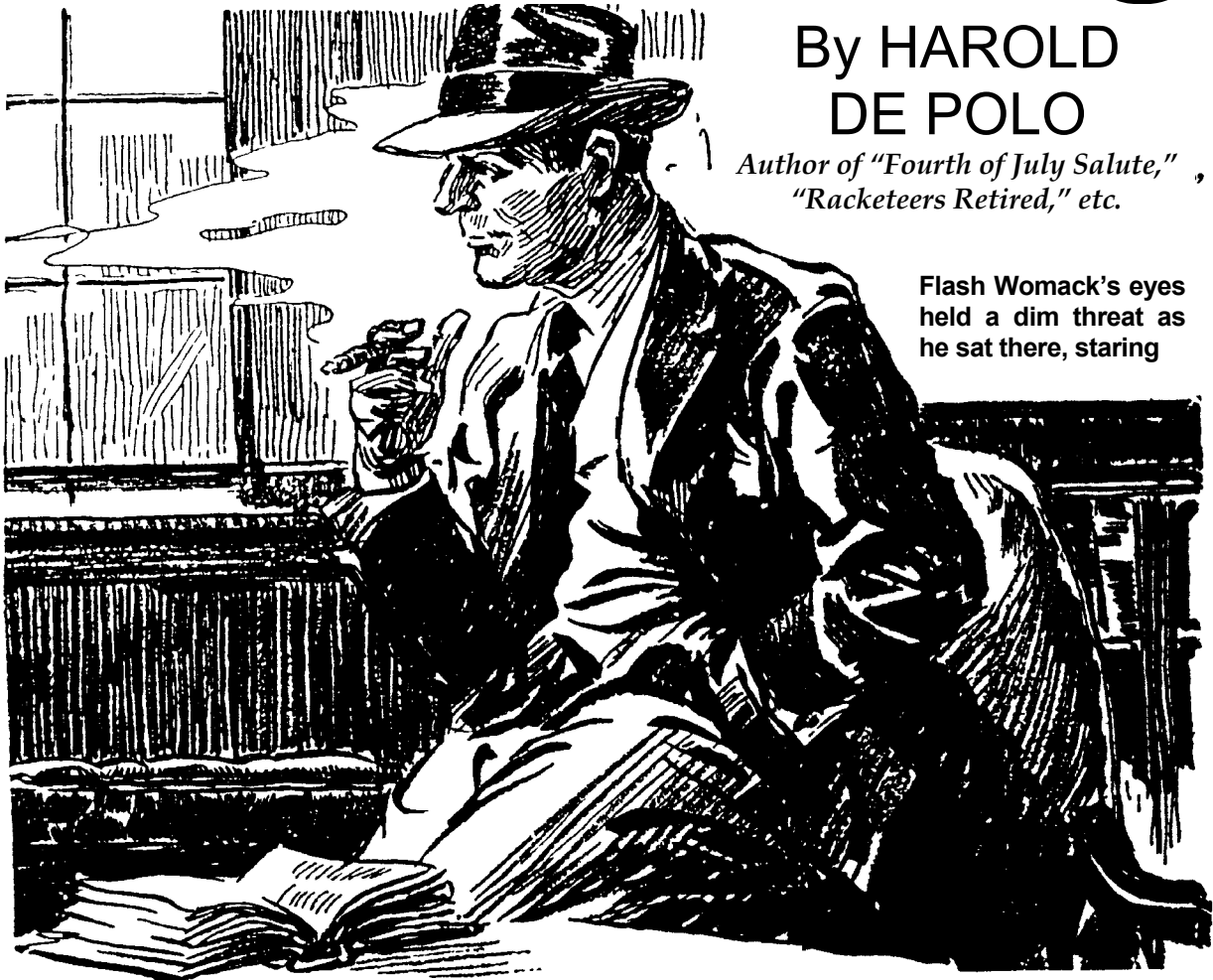


Good Fishing

By HAROLD
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"Racketeers Retired," etc.



