

SHORT STORY AMERICA

BUNCHES OF KNUCKLES

JACK LONDON

Arrangements quite extensive had been made for the celebration of Christmas on the yacht Samoset. Not having been in any civilized port for months, the stock of provisions boasted few delicacies; yet Minnie Duncan had managed to devise real feasts for cabin and forecastle.

"Listen, Boyd, she told her husband. "Here are the menus. For the cabin, raw bonita native style, turtle soup, omelette a la Samoset—"

"What the dickens?" Boyd Duncan interrupted.

"Well, if you must know, I found a tin of mushrooms and a package of egg-powder which had fallen down behind the locker, and there are other things as well that will go into it. But don't interrupt. Boiled yam, fried taro, alligator pear salad – there, you've got me all mixed, Then I found a last delectable half-pound of dried squid. There will be baked beans Mexican, if I can hammer it into Toyama's head; also, baked papaia with Marquesan honey, and, lastly, a wonderful pie the secret of which Toyama refuses to divulge."

"I wonder if it is possible to concoct a punch or a cocktail out of trade rum?"
Duncan muttered gloomily.

"Oh! I forgot! Come with me."

His wife caught his hand and led him through the small connecting door to her tiny stateroom. Still holding his hand, she fished in the depths of a hat-locker and brought forth a pint bottle of champagne.

"The dinner is complete!" he cried.

"Wait."

She fished again, and was rewarded with a silver-mounted whisky flask. She held it to the light of a port-hole, and the liquor showed a quarter of the distance from the bottom.

"I've been saving it for weeks," she explained. "And there's enough for you and Captain Dettmar."

"Two mighty small drinks," Duncan complained.

"There would have been more, but I gave a drink to Lorenzo when he was sick."

Duncan growled, "Might have given him rum," facetiously.

"The nasty stuff! For a sick man? Don't be greedy, Boyd. And I'm glad there isn't any more, for Captain Dettmar's sake. Drinking always makes him irritable. And now for the men's dinner. Soda crackers, sweet cakes, candy—"

"Substantial, I must say."

"Do hush. Rice, and curry, yam, taro, bonita, of course, a big cake Toyama is making, young pig—"

"Oh, I say," he protested.

"It is all right, Boyd. We'll be in Attu-Attu in three days. Besides, it's my pig. That old chief what-ever-his-name distinctly presented it to me. You saw him yourself. And then two tins of bullamacow. That's their dinner. And now about the presents. Shall we wait until tomorrow, or give them this evening?"

"Christmas Eve, by all means," was the man's judgment. "We'll call all hands at eight bells; I'll give them a tot of rum all around, and then you give the presents. Come on up on deck. It's stifling down here. I hope Lorenzo has better luck with the dynamo; without the fans there won't be much sleeping to-night if we're driven below."

They passed through the small main-cabin, climbed a steep companion ladder, and emerged on deck. The sun was setting, and the promise was for a clear tropic night. The Samoset, with fore- and main-sail winged out on either side, was slipping a lazy four-knots through the smooth sea. Through the engine-room skylight came a sound of hammering. They strolled aft to where Captain Dettmar, one foot on the rail, was oiling the gear of the patent log. At the wheel stood a tall South Sea Islander, clad in white undershirt and scarlet hip-cloth.

Boyd Duncan was an original. At least that was the belief of his friends. Of comfortable fortune, with no need to do anything but take his comfort, he elected to travel about the world in outlandish and most uncomfortable ways. Incidentally, he had ideas about coral-reefs, disagreed profoundly with Darwin on that subject, had voiced his opinion in several monographs and one book, and was now back at his hobby, cruising the South Seas in a tiny, thirty-ton yacht and studying reef-formations.

His wife, Minnie Duncan, was also declared an original, inasmuch as she joyfully shared his vagabond wanderings. Among other things, in the six exciting years of their marriage she had climbed Chimborazo with him, made a three-thousand-mile winter journey with dogs and sleds in Alaska, ridden a horse from Canada to Mexico, cruised the Mediterranean in a ten-ton yawl,

and canoed from Germany to the Black Sea across the heart of Europe. They were a royal pair of wanderlusts, he, big and broad-shouldered, she a small, brunette, and happy woman, whose one hundred and fifteen pounds were all grit and endurance, and withal, pleasing to look upon.

