

# LIFE O' DREAMS

By W. DOUGLAS NEWTON

Illustrated by W. R. Stott

ANSTEY buttoned up his waistcoat; he was smiling in his absent way. Lowndes fidgeted with his stethoscope, looked at his friend, and frowned.

Anstey pulled his slightly seedy coat about him, still smiling with the soft, vague good humour of dreaminess. He looked at Lowndes, and said suddenly, as though only just noticing his presence and purpose—

"Oh, am I ill?" Lowndes frowned deeper.

"It's rather puzzling. You're not ill organically, and yet you are."

Anstey's smile was rather more alert, his eyes twinkled quizzingly.

"Am I, for instance, ill enough to die?"

"Good Heavens, no!" burst out his friend, profoundly shocked.

"All the same," said Anstey in his old positive way, that even now he sometimes assumed, "all the same, I shall be dead before the week is out."

Lowndes stared at his friend. Anstey was a queer fellow, and there was something mysterious about him. Since the doctor had renewed the acquaintance broken off at Cambridge so many years ago, he had come to see what a strange creature Anstey was. It was necessary to go carefully with him; there was some curious latent power underneath the fellow's dreaminess that could leap out at one and cut one up with uncanny skill if one made slips. Still, the facts were facts. He said briskly—

"As a doctor, let me tell you that you are talking rubbish."

Anstey's eyes closed as he laughed; there was some big reason for merriment behind them which Lowndes could not understand. Anstey laughed.

"You think so?" he said. "All the same, I reaffirm the fact: before the week is out I shall be dead."

Lowndes frowned—well, inwardly; before his patient he preserved an amiable and equable air. He felt that possibly he was up against some form of mania, a result of the

queer life Anstey had led. He would have to knock some sense into the fellow.

"Let me also reaffirm the fact that you are talking rubbish, Bernard. Your case is queer, but the symptoms are absolutely petty. There is nothing in you which an ordinary tonic won't cure."

"What are my symptoms?" asked Anstey.

"They're queer," said Lowndes, "but extremely simple. You live the life of a steady old stick, yet, if I didn't know you, I should have declared you had been living too strenuously—burnt the candle at both ends, you know."

Anstey nodded, smiling as though agreeing. Lowndes looked at him quickly.

"Did you—I mean—when you were up at Cambridge you were rather a—determined individual—"

"No," smiled Anstey, "I have been a steady old stick since I left Cambridge—practically ever since."

"Oh," said Lowndes apologetically, but still eager to learn. "I didn't mean that I think you led a raffish life; I referred to hard work, rather. You were a devil for work, Bernard—you had an enormous appetite for it. You might have overdone it that way. Were you hard worked?"

"No," said Anstey. "No, not in the sense you mean. I became an insurance clerk six months after I left Cambridge. The work of an insurance clerk is not a very great strain on the intelligence."

Lowndes smiled with him as he said that. Certainly the work of an insurance clerk was no very great strain upon such an intelligence as Anstey had had. Anstey's intelligence had been a phenomenon at Cambridge. He was one of your big men. He had a keen and tremendous brain. It was very freely prophesied that he would do great things in the world—such a well-equipped mentality and such a powerful personality were destined for the largest of all possible spheres. At Cambridge they were all certain that Anstey was one of those men who would carve out

a huge destiny and perhaps help regenerate the world.

And he had become an insurance clerk six months after leaving Cambridge. Lowndes thought this might be a clue both to his circumstances and his present indisposition.

"Was there any shock, any crisis, any great trouble after—after you left Cambridge?"

"Nothing at all," smiled Anstey, quickly grasping what the doctor was driving at. "There was no actual reason why I should become an insurance clerk. My circumstances were slightly penurious, but quite pleasant. I took up clerking because it was offered, because it fitted in, because it was easy. No sudden upheaval of life or fortune made it necessary—I just became so from natural inclination—and because I wanted early hours to go to bed."

Lowndes opened his eyes in amazement.

"Sleep!" And then he said quickly: "I wonder? Is that an explanation? A sort of slow decay." He frowned. "No, it isn't that, Bernard. You're the most amazingly absent creature I know, but your wits are all right—much too all right for an insurance clerk. And, yes, by Jove, from what you tell me, your symptoms are rather those of sleeplessness than too much sleep." He stared at his friend. "Sleeplessness, good Heavens, and you have been spending half your days for the last two weeks asleep in that chair of yours!"