Flash Womack's eyes
held a dim threat as
he sat there, staring

The Sheriff of Derby County Casts for Danger and Reels in a Heap of Big City Gangster Trouble!

SITTING on the top porch step of the general store and post office, Ollie Bascomb had an eager and interested audience this sultry summer morning. He was not, as might have been expected, recounting some exploit he had experienced in his official capacity of county sheriff.

Instead he was telling his rapt listeners of the thrilling and monumental battle he had waged and

won with the four pound, six ounce brook trout only the previous evening.

For at least the seventh or eighth time, at the urgent request of a newcomer who had not heard the beginning of the account, he explained the start of the already famous tussle.

"Yep, I were a-standin' beside the big rock in the bend, where the Saltash goes through Ab Latham's maple lot. Up ahead by that ol' fallen

spruce, I see Mister Trout swirl. Right off, I had the hopeful notion he might be the big gentleman that had broke my leader 'bout that same spot last season.

"I 'membered he'd took a Black Gnat that day, so seein' that the weather an' stream conditions was sort o' like the year afore, I switched flies an' tied one on. I cast it up to him where that fork comes in the log. *Whoosh!* He sucked her down. I struck an' he was hooked.... Then I—"

"Ollie," interrupted the recent arrival a trifle dubiously, "that's a powerful long cast, a powerful accurate cast. All of sixty-seventy feet, ain't it? I'd like to have seen it."

"Sixty-eight feet *an'* a few inches, when I measured it with a tape in the spring o' Thirty-one," replied the sheriff gravely.

"Some cast," stated the other, shaking his head solemnly.

"Aw, shucks, I know that stream awful good, Gus. 'Specially in that stretch o' water," said Ollie modestly.

"You sure ought to," put in a passerby, who had paused for a moment. "Keep right on studying it, Bascomb. Whatever happens, don't let your job as sheriff take up any of your fishing and hunting time. *That* would really worry me."

Ollie did not reply directly to what had been calculated to be the heavy sarcasm of the local banker. Ira Colton was known as his most rabid political enemy, just as the sheriff was known to be a crazy huntin' an' fishin' fool.

He was conceded to be, however, just about the best wing shot and the best fly caster in the whole state of Maine, but certain members of the voting element not infrequently voiced the opinion that he paid a mite too much attention to these pastimes.

Ollie, usually, was able to make some dry retort that completely squelched his adversaries and caused them to retire in awkward embarrassment. But today, he keenly disappointed his friends and partisans.

His china-blue eyes opened wide and took on a faraway expression, and his round, good-natured face looked slightly worried. He removed the battered felt hat he invariably wore and rubbed a hand across his utterly bald pate. His other hand went to the right pocket of his frayed shooting

jacket, fussing idly with the handcuffs he always carried there. He said, musingly, as he clanked the steel tools of his trade:

"Yep, these here manacles, like they call 'em technical, are pretty heavy to tote 'round. Ain't so easy, I'm sayin', holdin' down this job o' sheriff."

Ira Colton snorted loudly and with inordinate disgust, and even a few of Ollie's well-wishers snickered.

Presumably, the sheriff didn't hear them. He seemed to be peering intently across the street. His audience followed his gaze. There was nothing there to excite anyone. Only a big red closed truck, apparently filled with furniture clear out to the lowered tailboard, drawn up before a gas pump. The Atlantic Transportation Company was written in gilt letters on its broad side, and it was headed up north in the direction of Canada.

OLLIE suddenly rose with a sigh, stretched luxuriously, and waddled his short and rotund figure down the steps. He ambled off toward his car, parked near the old hitching post, and he said somewhat dolefully as he passed Ira Colton:

"I'm hopin' hard sheriffin' don't git *too* voluminous in this here bailiwick. I'd hate it somethin' terrible to have my time took away from troutin' the balance o' the season. Guess I'll go catch me another fish right now, whilst I got the chance...."

