

# **THE FIRECRACKER**

Arthur J. Burks

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How Ross Artee ever got promoted to the purple of plain clothes from the harness of the pavements, nobody could figure out, even Ross Artee himself. Nobody knew his shortcomings better than he did himself. When he had been a patrolman, he was always in a jam of some kind with the public, because he wasn't one to beat around the bush. If he had something to say, he said it, even when it hurt, even when it meant he'd have to stand on the carpet to explain. Boiled down, his whole attitude was one of resentment toward red tape, regulations, and slow-going. When he started something, he wanted to finish it, right now. The slow, painstaking processes of the law made him start pacing the floor like a caged tiger, just to think about them. If his brain hadn't been a good one, he might have been extremely dangerous, on either side the law. But his brain was almost as good as his body, which was as nearly perfect as any on the force. He was just under six feet in height, weighed one seventy-five, and had a shock of red hair that made him look like a torch. He was sensitive about it, too, which was natural enough. A redhead didn't go through school to the tune of "red-headed gingerbread, five cents a cabbage head," without working up some sort of obsession about it.

Ross Artee, when anybody grinned at his red hair, calmly told them that the great men of history, including Alexander the Great, had been red-haired; then, if they laughed, he was likely, with but little warning, to punch somebody in the nose. If they took the first punch, he liked it better.

He was, in effect, a walking fire cracker, and how he ever advanced on the force was a mystery. But he did. And eventually he became a plain-clothes man without changing his ways much, and joined the homicide squad. And in New York City tint's a job, if a man only belongs. Ross Artee had learned to control himself, but he was always, even then, like a firecracker with the fuse perpetually aflame. Only wise superiors would have hung onto Ross Artee, for things could happen with such a man that might well bring the whole department into disrepute. Such a thing as a killing, for instance, that later proved to be unjustified.

Artee's first job on the homicide squad was a little trip into the woods, out around Westchester, where someone had certainly not done right by an unidentified corpse. Ross was to identify said corpse, and then find out who had rendered him thus, and do something about it. That it was obviously a gang-killing made his chief decide that Ross couldn't do much harm on the thing, even if he did explode.

Artee was driven to the spot, and to his first real look at mobster punishment. It was an old trick, but new to Artee, and it gave him the screaming-meemees. That any man, however depraved, or group of men, could do such a thing to another man, even if that man had murdered his own wife and all his children, didn't seem possible. The victim had been put into a sack, and tied, with barbed wire, in such a way that if he dared struggle, he killed himself. If he didn't struggle, he died of slow strangulation or starvation. And the man didn't live who could stand the cramped position of the victim for two minutes at the stretch, without moving. This particular victim had taken a long time to die.

He had rolled about under the trees, kicking up leaves and mold, for three or four minutes, at the least, and what the barbed wire had done to him, especially to his wrists and his throat, was something pretty ghastly. And his face was horrible to look at. Even so, it was a face that, with the blood washed off, should have been easily identifiable. Yet Ross Artee could not recognize it as the face of any known mobster and he had spent literally

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weeks, during his career to date, in the rogues' gallery, checking living mobsters into the screens of his memory.

And then it came to him. This was no mobster at all. This was Virgil Calleo, who had been missing a week from a South American consul general, and for whom the consulate had been making discreet inquiries. Calleo was a member of an excellent family, and a wealthy one, and now the whole business would come out. He had been taken and held for ransom, had proudly refused to pay, and had been treated as a mob—traitor would have been treated, perhaps with some idea that it would be put down as a mob—killing and forgotten. And the man did bear some slight resemblance to one Connie Herstrum, of Brooklyn if his face had been torn up more in his struggles

Ross Artee, sure of his diagnosis, became very grim. But deep down inside him the fuse was beginning to burn. This killing of Virgil Calleo was bad for many reasons, disregarding the personal ones concerning Virgil himself, and his family. There would be international complications of vast magnitude. Hoodlums had, by killing Virgil, automatically involved the whole country in trouble that might well be far-reaching.

Artee looked down at the dead man, when he had been straightened out a bit, and the victim's glazed eyes seemed to say to him:

"Well, what are you going to do about it? I've done my bit, as you can see. I paid nothing, except my life, and I'd do it over again before I'd let anybody put anything over on me. Firecracker, it's time for you to explode."