"I know," said Anstey. "But what you say is true—I mean about sleeplessness." He looked at his friend with pleasant slyness, as though about to launch a surprise. "I am not exactly asleep when I am dozing in that chair. I am, as a matter of fact, very much awake—only I am awake in Kalbyna."

"What," asked the mystified Lowndes, "what, in Heaven's name, is Kalbyna?"

"Kalbyna," said Anstey slowly, watching his friend closely, "Kalbyna is a rather beautiful island in the East Indies, somewhere between the Nicobars and the Coral Seas. It is a rare place, Lowndes; I should like you to go there one of these days."

"I didn't know you had travelled," jerked Lowndes.

"I haven't," said Anstey. "In the body I have not travelled. It is only when I shut my eyes in sleep in London that I go to Kalbyna and live my life there in my active dreams—and there I am to die, Austin."

Austin Lowndes stared at the man. He knew—or, at least, thought he knew—now

what was the matter with his old friend. Anstey shook his head.

"No, my dear fellow, I'm not mad. I know it is difficult to understand, but I am telling you the truth. Don't try to find explanations; you won't find any. I myself have found none. Just take it for granted that what I am telling you is true. When I go to sleep in this lodging-house sitting-room of Warwick Street, Victoria, London, I am awake at once in Kalbyna, and live my life there, live it in splendid, active reality—so active that this life in London seems the dream."

Lowndes could only gasp.

"My dear fellow, my dear fellow, it's preposterous—"

"It's whatever you like," said Anstey, with a sudden desperate earnestness, "only it is a fact. I want you, against your reason even, to accept it as a fact. That is why I have asked you specially to see me to-day. I want to tell you all the facts. I must, for I am going to die. I am going to die in Kalbyna—they have decided on that."

Lowndes frowned.

"Bernard," he stammered, "I don't know that it is possible to believe so incredible a story—"

Anstey pulled out a notebook, found a cutting from some work of reference in it, and handed it to Lowndes.

Lowndes read the cutting carefully. It related to Kalbyna. It told how Kalbyna had risen from a primitive, petty, and rather cannibalistic island to be a centre of great industry and prosperity. The force that had brought civilisation to this barbarous place was the will of an Englishman, an Oswald Sleath, who had first become a settler, and then, like Brooke of Sarawak, had become the chief living force in the place. He had moulded the whole of its later destiny in a single great achievement. Lowndes read the paragraph and handed it back. Anstey gave him an old and rather worn photo cut from a newspaper; it was the photograph of a man clad in the duck suiting of the tropics.

"Who is that?" asked Anstey. Lowndes looked carefully at it. There was no doubt as to who it was. He said—

"This is you, Bernard, of course." Anstey turned up the printed legend beneath the photo, which had been folded back and under. The inscription was—

"Oswald Sleath, the uncrowned King of Kalbyna."

"Is that proof enough?" asked Anstey.

"I don't understand——"

"And you won't understand. I don't want you to waste time trying. I want you to believe that I, Bernard Anstey, who goes to sleep here in Warwick Street, wake Oswald Sleath in Kalbyna. I am Oswald Sleath of Kalbyna. Will you believe that and listen to what I have to say? That's all I ask. Will you believe?"

"I'll believe, Bernard," said Lowndes quietly.

## II.

BOTH the men sat down, and Bernard Anstey began talking at once. His odd dreaminess had come over him, but the power that one always felt to be latent in him, that seemed to be so strange in one in his present condition of life, was more apparent than ever now. He said—

"You remember me well at Cambridge, Austin, I don't doubt. You remember that many, including myself, were agreed that I was bound to do big things in life. I was, as a matter of fact, determined to do big constructive things in life. I educated myself to that end; I prepared and planned. I didn't spare myself, Austin; I worked hard, and I was capable of hard work, too. My mental equipment, I think—in fact, I know—was extremely well considered and well found. I knew I was fitted to play a rather important and useful part in the governance of the world, and I had made up my mind that I should play that part. Well, I have, though not in the way I had planned."

"In Kalbyna, you mean?"

"In Kalbyna instead of Westminster," said Anstey. "And I think Kalbyna is the better choice. I have made Kalbyna a living, virile thing; at Westminster, what should I have made? A reputation, perhaps, but nothing as big as Kalbyna."