Ollie didn't cross the Saltash up the road a piece, where he usually did, to fish in one of the feeder streams. He continued up north, following the big red truck that had driven on a couple of minutes before him.

The border, he knew, was still a thirty or forty mile run ahead of him, depending upon which road was taken, and he figured that he had plenty of time. He could hear the truck not too far ahead of him, and he had decided that he preferred to catch it on the sharp bend up by Saltash Corners.

Presently, Ollie did step on the gas, and in a scant minute the truck was in plain sight. He guessed that the driver would be looking in his rear-view mirror by now, and he waved his hand in a gesture that signified he wanted the man to stop. But instead of stopping, the man pressed his foot harder on the accelerator. The truck was

hitting sixty in a few seconds.

At last, the sheriff gave his own car more gas. The truck did likewise. Ollie smiled at this. He had a fast car under him, and he began to prove it, giving her everything she had. In another moment or so, with speed still in reserve, he was racing along beside the cab of the truck.

"Pull her up, son," he said, leaning over and making his voice sound authoritative.

"Whaddaya want, you crazy hick?" yelled the driver.

"I want to search your truck," said Ollie. "I'm the sheriff."

"Go to hell, sap!" said the other. And with that, he yanked an automatic from the seat beside him and poured two slugs straight at Ollie.

AT THE first report, the sheriff spasmodically grabbed at the left side of his chest with his right hand. The fingers of his left hand seemed to tighten convulsively on the wheel, and he slumped inertly down on the cushions. His car veered off to the left side of the road, and the Atlantic Transportation Company truck went roaring along toward Canada at close to seventy!

Ollie's car didn't lurch into the ditch or crash head-on into the trees, but came to a jerky halt after it had zigzagged along for a couple of dozen feet. It did this, because the sheriff had very deftly reached up and turned off the ignition. After a few more seconds, looking as hale and hearty as ever, Ollie Bascomb sat up with a quizzical, yet somewhat wry grin on his face. It was a good trick, he thought, making that driver think he had killed him.

He didn't sit there inactive for very long. He waited until he was fairly certain that the truck was a good two miles ahead of him. Then he got busy.

Starting his own car, he took it easy for a few hundred yards until he hit the Saltash Hill Turnpike. There, he put the clutch in second, edged himself over the wheel with the definite expectation of a rough ride, and began to grind up the rutted road.

The sheriff had to punish his car to get to the summit of Saltash Hill. There, for a mere second or two, he slackened his speed and glanced off far down below him to the west. Instantly, with an audible chuckle, he began his descent.

On the main road, miles beneath him, he had caught a glimpse of the big red truck. It was taking the longer and better route toward Canada, and Ollie was willing to bet he could reach the crossroads up by North Derby before the truck did.

Ollie would have won that bet. When he got to the North Derby turn, his sensitive ears told him the truck was still a mile or more south of him. He wasted no time. Parking his car exactly in the middle of the highway, he stepped behind it and waited.

This time, he was gripping an automatic. It was a comparatively ancient weapon, but a proverbially trusty one. With it, at least, he had brought down many a running rabbit from fifty to a hundred yards when some old crony had asked him to exhibit his marksmanship.

When the truck was within a couple of hundred feet of him, the sheriff marched out into the middle of the road. His usually amiable face was grimly stern now, and he was leveling his gun. He saw the truck hesitate, after a fraction of a second. And even at that distance, his keen eyes thought that they could detect a look of shocked surprise and disbelief on the face of the driver. But the truck immediately picked up speed and came right on—came roaring on!

It covered fifty feet, seventy-five, a hundred. Then the driver leaned far out and started to sight his own pistol.

But he never got the chance to pull the trigger.

Ollie squeezed his expert index finger, and the driver hurtled over the side of the cab while the truck careened off the road and smashed into a giant pine.