The Samoset had been a trading schooner, when Duncan bought her in San Francisco and made alterations. Her interior was wholly rebuilt, so that the hold became main-cabin and staterooms, while abaft amidships were installed engines, a dynamo, an ice machine, storage batteries, and, far in the stern, gasoline tanks. Necessarily, she carried a small crew. Boyd, Minnie, and Captain Dettmar were the only whites on board, though Lorenzo, the small and greasy engineer, laid a part claim to white, being a Portuguese half-caste. A Japanese served as cook, and a Chinese as cabin boy. Four white sailors had constituted the original crew for'ard, but one by one they had yielded to the charms of palm-waving South Sea isles and been replaced by islanders. Thus, one of the dusky sailors hailed from Easter Island, a second from the Carolines, a third from the Paumotus, while the fourth was a gigantic Samoan. At sea, Boyd Duncan, himself a navigator, stood a mate's watch with Captain Dettmar, and both of them took a wheel or lookout occasionally. On a pinch, Minnie herself could take a wheel, and it was on pinches that she proved herself more dependable at steering than did the native sailors.

At eight bells, all hands assembled at the wheel, and Boyd Duncan appeared with a black bottle and a mug. The rum he served out himself, half a mug of it to each man. They gulped the stuff down with many facial expressions of delight, followed by loud lip-smackings of approval, though the liquor was raw enough and corrosive enough to burn their mucous membranes. All drank except Lee Goom, the abstemious cabin boy. This rite accomplished, they waited for the next, the present-giving. Generously molded on Polynesian lines, huge-bodied and heavy-muscled, they were nevertheless like so many children, laughing merrily at little things, their eager black eyes flashing in the lantern light as their big bodies swayed to the heave and roll

of the ship.

Calling each by name, Minnie gave the presents out, accompanying each presentation with some happy remark that added to the glee. There were trade watches, clasp knives, amazing assortments of fish-hooks in packages, plug tobacco, matches, and gorgeous strips of cotton for loincloths all around. That Boyd Duncan was liked by them was evidenced by the roars of laughter with which they greeted his slightest joking allusion.

Captain Dettmar, white-faced, smiling only when his employer chanced to glance at him, leaned against the wheel-box, looking on. Twice, he left the group and went below, remaining there but a minute each time. Later, in the main cabin, when Lorenzo, Lee Goom and Toyama received their presents, he disappeared into his stateroom twice again. For of all times, the devil that slumbered in Captain Dettmar's soul chose this particular time of good cheer to awaken. Perhaps it was not entirely the devil's fault, for Captain Dettmar, privily cherishing a quart of whisky for many weeks, had selected Christmas Eve for broaching it.

It was still early in the evening – two bells had just gone – when Duncan and his wife stood by the cabin companionway, gazing to windward and canvassing the possibility of spreading their beds on deck. A small, dark blot of cloud, slowly forming on the horizon, carried the threat of a rain-squall, and it was this they were discussing when Captain Dettmar, coming from aft and about to go below, glanced at them with sudden suspicion. He paused, his face working spasmodically. Then he spoke:

"You are talking about me."

His voice was hoarse, and there was an excited vibration in it. Minnie Duncan started, then glanced at her husband's immobile face, took the cue, and remained silent.

"I say you were talking about me," Captain Dettmar repeated, this time with

almost a snarl.

He did not lurch nor betray the liquor on him in any way save by the convulsive working of his face.

"Minnie, you'd better go down," Duncan said gently. "Tell Lee Goom we'll sleep below. It won't be long before that squall is drenching things."

She took the hint and left, delaying just long enough to give one anxious glance at the dim faces of the two men.

Duncan puffed at his cigar and waited till his wife's voice, in talk with the cabin-boy, came up through the open skylight.

"Well?" Duncan demanded in a low voice, but sharply.

"I said you were talking about me. I say it again. Oh, I haven't been blind. Day after day I've seen the two of you talking about me. Why don't you come out and say it to my face! I know you know. And I know your mind's made up to discharge me at Attu-Attu."

"I am sorry you are making such a mess of everything," was Duncan's quiet reply.

But Captain Dettmar's mind was set on trouble.

"You know you are going to discharge me. You think you are too good to associate with the likes of me – you and your wife."

"Kindly keep her out of this," Duncan warned. "What do you want?"

"I want to know what you are going to do!"

"Discharge you, after this, at Attu-Attu."

"You intended to, all along."