"I was a poor man, Austin, but that didn't worry me. I had ideas, and a brain to put them before the world. I could keep myself with my pen until I had made for myself an assured position. I came down from Cambridge with all my schedule of life planned to a month, all my arms and munitions ready. I remember I chose my rooms and my table at the club because both were bound to bring me into contact with the men who were going to be useful to me. I spent the first two months getting in touch with people. I got in touch with Ferris, of *The Advance*. When I had impressed him, I sat down and wrote an article—not a good article, but a deliberately popular one—containing some original and

arresting ideas, which I knew that Ferris would buy on sight. He bought on sight."

"I read it," said Lowndes. "It was attractive and as stimulating as an *apéritif*. I waited for more."

"You were meant to wait for more. You were meant to ask for more. That was my whole intention. And more was to follow—only no more was written. That night I went to bed early. I was tired, if pleasantly excited, and turned in at ten o'clock. I went to sleep at once—and at once was at Kalbyna."

He paused reflectively; there was a bright glow of memory on his face.

"I was there abruptly, walking on the ramshackle quay, and the air was rich and hot all about me, and a great, soft, salt wind blew on me, and the sky was tremendous. There was a ship beside the quay. I can hear the slow hiss of her steam now, and the slop of the waves, and the gurgle of the tide on her rusty plates, and the cheeping of her straining warps. I can hear that, too. And I knew that I had just come to Kalbyna, and that Kalbyna was to be mine."

"One moment!" cried Lowndes. "You were in Kalbyna—you mean you dreamed you were in Kalbyna. You went to sleep and dreamed it."

"I was in Kalbyna—dreaming or awake, I do not know; awake, I think, yet in one sense I was asleep; yet awake I must have been, for the things I did in Kalbyna. I am a real man there, Austin; this Oswald Sleath is not a dream person, and I am Oswald Sleath."

Lowndes made a gesture of hopelessness.

"But you weren't there; you were here—what is it?—thousands of miles away."

"Was I, I wonder? You are trying to reckon a spiritual thing in material terms. What is space and time to the spirit? Space, nothing; time—well, ten o'clock here is morning in Kalbyna; the times fit in exactly. Morning exactly, Austin. I've sometimes wondered whether that explained things—the soul, the ego that closed its eyes here in sleep awoke in Kalbyna; the times fitted. I don't know whether it explains, but I think it does. . . . During these last few weeks, when I have seemed to be sleeping all day, I was, in fact, sleeping all day, because day and night I have been awake in Kalbyna, awake and working, for there has been much to do."

"The sleeplessness, yes, that would fit in, too," said Lowndes.

"Yes," agreed Anstey.

"Go on," urged the doctor; "I won't interrupt again."

Anstey paused and collected his thoughts.

"I was on the quay by that rich and lambent sea, and I was looking at Kalbyna. And Kalbyna was beautiful. I could see the wide and white sands; the heat was beating up from them, you know. Behind the sands the palms tossed their feathers against the sky, and under them, to the left, were the houses, palm-thatched, with their coloured wooden walls looking like blobs of bright wet paint in that wonderful air. Behind the houses and the palms were massed the hills—mountain backed by mountain, bright and polished in the light, moving and luminous and magnetic."

He looked at his friend.

"I knew exactly why I had come. The new life was thrust upon me, as it were, but I knew all about the *me* who stood on Kalbyna's quay. This Oswald Sleath was no stranger, though I had only awakened to him that day. He—I had come to Kalbyna to trade. Oswald—that is I—had been a trader of an unsatisfactory sort before—I knew that quite well—and had not been a success. Kalbyna had been a gambler's chance for him. But once he had set eyes on the island he knew that it was to be his destiny. He awoke to it—I think that was *me* entering into him. He—I knew that Kalbyna was to be made by Oswald Sleath.