Methodically, the sheriff slipped his weapon into his pocket and walked over to the truck. He would not need his gun, he knew. The driver was not wounded. He was dead. Ollie was sure of this. He had meant him to die, and the shot had been far simpler than knocking over an erratically bounding rabbit in brush-grown country.

OLLIE did not like to have to shoot to kill a human, but here was one case where the play had been forced on him. The other had shot to kill—and probably thought he had killed, until a

moment ago—and there was no doubt whatsoever that he would have again tried to kill the sheriff.

Ollie went to the rear of the truck, pulled aside one of the chairs that were roped to the tailboard, and hoisted himself up. He shoved away more furniture and squirmed his body through the aperture he had created. His passage was stopped, then, by a glittering wall of five gallon tins.

“Thought so,” he said gravely. “That there is the biggest load o’ alcohol they ever tried to smuggle into Canady....”

A week passed by, after the killing of the alcohol runner, and Ollie had about decided that the business was finished. Telegraph wires and telephone calls had told the sheriff that the driving license and truck plates had been issued to fake names at nonexistent addresses in New York City, and that there was no such concern listed as the Atlantic Transportation Company.

The deceased, consequently, had been given public burial in the Derby cemetery. He was just an independent hoodlum in the lucrative and comparatively new trade of smuggling alcohol into Canada, Ollie concluded.

But Ollie found out to the contrary, a few days later. He was back in his bachelor quarters in the rear of the jail, late one night, engrossed in the enthralling occupation of tying flies. He was having such fun, in fact, that when a knock sounded on the door he said in a voice that, for him was almost testy:

“Come along in.”

A large man entered. He had a bland face and oddly slanted dark eyes that seemed to carry a smoky, film over them, as if to hide their expression. He was faultlessly groomed, and he looked well-fed and distinctly at ease with the world.

“I’m Mr. Womack, Mr. Bascomb—Flash Womack!” he said politely.

“Take a seat, Mr. Womack,” said the sheriff, carefully putting down a number fourteen hook and waving at a chair opposite his desk.

“Flash” Womack did not sit down. He rubbed at a jaw that, though freshly-shaven, was nevertheless blue-jowled.

“I said my name was Flash Womack, Mr. Bascomb!” he said, more softly.

“Pleased t’ meet you, Mr. Flash,” said Ollie.

“I thought you might have heard of me,” said his visitor, a fiery glint showing in his eyes that

might have explained his nickname.

“Mebbe I have,” conceded Ollie, putting the stopper in his bottle of colodion. “Even in the conserv’ive New York papers I read, they mention them gangsters an’ rack’teers an’ other hoodlums once in a while. Seems as though I can’t be certain jest where you come, numerically, in the city’s public enemies, Mr. Womack.”

It couldn’t be told if Flash Womack liked that one or not. His eyes didn’t show it, anyway. He merely smiled and sat down on the arm of the chair near the desk.

“I’m president of the Atlantic Transportation Company, by the way,” he said. “Or was, I should say. We aren’t quite sure whether we’ll continue with this—er—this subsidiary holding. Not under that name. One of our employees met with an untimely accident.”

“You had one damn headstrong employee, Mr. Flash—right reckless feller, I might even say,” drawled Ollie.

FLASH WOMACK spoke now with open disgust, dropping the suave tone and precise diction that had plainly been acquired at no little effort.

“Tough Mooney was just a punk,” he ground out. “Maybe you bumpin’ him off saved me the trouble of doin’ it myself, sometime. What I’d like to know, Bascomb, is where did the louse slip up? What boner did he pull?”

“Was it him that pulled the boner, like you call it?” mused Ollie.

“Have it your own way.” The racketeer laughed, leaning back on the chair. “You ain’t tellin’ nothin’, eh?”

“You city fellers pick things up real fast, Mr. Womack,” chuckled the sheriff. “Some o’ us Maine lads got the habit o’ answerin’ a question we don’t hanker t’ answer by askin’ another question.”