"On the contrary. It is your present conduct that compels me."

"You can't give me that sort of talk."

"I can't retain a captain who calls me a liar."

Captain Dettmar for the moment was taken aback. His face and lips worked, but he could say nothing. Duncan coolly pulled at his cigar and glanced aft at the rising cloud of squall.

"Lee Goom brought the mail aboard at Tahiti," Captain Dettmar began.

"We were hove short then and leaving. You didn't look at your letters until we were outside, and then it was too late. That's why you didn't discharge me at Tahiti. Oh, I know. I saw the long envelope when Lee Goom came over the side. It was from the Governor of California, printed on the corner for any one to see. You'd been working behind my back. Some beachcomber in Honolulu had whispered to you, and you'd written to the Governor to find out. And that was his answer Lee Goom carried out to you. Why didn't you come to me like a man! No, you must play underhand with me, knowing that this billet was the one chance for me to get on my feet again. And as soon as you read the Governor's letter your mind was made up to get rid of me. I've seen it on your face ever since for all these months.. I've seen the two of you, polite as hell to me all the time, and getting away in corners and talking about me and that affair in 'Frisco."

"Are you done?" Duncan asked, his voice low, and tense. "Quite done?"

Captain Dettmar made no answer.

"Then I'll tell you a few things. It was precisely because of that affair in 'Frisco that I did not discharge you in Tahiti. God knows you gave me sufficient provocation. I thought that if ever a man needed a chance to rehabilitate himself, you were that man. Had there been no black mark against you, I would have discharged you when I learned how you were

robbing me."

Captain Dettmar showed surprise, started to interrupt, then changed his mind.

"There was that matter of the deck-calking, the bronze rudder-irons, the overhauling of the engine, the new spinnaker boom, the new davits, and the repairs to the whale-boat. You OK'd the shipyard bill. It was four thousand one hundred and twenty-two francs. By the regular shipyard charges it ought not to have been a centime over twenty-five hundred francs—"

"If you take the word of those alongshore sharks against mine—' the other began thickly.

"Save yourself the trouble of further lying," Duncan went on coldly. "I looked it up. I got Flaubin before the Governor himself, and the old rascal confessed to sixteen hundred overcharge. Said you'd stuck him up for it. Twelve hundred went to you, and his share was four hundred and the job. Don't interrupt. I've got his affidavit below. Then was when I would have put you ashore, except for the cloud you were under. You had to have this one chance or go clean to hell. I gave you the chance. And what have you got to say about it?"

"What did the Governor say?" Captain Dettmar demanded truculently.

"Which governor?"

"Of California. Did he lie to you like all the rest?"

"I'll tell you what he said. He said that you had been convicted on circumstantial evidence; that was why you had got life imprisonment instead of hanging; that you had always stoutly maintained your innocence; that you were the black sheep of the Maryland Dettmars; that they moved heaven and earth for your pardon; that your prison conduct was most exemplary; that he was prosecuting attorney at the time you were convicted; that after you had served seven years he yielded to your family's plea and pardoned you; and

that in his own mind existed a doubt that you had killed McSweeny."

There was a pause, during which Duncan went on studying the rising squall, while Captain Dettmar's face worked terribly.

"Well, the Governor was wrong," he announced, with a short laugh. "I did kill McSweeny. I did get the watchman drunk that night. I beat McSweeny to death in his bunk. I used the iron belaying pin that appeared in the evidence. He never had a chance. I beat him to a jelly. Do you want the details?"

Duncan looked at him in the curious way one looks at any monstrosity, but made no reply.

"Oh, I'm not afraid to tell you," Captain Dettmar blustered on. "There are no witnesses. Besides, I am a free man now. I am pardoned, and by God they can never put me back in that hole again. I broke McSweeny's jaw with the first blow. He was lying on his back asleep. He said, 'My God, Jim! My God!' It was funny to see his broken jaw wobble as he said it. Then I smashed him ...I say, do you want the rest of the details?"

"Is that all you have to say?" was the answer.

"Isn't it enough?" Captain Dettmar retorted.

"It is enough."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Put you ashore at Attu-Attu."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime ..." Duncan paused. An increase of weight in the wind rippled his hair. The stars overhead vanished, and the Samoset swung four points off her course in the careless steersman's hands. "In the meantime throw your halyards down on deck and look to your wheel. I'll call the men."