ROSS ARTEE, after the body had been taken in charge by the proper persons, went into action. The fuse, set deeply in his soul, was burning brightly, and for the first time he thought of the Police Positive as more mete for the occasion than fists or persuasion of any sort. A kidnap gang, it appeared to be, but whom? The resemblance to the Brooklyn mobster gave Ross an idea. Within two hours, which was fast traveling, considering, Artee faced the man whom Calleo resembled, and told him coldly just what had happened.

Connie Herstrum stared at him. Herstrum had no use for cops, or dicks, and said so. But he neither liked the job that had been done on Calleo, nor the intimation he read into it.

"I refuse to help dicks do anything, Artee," he said coldly. "But at the same time, I'm going to have a little talk with the guy who really would like to put me in the same place he put this Calleo, and I'm on my way right now. I may, possibly, save you some trouble "

"And if I trailed along, without your knowledge, of course," said Ross Artee, "I might get there in time to keep the guy from doing to you what we both feel he intends to do, sooner or later."

"I want no help from dicks," said Herstrum, "and you'd better keep out of my hair!"

To all intents and purposes, Herstrum had meant what he said. But he need not have told Artee what he intended doing. And so, shortly thereafter, Artee followed Herstrum to a dirty-looking three-story building, buried in the heart of Greenwich Village. It might have been a hang-out for a down-at-heels group of artists. Artee stood across the street from it, discreetly hidden, discreetly paying no attention, until he saw a face appear at a dirty window above.

It was the face of Herstrum, who thus calmly betrayed his enemies. How he did it and failed to get into a shooting scrape, Artee did not know. But he didn't ask questions when Herstrum came down, got into his car and drove away without looking at Artee once. After that, Artee went calmly up the stairs to the rooms he had picked out, and knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" asked a cold voice from inside.

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"A friend," said Artee softly, almost too softly, so that the man inside, not hearing clearly, had to ask him again, adding:

"A friend of whom?"

"Of Virgil Calleo!" retorted Artee, whereupon there was a silence beyond the door that could have been cut with a knife.

"Is it a pay-off?" asked the voice, finally.

"Yes," said Artee, "but not in money. Do you open, or do I blast my way in?"

"If you're a copper, come with your guns smoking! We're that kind of people."

Before the man had finished speaking, Artee had a pistol in either hand, and was blazing away at the lock of the door. Three well-placed shots, and then he stepped back and hurled himself with all his power straight at the door. It went down with a crash, and bullets spat into the hall. Artee had hit the floor, sprawled out, and was rolling toward the far hall. As he went, he was taking inventory, and watching automatics swing to cover him. There were five men in the room, and he recognized the faces of all five before a bullet came even close to him. It couldn't have suited him better, as matters developed. Now there was no question about taking the five men in. They did not intend to be taken in alive.

His right-hand pistol spoke and a black hole appeared in the forehead of Mike Drake, leader of this segment of the nastiest, most lethal mob in the United States, because it operated all over the United States. Drake fell forward, after a long pause, as though he were trying to make up his mind. As he fell, his trigger finger spilled bullets into the floor, purely by reflex action.

A bullet nicked the ear of Ross Artee, and he whirled, rising to his knees. He snapped a shot at the man who had fired, this time with his left-hand pistol. Ross Artee was not a man who missed, and time after time, down the years, he had practiced shooting with either hand, from every conceivable position. Again a hole appeared in a man's face, Ross' bullet smashing the bridge of the shooter's nose. The man slid back against the wall, as though struck a sledge-hammer blow on the forehead. He was Lester Brundick, who had figured in several snatches, and could have cut a dozen notches in his guns if there had been such a custom in mobdom.

Then there were three men left, and two made a race for the door. As the third man fired, Artee flung himself at the two, caught them, smashed one with a left to the base of the skull, the other over the head with his pistol muzzle. He could not shoot men not facing him. With each blow or bullet it was as though he said:

"There, Calleo, is one for your balance sheet. And there won't be any of them left when I'm done."

The fifth man put a couple of bullets in Artee, but he was mad with terror, and his bullets were wild. Artee, when he didn't go down, knew that they were only flesh wounds, painful but not serious. In his legs, they simply burned like everything, and dribbled blood down his legs into his shoes. And then, two more blows with pistol muzzles, and the lashad figured in several snatches, and could have cut a dozen notches in his guns if there had been such a custom in mobdom.