“I’ll put a straight question this time, the type of question anybody would be glad to answer,” said Womack, his voice soft once more. “Just how much do you want, cash money and payable each trip, to pass our trucks through Derby and the rest of your county unmolested? I might add,” he put in, “that my drivers will *not* commit whatever boner it was that Mooney pulled. Ostensibly, our cargo will be furniture.”

"I still got to answer that with another question," said Ollie, somewhat apologetically. "Mean you'll be totin' alcohol?"

"I do."

"Sorry, Mr. Flash."

"Sorry?"

"Polite form o' speech. You don't pay me nothin'."

"Play ball instead of trying to play poker," advised the New York public enemy. "Set your figure high at the start. I'm prepared to go high. I'm no piker. How much a load, say?"

"Sorry again," said Ollie, picking up his tweezers and looking as if he wished his guest would depart.

That angry flash of red went through Womack's eyes, but almost immediately they quieted down and became veiled.

"You really mean that, eh?" he said, speculatively.

"Yes," said Ollie. "I do."

Flash Womack looked hard at the sheriff of Derby. Then he rested his elbows on the desk and cupped his chin in his palms. He spoke coolly, his words clipped, distinctly enunciated.

"Bascomb, I'm coming clean. I've been in the rackets all my life—mostly the whiskey racket—but repeal has shot this to hell. Rackets is all I know. Rackets is the only way I can get three squares a day. I said I knew the booze business, so I looked around. I saw where the high price of liquor in Canada, if bought in commission stores there legally, was sending the Canucks to bootleggers. I've organized a fleet of alcohol trucks, and there's going to be millions in it if I can judge from the first few months. Savvy?"

"Too bad a feller with your knowledge an' likin' of the liquor trade couldn't do it from the legit'mate end," opined Ollie.

"Only a sucker works legally, Bascomb," said Womack, a smile of faint superiority crossing his lips. "Anyway, I'm in this racket and I'm in it to stay. I've got the whole border of the eastern states lined up. They all played ball with me. A lot of 'em probably felt they *had* to play ball with me, let's say. I don't like that. I don't like roughneck stuff, I mean. I want to handle a peaceful, honest racket, with no chiseling from either party. Now *you* tell me you won't play ball with a square-shooter, eh?" he finished, pausing expectantly.

OLLIE yawned.

"Seems as though we don't agree on the word 'square'," drawled the sheriff.

"Bascomb, my trucks are going to continue going through this town and this county," snapped Womack. "We want this good road. Outside of that, it leads into our Quebec Province hideout. We—"

"Your trucks'll go through here, no matter what they carry, if you got a legal permit to carry it," Ollie interrupted. "But this illegal alcohol? No! That includes your Atlantic Transportation Company, or your Eastern Distributin' Corp'ration, or—"

"When did you get wise that Eastern truck was mine?" cut in Womack, showing his surprise. "Gripes, Louis only made one trip with that one, the bum! What boner did *he* pull?"

"Him the feller pulled the boner?" Ollie asked.

Womack clamped his jaw hard, and the glint of anger flashed in his eyes more lethally than before. His voice was silky now.

"Bascomb, I'm not alone in this. Important men and important money are with me. And we don't like to have our plans frustrated. A sheriff tried to stop us in New York, and so did a state police officer. A custom man in New Hampshire likewise exhibited too much zeal. It is a curious fact that they all met with—untimely deaths!"

"Seems as though one o' *your* men met with an untimely death, when he came to Maine," commented Ollie with a sigh.

"That your last word, Bascomb?" Womack asked curtly.

"Said so two-three times, ain't I?" asked Ollie plaintively.

Womack was silent for a moment, studying the sheriff. He shrugged his shoulders resignedly and started to rise. Suddenly, he flung both hands up to his right eye and cried out.

"Ouch!"

"That was jest a blue-bottle fly that got you," soothed Ollie. "They sting hard."

"I'll—I'll say they do, damn 'em!" said Womack savagely. Then he added, flushing, "I don't like my eyes monkeyed with. Knew a man went blind once, getting stung by a bee."