The next moment the squall burst upon them. Captain Dettmar, springing aft, lifted the coiled mainsail halyards from their pins and threw them, ready to run, on the deck. The three islanders swarmed from the tiny forecabin, two of them leaping to the halyards and holding by a single turn, while the third fastened down the engine room companion and swung the ventilators around. Below, Lee Goom and Toyama were lowering skylight covers and screwing up deadeyes. Duncan pulled shut the cover of the companion scuttle, and held on, waiting, the first drops of rain pelting his face, while the *Samoyet* leaped violently ahead, at the same time heeling first to starboard then to port as the gusty pressures caught her winged-out sails.

All waited. But there was no need to lower away on the run. The power went out of the wind, and the tropic rain poured a deluge over everything. Then it was, the danger past, and as the *Kanakas* began to coil the halyards back on the pins, that Boyd Duncan went below.

"All right," he called in cheerily to his wife. "Only a puff."

"And Captain Dettmar?" she queried.

"Has been drinking, that is all. I shall get rid of him at Attu-Attu."

But before Duncan climbed into his bunk, he strapped around himself, against the skin and under his pajama coat, a heavy automatic pistol.

He fell asleep almost immediately, for his was the gift of perfect relaxation. He did things tensely, in the way savages do, but the instant the need passed he relaxed, mind and body. So it was that he slept, while the rain still poured on deck and the yacht plunged and rolled in the brief, sharp sea caused by the squall.

He awoke with a feeling of suffocation and heaviness. The electric fans had stopped, and the air was thick and stifling. Mentally cursing all Lorenzos and storage batteries, he heard his wife moving in the adjoining stateroom and pass out into the main cabin. Evidently heading for the fresher air on deck, he

thought, and decided it was a good example to imitate. Putting on his slippers and tucking a pillow and a blanket under his arm, he followed her. As he was about to emerge from the companionway, the ship's clock in the cabin began to strike and he stopped to listen. Four bells sounded. It was two in the morning. From without came the creaking of the gaff-jaw against the mast. The Samoset rolled and righted on a sea, and in the light breeze her canvas gave forth a hollow thrum.

He was just putting his foot out on the damp deck when he heard his wife scream. It was a startled frightened scream that ended in a splash overside. He leaped out and ran aft. In the dim starlight he could make out her head and shoulders disappearing astern in the lazy wake.

"What was it?" Captain Dettmar, who was at the wheel, asked.

"Mrs. Duncan," was Duncan's reply, as he tore the life-buoy from its hook and flung it aft. "Jibe over to starboard and come up on the wind!" he commanded.

And then Boyd Duncan made a mistake. He dived overboard.

When he came up, he glimpsed the blue-light on the buoy, which had ignited automatically when it struck the water. He swam for it, and found Minnie had reached it first.

"Hello," he said. "Just trying to keep cool?"

"Oh, Boyd!" was her answer, and one wet hand reached out and touched his.

The blue light, through deterioration or damage, flickered out. As they lifted on the smooth crest of a wave, Duncan turned to look where the Samoset made a vague blur in the darkness. No lights showed, but there was noise of confusion. He could hear Captain Dettmar's shouting above the cries of the others.

"I must say he's taking his time," Duncan grumbled. "Why doesn't he jibe?"

There she goes now."

They could hear the rattle of the boom tackle blocks as the sail was eased across.

"That was the mainsail," he muttered. "Jibed to port when I told him starboard."

Again they lifted on a wave, and again and again, ere they could make out the distant green of the Samoset's starboard light. But instead of remaining stationary, in token that the yacht was coming toward them, it began moving across their field of vision. Duncan swore.

"What's the lubber holding over there for!" he demanded. "He's got his compass. He knows our bearing."

But the green light, which was all they could see, and which they could see only when they were on top of a wave, moved steadily away from them, withal it was working up to windward, and grew dim and dimmer. Duncan called out loudly and repeatedly, and each time, in the intervals, they could hear, very faintly, the voice of Captain Dettmar shouting orders.

"How can he hear me with such a racket?" Duncan complained.

"He's doing it so the crew won't hear you," was Minnie's answer.

There was something in the quiet way she said it that caught her husband's attention.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he is not trying to pick us up," she went on in the same composed voice. "He threw me overboard."

"You are not making a mistake?"