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ROSS ARTEE, shaking a little, because bullets hurt, after all, strode to the door, started to go out. His eyes played over each of the five, identifying them all over again. Then he spent a few minutes going over what papers he could find in the place, with a view to getting proof that he had got the killers of Virgil Calleo. While he was engaged in this business, a man stepped into the doorway and looked coolly down at the havoc Ross Artee had wrought.

The man was Connie Herstrum, and his face told nothing. He spoke through tight lips.

"A man like you would be valuable to a man like me, Artee," he said. "But since you aren't that kind, I thought I'd come back to let you in on something you may not have believed when I first told you. I may have helped a little in this, because these five had something coming; and if I'd done it, it wouldn't have been legal. But stay out of my hair, understand?"

"Do anything to put me to work," said Artee quietly, "and I'll be in your hair, never fear! I don't like threats!"

"And I don't threaten; I promise," said Herstrum. "Now that we've got the record straight, thanks."

"I didn't do it for you," said Artee, "but thanks for your help."

Artee indicated that Herstrum was to go ahead of him out of the snatch hideout, and Herstrum went. Outside a crowd was gathering, and a policeman was pushing his way through, telling all and sundry to disperse. Ross Artee told the officer what he would find upstairs, and by the time Artee reached headquarters, headquarters already had the story. Everybody who heard it knew that Artee had finally exploded. That he was right, that he had got the right people, didn't change the fact. That the three he hadn't killed revived and escaped before the cops took charge, brought a breath of relief from his chief—for he might so easily have made a clean sweep. The result of all conversation on the force about the matter came down to this:

"He's a firecracker, a giant firecracker. But there are giant firecrackers on the other side of the law, and I wouldn't be surprised if one or two of them might not have been the bosses of those five victims of Artee's!"

Reporters called, later, reporting to the chief that all newspapers had received a mysterious telephone call from someone, to the effect that Artee would be shot on sight, and to warn him he'd better leave town. That the three survivors had started a drive for vengeance was indicated.

"And just who gave such a break to the newspapers?" asked Artee coldly.

"Just a voice," said the chief, "over each newspaper telephone, saying to bring word to you that you'd be dead within twenty-four hours, and who do you think you are, as a patriotic American, to kill two and cripple three men, for one Latin American. The newspapers refuse to divulge their sources, of course."

"Ask them," said Artee, "to lay off me. The reporters, I mean. Maybe a crank telephoned. Maybe it's the straight goods, and I don't want to be hampered by newspapers."

Artee rose, strode out onto the street. There were certain details connected with the Calleo snatch and murder still to be worked out. And he couldn't get those eyes out of his mind—the eyes of Calleo. Moreover, by this time, the victim's parents knew everything that had happened—including the summary execution of two of their son's killers. If the swift vengeance of New York police—they would take it as summary execution and vengeance—didn't satisfy them, nothing would. Ross Artee, in a matter of seconds, had become a national figure, and a national target.

He knew that hereafter he wouldn't even read the newspapers, for there would be plenty of editorials about what he had done to the Mike Drake mob, accusations of using his authority to sate a love for killing. There were always such accusations. A public character is always in bad with someone. Whoever, among Drake's friends, burned him down now, would not lack for reputable friends in court—friends, whose sympathy might make it possible for such a one to escape the chair. People were prone to take sides, and plenty would say, with the man who had phoned the newspapers, that five casualties for one was too high payment.

ROSS ARTEE glanced swiftly about him as he stepped onto the street, hunting for coigns of vantage from which bullets might be spat at him, noting all cars within range of a Tommy gun, and going taut in spite of himself, in expectation of the slugs he knew would eventually come.

Twenty-four hours! It might come in twenty-four seconds, or twenty-four minutes—but in twenty-four

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hours, without a doubt. Someone, someone known, or whose identity was at least suspected by, reporters, had made this promise. That one's friends had heard it; he had to make good, or die. A rule of gangdom, of men of all kinds, when it came to "matters of honor." So Ross Artee walked in the shadow of death, and knew it.

A strange perfume was wafted to his nostrils, an exotic perfume. A woman bumped into him, apologized, then seized his arm, swung him to face her. She was young, rather dark, but utterly lovely—and her resemblance to Virgil Calleo was startling.