"Think o' that," said Ollie, making polite conversation.

Flash Womack was all business again. His face was wearing its habitual bland mask as he rose, and he bowed in the manner of any conventional guest who had been courteously entertained.

"Well, we've had our warning and you've had yours," he said. "We'll probably be seeing you, Mr. Bascomb."

"It'll allus be a pleasure, Mr. Flash," retorted Ollie. "Sort o' refreshin' to our rural minds, exchangin' idees with you big city fellers," he added, as the racketeer opened the door....

A week went by, ten days, and Ollie had heard nothing from Womack or any of his henchmen. He had fully expected to receive another visit, or at least some attention from some member of the alcohol gang. He had stayed pretty close to home, in fact, and he had kept his eyes and ears open more than ordinarily. He had, he figured, missed some good troutin' during these sadly waning days of the season.

But after the tenth day Ollie could stand it no longer. He reckoned that the weather and temperature and every conceivable condition made it a perfect day to test out the new fly he had on his favorite stream. Consequently, when dawn had grayed the horizon over by Saltash Mountain for no longer than an hour, Ollie got his kit together and headed for the waters that joined Upper and Lower Saltash Lakes.

Ollie soon had the supreme satisfaction of learning that his theory had been correct. He found out from the start that his new lure was a success. In this wilderness brook, where he was the only man wading in it, the trout were actually gluttonous for his fly. He caught a dozen trout in his first hour. He returned all but two of these, as was his custom, knowing that the pair he kept would make him a luscious meal that noon.

AS HE tossed back another speckled beauty and blew on his fly, Ollie experienced that odd intuition of lurking peril that most trained woodsmen can sense even before it becomes real. He gave no hint of this, however.

As before, apparently as fascinated as ever with his superb artistry, he went on casting. He made, perhaps, his most difficult cast of the morning. The fly traveled a generous eighty feet if an inch, and it drifted lightly down by a whirlpool

beside a boulder like a bloom of wafted thistle.

"Nice work, Bascomb. Damned if it isn't. Looks like a darned interesting racket," came a voice, obviously meant to be ironic, but into which keen admiration had unconsciously crept.

"Mornin', Mr. Flash," greeted Ollie, retrieving his line without looking around. "Up early for a city feller, ain't you?"

"That's your fault, Bascomb," Womack said. "Been waiting for you to make a break from your home town to some quiet spot. Today's the first time you have, the boys on the job tell me. We like to make our killings look accidental or from natural causes, I think I told you. We don't like roughneck stuff. That first sheriff—"

"I know. I had it looked up," broke in Ollie. "He was ridin' a motorcycle on a lonely Ad'rondack road an' one o' your men side-swiped him with a blue car. Them state police is workin' on the case now."

Ollie turned with a grave smile, and was in time to catch the look of surprise and annoyance in Womack's eyes. The racketeer was standing on the bank, in a cleared space, some fifty or sixty feet away. There was an automatic in his hand, and this morning his face was not so bland. On it there was the expression of a killer.

"Trying to be a slick detective, eh?" he said harshly.

"Jest a workin' businessman like you. My job is sheriffin'."

"Well, you'll be retired soon, Bascomb," said Womack, his laugh making it obvious that he liked his repartee.

"How you aimin' t' put this 'accident' onto me, Mr. Flash?" asked Ollie, casually flipping his heavy oiled line into a back cast.

Ollie discovered, gratefully, that he had been right. The gangster, as he had judged and hoped, was of the type to grow loquacious, explanatory, when he thought he was winning.

"A cinch, Bascomb," Womack jeered. "I've got the rod on you, and the first wrong move you make I'll drill you if I have to. When I kill you, in a couple of minutes, you'll be walking here to me on the bank, or I'll be walking out to you in the water. Then I sock you over the temple with this gat and knock you out, and hold you under the water until you drown. You slipped on a rock, struck your head and became unconscious. That's

the way it'll look. How's *that* for a set-up, hick?"