"How could I? I was at the main rigging, looking to see if any more rain

threatened. He must have left the wheel and crept behind me. I was holding on to a stay with one hand. He gripped my hand free from behind and threw me over. It's too bad you didn't know, or else you would have staid aboard."

Duncan groaned, but said nothing for several minutes. The green light changed the direction of its course.

"She's gone about," he announced. "You are right. He's deliberately working around us and to windward. Up wind they can never hear me. But here goes."

He called at minute intervals for a long time. The green light disappeared, being replaced by the red, showing that the yacht had gone about again.

"Minnie," he said finally, "it pains me to tell you, but you married a fool. Only a fool would have gone overboard as I did."

"What chance have we of being picked up ...by some other vessel, I mean?" she asked.

"About one in ten thousand, or ten thousand million. Not a steamer route nor trade route crosses this stretch of ocean. And there aren't any whalers knocking about the South Seas. There might be a stray trading schooner running across from Tutuwanga. But I happen to know that island is visited only once a year. A chance in a million is ours."

"And we'll play that chance," she rejoined stoutly.

"You ARE a joy!" His hand lifted hers to his lips. "And Aunt Elizabeth always wondered what I saw in you. Of course we'll play that chance. And we'll win it, too. To happen otherwise would be unthinkable. Here goes."

He slipped the heavy pistol from his belt and let it sink into the sea. The belt, however, he retained.

"Now you get inside the buoy and get some sleep. Duck under."

She ducked obediently, and came up inside the floating circle. He fastened the straps for her, then, with the pistol belt, buckled himself across one shoulder to the outside of the buoy.

"We're good for all day to-morrow," he said. "Thank God the water's warm. It won't be a hardship for the first twenty-hour hours, anyway. And if we're not picked up by nightfall, we've just got to hang on for another day, that's all."

For half an hour they maintained silence, Duncan, his head resting on the arm that was on the buoy, seemed asleep.

"Boyd?" Minnie said softly.

"Thought you were asleep," he growled.

"Boyd, if we don't come through this—"

"Stow that!" he broke in ungallantly. "Of course we're coming through. There isn't a doubt of it. Somewhere on this ocean is a ship that's heading right for us. You wait and see. Just the same I wish my brain were equipped with wireless. Now I'm going to sleep, if you don't."

But for once, sleep baffled him. An hour later he heard Minnie stir and knew she was awake.

"Say, do you know what I've been thinking!" she asked.

"No; what?"

"That I'll wish you a Merry Christmas."

"By George, I never thought of it. Of course it's Christmas Day. We'll have many more of them, too. And do you know what I've been thinking? What a confounded shame we're done out of our Christmas dinner. Wait till I lay hands on Dettmar. I'll take it out of him. And it won't be with an iron

belaying pin either, Just two bunches of naked knuckles, that's all."

Despite his facetiousness, Boyd Duncan had little hope. He knew well enough the meaning of one chance in a million, and was calmly certain that his wife and he had entered upon their last few living hours – hours that were inevitably bound to be black and terrible with tragedy.

The tropic sun rose in a cloudless sky. Nothing was to be seen. The Samoset was beyond the sea-rim. As the sun rose higher, Duncan ripped his pajama trousers in halves and fashioned them into two rude turbans. Soaked in sea-water they offset the heat-rays.

"When I think of that dinner, I'm really angry," he complained, as he noted an anxious expression threatening to set on his wife's face. "And I want you to be with me when I settle with Dettmar. I've always been opposed to women witnessing scenes of blood, but this is different. It will be a beating."

"I hope I don't break my knuckles on him," he added, after a pause.

Midday came and went, and they floated on, the center of a narrow sea-circle. A gentle breath of the dying trade-wind fanned them, and they rose and fell monotonously on the smooth swells of a perfect summer sea. Once, a gunie spied them, and for half an hour circled about them with majestic sweeps. And, once, a huge rayfish, measuring a score of feet across the tips, passed within a few yards.

By sunset, Minnie began to rave, softly, babblingly, like a child. Duncan's face grew haggard as he watched and listened, while in his mind he revolved plans of how best to end the hours of agony that were coining. And, so planning, as they rose on a larger swell than usual, he swept the circle of the sea with his eyes, and saw, what made him cry out.

"Minnie!" She did not answer, and he shouted her name again in her ear, with all the voice he could command. Her eyes opened, in them fluttered commingled consciousness and delirium. He slapped her hands and wrists till

the sting of the blows roused her.