"You are Ross Artee?" she asked swiftly. "I have seen your picture. I am—"

"Sister of Calleo, or first cousin, or something. So what?"

"I know you are in danger for what you do. I wish to remain with you until all my brother's enemies are paid off. I would like, if I might, to handle a pistol myself!"

Ross stared at her. Her face was almost, as she spoke, the face of an angry cat. Her eyes blazed. Her hands opened and closed like the talons of a cat. Artee had some idea what she would be like in a fight, a fury incarnate. And something in him went out to her, and she knew it instantly, and her eyes told him she knew, and did not resent.

"Yes," she said, "we are alike, and for thees reason I am desire to help. Thees is the reason I go hunting you, and see you come out of the headquarters of police. I follow, but you walk so fast, and look so stern—"

"And somebody is likely to shoot at me at any moment," said Ross, "so you'd better scam away from me! And I don't mean perhaps, understand? What's your name, and where can I find you?"

"My name is Aspasia Calleo, sister of Virgil, and I may be located through our consul general. And, if you insist—"

She smiled, moved away from him with apparent reluctance, and disappeared into the crowd. Ross Artee, however, turned after a moment, and followed her. That she had come to the States by air since her brother's disappearance, seemed to be the answer to her presence. It would complicate matters if the enemy had seen her accost him. Maybe she had been contacted, brought here for a pay-off, and the finding of her brother's body had spoiled it. Maybe the enemy knew more about her than Ross Artee did. And the mere thought of men like Mike Drake, or men from whom Mike Drake had taken orders, laying hands on that girl—

"If she were snatched," thought Artee, "there would be hell to pay and no mistake! And it might happen in retaliation, or it might just happen!"

And so, he turned and followed her, and she didn't look back. He had the odd feeling that she knew he was following her, expected him to follow. At the same time, he knew that if he were being tailed by the man or men sworn to kill him within twenty-four hours, the enemy would see the wisdom of disposing of him before doing anything to Aspasia Calleo. And they could snatch her so easily, while the city was aroused over the killing of Ross Artee. Thinking of himself as a potential corpse gave Artee a strange creepy feeling that he hadn't had before. He felt a mounting fear for the safety of Aspasia Calleo, whose eyes had fascinated him, whose fury was the sort of thing he understood, because it was like his own that he tried so hard to control.

He stepped out faster, in order not to lose her. She strode through the crowd with a free swinging stride, and it came to Ross that she knew what she was doing, and was literally daring someone to contact her—someone who had contacted her brother—

"She's got a knife somewhere, I'll bet," thought Artee, "just as a cat has many knives. And if she were to use it, no court in the nation would convict her!"

A CAR streaked up to the curb, a bit ahead of the girl, and Ross Artee started to run as men jumped from that car, stepped toward the girl, hands in coat pockets. But even as Artee moved two pistol muzzles were pushed against his back, and a low voice said:

"We can give it to you here, dick, but we'd rather do a nice clean job of it—nicer and cleaner than the Calleo job. And don't worry about that fool girl! She shoulda stayed home, instead of comin' here to give us a fresh shot at the Calleo bankroll!"

Ross Artee slowed when he felt those pistol muzzles. They meant business, no doubt about that. And he saw the girl being flung into the car. Passers-by were minding their own business, as passers-by sometimes did. No scream of dismay came from the girl. She wasn't the screaming kind. Ross Artee took his life in his hands at that moment, and the lives of people in the street—for he gambled that these two men would not really fire at him, whatever he did. They were afoot, and police bullets traveled fast. They were probably from that car ahead.

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Ross Artee, without tensing his body in advance, kicked backward, like a horse. He had guessed at the positions of the two men and at their height, from the spots where the gun muzzles were pushed against his spine. He heard a scream of pain as his heel connected with a kneecap, and one muzzle was withdrawn from his back. A bullet would come in the next second, of course! The other muzzle had wavered. Ross Artee whirled, braving those slugs, and grabbed for the necks of the men with the guns. He didn't even glance down at the gun hands. He grabbed for necks with hands that were like hams, hands that could rend and maim and tear. And when he got the necks he brought the two heads together with all the force he could—so that the noses and faces met in a kiss that must have knocked all the sense out of the two men in a split second. Their knees sagged. Their guns fell to the sidewalk. Passers-by, women, screamed bloody murder. Ross Artee smashed those two faces together again, and saw the blood spurt, and then he dropped his victims, whirled and ran after the car which had spirited off Aspasia Calleo.