But Ollie was paying no attention to him. He was glancing off to his left, away from his enemy. He spoke in the thrilled whisper of a sportsman.

"Jest a minute! Jest a minute! I see a big trout, over by that low-hangin' juniper... Jest a minute!"

Deftly, Ollie cast his fly. It landed under the juniper, a good seventy feet away.

"Cripes," breathed Womack in admiration.

"Shucks, he don't like *that* pattern, it seems," said Ollie, as the trout failed to strike.

WOMACK, all at once, seemed to have had enough of this casting exhibition. His bland face became vicious again, his eyes burning with an ugly glint. He spoke in a voice that was metallic, merciless.

"Get comin' in here, Bascomb!"

The sheriff, slowly retrieving his line and meticulously seeing that the slack fell in proper coils on the flat rock beside him, was fully aware that he was facing what appeared to be certain death. He had faced it in the past, on various occasions, so he knew something about it. He realized that there was no chance, this time, for the use of words as a subterfuge. Flash Womack was a killer at heart, and he had come here to kill.

"I said to get comin' in here, you rat!" snarled the gangster.

Ollie, starting to reel in his line, suddenly allowed a sharp whistle of excitement to escape him.

"My soul an' body, Mr. Flash, wait jest a minute!" he said, almost breathlessly. "See that fish rise? See him break water.... All o' five pounds, so help me.... Jest a minute.... There! Over by that reddish rock down the stream, to your right.... There he goes again.... I got to git me one more fish, Mr. Flash!"

Ollie was straightening out his line now, making his back cast preparatory to shooting at his mark. Womack had turned his head and was gazing at that reddish stone in the brook. Ollie, with all the exquisite science he possessed, made what he knew was to be the most important cast he had ever made in his life.

His line, his leader, his fly, whistled through the air in a clean flight that a brother fisherman would have given his very soul to have witnessed. But his cast did not travel toward that boulder in

the stream. It went straight for the racketeer standing on the bank!

It struck Womack just under the right eye, catching the lower lid, and Ollie gave his bamboo the butt. The hook held, dug deep in.

"Help!"

Womack cried out the word like a badly frightened and hurt child, and flung up both hands to his face. His automatic dropped to the ground unheeded, sliding off into the water.

"You git comin' to *me*, Womack," Ollie was saying, expertly keeping a taut line. "Don't try to pull out that hook, you—you sucker! You'll only git it in worse!" he paused. "Thanks for tellin' me that night that your eyes were your vulnerable spot, like it be with a lot o' folks. Sure, jest flick 'em in the eye an' they'll toss up both hands an' drop their guard. ... You git comin' to *me*!"

Flash Womack got going. After four or five minutes of floundering through the water, taking two duckings on the way, he reached his captor. Then, he obediently held out his arms while the sheriff slipped the handcuffs over his wrists. He was shaking dazedly, but when Ollie removed the hook, his eyes and his voice were pleading as he asked:

"Bascomb, you got me licked, and how. Have a heart, will ya? I wanna know just one thing. How in hell did you get wise we wasn't luggin' furniture in the beginnin'? What boner did Tough Mooney pull?"

Ollie smiled gently.

"Don't know it was Tough Mooney pulled the boner or not," the sheriff thoughtfully divulged. "My business is keepin' the law, like I told you, an' my job has sort o' teachd me to be all-fired sharp 'bout noticin' what you might term the little things.

"When I see that Atlantic truck by the gas pump, that day I had to shoot Tough Mooney, they was jest one thing 'spicious to a close observer. I seen a chair on the back o' that truck I were sure I'd saw, a week or so afore, on the back of a Eastern Distributin' truck. The green paint, on the arm, were scraped off 'bout the same place."

"Cripes!" broke in Womack. "An'. I seen to havin' them two trucks packed myself!"

"Hell, man, think o' me," drawled Ollie. "Here I come out to git me a trout an' look, I catch me a sucker!"