"There she is, the chance in a million!" he cried.

"A steamer at that, heading straight for us! By George, it's a cruiser! I have it—the Annapolis, returning with those astronomers from Tutuwanga.

. . . .

United States Consul Lingford was a fussy, elderly gentleman, and in the two years of his service at Attu-Attu had never encountered so unprecedented a case as that laid before him by Boyd Duncan. The latter, with his wife, had been landed there by the Annapolis, which had promptly gone on with its cargo of astronomers to Fiji.

"It was cold-blooded, deliberate attempt to murder," said Consul Lingford. "The law shall take its course. I don't know how precisely to deal with this Captain Dettmar, but if he comes to Attu-Attu, depend upon it he shall be dealt with, he – ah – shall be dealt with. In the meantime, I shall read up the law. And now, won't you and your good lady stop for lunch!"

As Duncan accepted the invitation, Minnie, who had been glancing out of the window at the harbor, suddenly leaned forward and touched her husband's arm. He followed her gaze, and saw the Samoset, flag at half mast, rounding up and dropping anchor scarcely a hundred yards away.

"There's my boat now," Duncan said to the Consul. "And there's the launch over the side, and Captain Dettmar dropping into it. If I don't miss my guess, he's coming to report our deaths to you."

The launch landed on the white beach, and leaving Lorenzo tinkering with the engine, Captain Dettmar strode across the beach and up the path to the Consulate.

"Let him make his report," Duncan said. "We'll just step into this next room

and listen."

And through the partly open door, he and his wife heard Captain Dettmar, with tears in his voice, describe the loss of his owners.

"I jibed over and went back across the very spot," he concluded. "There was not a sign of them. I called and called, but there was never an answer. I tacked back and forth and wore for two solid hours, then hove to till daybreak, and cruised back and forth all day, two men at the mastheads. It is terrible. I am heartbroken. Mr. Duncan was a splendid man, and I shall never..."

But he never completed the sentence, for at that moment his splendid employer strode out upon him, leaving Minnie standing in the doorway. Captain Dettmar's white face blanched even whiter.

"I did my best to pick you up, sir," he began.

Boyd Duncan's answer was couched in terms of bunched knuckles, two bunches of them, that landed right and left on Captain Dettmar's face.

Captain Dettmar staggered backward, recovered, and rushed with swinging arms at his employer, only to be met with a blow squarely between the eyes. This time the Captain went down, bearing the typewriter under him as he crashed to the floor.

"This is not permissible," Consul Lingford spluttered. "I beg of you, I beg of you, to desist."

"I'll pay the damages to office furniture," Duncan answered, and at the same time landing more bunched knuckles on the eyes and nose of Dettmar.

Consul Lingford bobbed around in the turmoil like a wet hen, while his office furniture went to ruin. Once, he caught Duncan by the arm, but was flung back, gasping, half-across the room. Another time he appealed to

Minnie.

"Mrs. Duncan, won't you, please, please, restrain your husband?"

But she, white-faced and trembling, resolutely shook her head and watched the fray with all her eyes.

"It is outrageous," Consul Lingford cried, dodging the hurtling bodies of the two men. "It is an affront to the Government, to the United States Government. Nor will it be overlooked, I warn you. Oh, do pray desist, Mr. Duncan. You will kill the man. I beg of you. I beg, I beg..."

But the crash of a tall vase filled with crimson hibiscus blossoms left him speechless.

The time came when Captain Dettmar could no longer get up. He got as far as hands and knees, struggled vainly to rise further, then collapsed. Duncan stirred the groaning wreck with his foot.

"He's all right," he announced. "I've only given him what he has given many a sailor and worse."

"Great heavens, sir!" Consul Lingford exploded, staring horror-stricken at the man whom he had invited to lunch.

Duncan giggled involuntarily, then controlled himself.

"I apologize, Mr. Lingford, I most heartily apologize. I fear I was slightly carried away by my feelings."

Consul Lingford gulped and sawed the air speechlessly with his arms.

"Slightly, sir? Slightly?" he managed to articulate.

"Boyd," Minnie called softly from the doorway.

He turned and looked.

"You ARE a joy," she said.

"And now, Mr. Lingford, I am done with him," Duncan said. "I turn over what is left to you and the law."

"That?" Consul Lingford queried, in accent of horror.

"That," Boyd Duncan replied, looking ruefully at his battered knuckles.