As he ran, he signaled for a cab, and one drew up to the sidewalk.

"The law," he told the cabby. "Bullets may fly, but a woman's life is in danger—"

"You're Ross Artee," said the cabby quietly. "And the woman is?"

"The sister of Virgil Calleo. She's been snatched! Keep that car in sight, if you have to wreck this buggy, understand? That is, if you're with me."

"I reckon Ross Artee can look out for me!" said the cabby. "So, sit back and ride!"

Ross sat back. He crouched low in the back seat, peering out at the car ahead. Its driver was a master at the wheel, no doubt about that. He missed other cars by hairbreadths, he missed red lights by split-second calculations, and so did Artee's cabby. The race toward Greenwich Village was a mad one. The horn of the car ahead was sounding. Ross told the cabby to keep his own horn going, and that good luck would have to take care of the rest.

Faster and faster the two cars sped. Now bullets began to come back at the cab—for both cars were on the highway paralleling the Hudson, and racing for open country. That prowling cars had a warning now and were closing in, Ross Artee knew to be true. But that they would cut off the enemy, he doubted. Moreover, as traffic thinned out, it became increasingly apparent that the cab would never catch the other car, or even keep it in sight. Cabs weren't made for such speed,

"Pick a fast new car, and cut in in front of it, cabby," said Artee. "Later, you can come to headquarters and get your dough."

"I'll do better than that," said the cabby. "Watch!"

He cut in front of a long, low, fast car, forced it against the rail, halting it. He jumped out, yelled at the irate driver.

"Police business. Take this cab of mine to police headquarters. Give that wheel to a man that can drive. O. K., madame, there in the back seat! Into the cab with your husband. It's a better trade than you think, and I'm driving your car for Ross Artee! It'll be in the newspapers!"

The cabby made the shift so fast that Ross had to blink. He made a mental promise to keep in touch with the fellow, afterward, if he were ever to need the services of a resourceful man. For now their speed became a fearful thing. The big car hummed, and the car they were following seemed to crawl back toward them. Bullets began to come from it—and one of them smashed the windshield.

"If you dropped a slug on them," said the cabby from the corner of his mouth, "it might have a good effect."

Ross sat beside him, painfully, fearfully peering ahead. "And maybe kill the girl! No! We've got to take it until we get a break of some kind. You can't even take a chance on crashing them, for she'd be the one to get killed, and they wouldn't even get scratched."

THE chase continued, with Ross waving off prowling cars that pressed alongside, taking part in the chase, until they were well north of the reservoir, heading toward Katonah. Then the car ahead swung in to the side of the road, almost turning over, and men began to boil out of her—with Aspasia Calleo in their midst. She was their shield, and Ross gritted his teeth in futile rage.

But the cabby flung the car up to the group, just as the last of them disappeared into a thicket of pines beside a lake.

"Here, somewhere, is where they hid out with Virgil Calleo. They're taking her to the same place," said Ross to himself.



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And then, a scream burst from the lips of Aspasia Calleo, and Ross jumped into a run from the car. He didn't look around to see what happened to the cabby. That scream had blotted out everything else, every other thought. Inside Ross Artee, something broke when that scream came—perhaps the firecracker had exploded. But something cold and savage had taken the place of his self-control. He knew, in that instant, that bullets could not kill him until he had done something about the girl—and that she was in no danger from bullets fired by him, because he would, in her cause, be able to shoot the eyes out of gnats on the wing.

He crashed through the trees and came upon the group. Bullets began to pop past his ears. He paused for a brief second, said coldly:

"I'll give you just one chance to surrender without bloodshed. Then, I'm coming, and I'll get every last one of you before I go down!"

There were five of the men. Their faces were white, and their shots were wild. They were nervous, for three of those men had tasted the power of Ross Artee before. They had not faced him, and had lived. Now they must face him, or die a little—again. They all began firing at once, in answer to his demand for their surrender. Perhaps he could have got them, one by one, and he really had no compunction about it—but just because they deserved it, and he was in the right, was no excuse, really, for shooting them all. And he might kill the girl with a ricochet shot.

Three of these men had taken enough from Ross Artee to respect him. The other two, whose names and pictures were often in the news, were as deadly as any Ross Artee had ever seen. To play out his string as his comrades expected of him, he should mow down every last man, and bring the girl out without a scratch. And with bullets cracking all about him, he had to decide fast.

He decided in favor of a kind of moderation! It was of a sort due to be discussed on the force, and throughout mobdom, for years to come. For he charged straight into the guns of those five. He had the feeling, as he went, that nothing could stop him. He did not zigzag, for he might as easily step into a slug as away from it. Those firing mobsters stared in amazement, their eyes popping, at the charging Ross Artee.

His pistols were lifted, and three who had tested their striking power screamed in anticipation. Maybe Ross Artee had expected just that. Maybe he actually was holding himself rigidly in control. Maybe— But even Ross Artee, himself, might not have been able to explain it at that moment, if all actors in the drama could have been frozen in place, and each commanded to tell his version of what was happening.

With fists claspings silent pistols, he flung himself headlong into the midst of the girl's captors. The three who had met him before screamed, repeated their previous actions, turned to flee. One of the grim-faced men whirled, shot twice—and two of the fleeing men went down. In the next instant, Ross Artee had brought his pistol muzzle down upon the neck of the man who had fired.

That one went down with a wild, eerie scream. Two men were left, and both were trying to use Aspasia Calleo as a screen, and she was not a big girl.

"Shoot, the both of you," grated Ross, "but get this through your thick skulls: I'll get you both before I hit the ground!"

And he marched straight at them, as they staggered backward, pumping lead, and clinging to Aspasia as though she had been a raft; they, two men in danger of drowning. Their faces were paperwhite. When Artee did not fall as they shot, their terror increased. Artee knew that it was a miracle that he himself had not gone down, yet when he analyzed the matter later, it was nothing of the sort. He had been built up by the stories in the newspapers, and by the wild stories the three survivors of the first scrap had relayed to their bosses. And his enemies had reacted to those tales. Moreover, they probably knew the talk that went the rounds in the force. One man against five. He had faced five before, and had come out practically unscathed. It is difficult for normal men to face a man believed to bear a charmed life.

The two remaining men screamed when Aspasia herself twisted in their hands and started clawing. By that time, it was too late for them to recover the psychological ground they had lost—and Ross Artee was atop the two of them. Aspasia hampered him, in her efforts to get in her share of blows on the two survivors. He pushed her roughly aside. She fell, sprawling. Spanish words that sounded suspiciously like swearing came from her lips. And then, Artee had downed the two men with a succession of trip-hammer blows.

AND it was upon this scene, a little later that officers and plain-clothes men sent along by his chief, intruded. They were outside their bailiwicks, but it did not matter, since all work had been done.

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"So, firecracker meets firecrackers," said one of the men, "and again our own comes through. But he had to kill two more men to do it! And look who he's got, besides! Two of the biggest mob leaders in the country, Hymie Lynch and Duke Gordeen!"

"He is no firecracker, thees one," snapped Aspasia, struggling to her feet, her face very red. "He do not kill anybody. They kill one another as they stampede to escape him. He forget he have pistols, and use only his fists—"

"I was trying," said Ross Artee, calmly, and quite sincerely, "to retain control of my temper! I didn't want to kill anybody else, just because I got mad!"

"Very commendable," said his chief dryly, when he reported back at headquarters later. "You fail to shoot to kill, when you face men sworn to kill you, and whom anybody could shoot on sight without a legal comeback! Remarkable control! Remarkable!"

"And he push me over, like I am a inuneco, a simpering wooden doll! And I shall get even. No man, she shall push me, and get away with it. I shall punish him all our life—"

Then Aspasia got red in the face, knowing just how it sounded, and the chief snickered. Ross Artee grinned at the girl and said:

"If that's a proposal of marriage, Aspasia, to take effect when a suitable time has elapsed after your brother's affairs are settled, I accept. But I shall rule the domestic household!"

"That is what you sink!" said Aspasia Calleo grimly.

"Personally," said the chief, his grin very wide, "I, myself, don't 'sink' so. We'll still find out how the firecracker behaves when he encounters another firecracker—only, instead of a mobster, it will be a fiery dame, and he hasn't a chance!"

"I confess," said Artee, putting an arm about Aspasia, "that I have my own doubts; but I'll be interested all the time, that's a cinch, no matter who gets pushed around!"