"I walked up from the quay to the leaf-roofed store, the Kalb men carrying my baggage. A whisky-sodden white man walked with me; he was the trader whose place I was to take. He was going home because he was sick to death of Kalbyna. He hadn't a good word to say about the place or its inhabitants, and he obviously wished to depress me. I wasn't depressed; the more I saw of Kalbyna, the more sure of her I was. Already I could feel her in my bones. . . . The fool was certain that I was a blockhead. He was certain I was a young blockhead; that is the worst type of the school. I didn't mind in the least; what he was written all over his bleary countenance. As a matter of fact, he was the failure, not Kalbyna. He might have done immense things in the island. Its soil is superbly fruitful, and there are minerals of all kinds in the mountains. But if you look up the book by Pollard, you'll find all the material details there; Pollard got them from me—Oswald Sleath, that is. You'll find, too, in Pollard's book my

estimate of the Kalbs, and I proved it a correct one. They are a fine people, hardy, strong, and industrious. Then, they lacked direction; they wasted energy in inter-tribal fighting and inter-island raiding. It only wanted a strong, direct mind to control them, and they would yield magnificent results. I saw that at once. I remember thinking the whole thing out in my hammock under the mosquito nets just before I slept. I slept, and awoke Bernard Anstey, in London—and London and Bernard Anstey seemed singularly squalid and colourless."

Anstey stopped; he thought for a space, probably recalling that wonderful first impression.

"I spent a curious day—I mean my waking day," he continued. "I hadn't quite grasped what it all meant. It seemed to me a singular and vivid dream—a curiously actual dream that got between me and my intentions all that day. But here, awake in London, I hadn't quite grasped exactly what it signified. It spoilt that day, however. I had set down a precise timesheet—writing in the morning, then lunch with a man I wished to impress, a committee meeting in the afternoon, and in the evening a party meeting at Croydon, at which I might be called upon to speak. Well, I didn't write; I kept the luncheon appointment, and didn't talk. The big man provided several openings, and I quite saw that he expected me to rise to the occasion, but my brain just wasn't there at all. I could *not* talk. I take it that he was disappointed in me—I knew he must be. I felt it keenly during the day, then I forgot all about the matter. The committee meeting I cut altogether. I went to the Museum Reading Room and submerged myself in the East Indies. The meeting at Croydon—I didn't even think of it. I wanted to go home and go to bed, and I did—and I awoke in Kalbyna.

"Well, I needn't go into details. After the first few nights I stopped trying to puzzle things out, and simply accepted the facts. I knew that directly I went to sleep in London I awoke in Kalbyna, and that I had work to do in Kalbyna. That was all that mattered. You remember you fellows used to think I had peculiar capacities for administration, organisation, government, and the like? I thought so, too, and had prepared to assault England with those gifts." Anstey laughed. "The ideas of youth are a little exaggerated, eh? But my ideas weren't exaggerated for Kalbyna; the

gifts I had were the gifts she needed, and I applied them."

"But did you give in without a fight?" cried Lowndes. "I mean, it was all very well to dream—all right, then, to live this fine dream life, but to live it must have—in fact, did mean that all your ambitions here, in London, were to end. Did you give up all your plans without a struggle?"

"I don't think I had the chance to struggle, not powerfully, in any case—the dream life was so absorbing. At once it had become a passion, and in the face of that passion the real life—I suppose it was my real life—became more dream-like. I treated London as an unreality. I let everything slide, didn't bother. That's how I became a clerk in the insurance company. Money affairs became, mildly, a nuisance. My banker returned a cheque 'overdrawn.' I realised that, as a poor man, I would have to keep my London self solvent and alive. I looked for work. The first job I found was in a stockbroker's office. It was much too strenuous—it interfered with Kalbina. I gave it up, and was accepted by the Ruby Insurance Company—mild, dream-like work, admirably useful to me. I have been there ever since.

"Of course the contrasts were queer. You see, I was able very quickly to become important in Kalbina. I became in time a sort of European adviser to the Ranj, and then I became a sort of general also. Can you see the contrast? Somewhere about four p.m. Bernard Anstey would be taken to task for sending Mr. Smith, of The Acacias, Stamford Brook, a fire, burglary, and housebreaking renewal notice instead of a fire and burglary renewal notice; at two a.m. (London time) the same person, under the name of Oswald Sleath, would be in the Court of Kings and outwitting the cruel but suave diplomacy of enemy Ranjs; and a word from him might launch armies and waste villages.

"I remember going to a *matinée* of a rather full-blooded play one year. People didn't go much to that play because they said it was too real and ugly and primitive. I found it comical and unnatural. At that time I was marching through the dense bush, at the head of a very respectable force of Kalbs, against a tribe of petty pirates who had been causing trouble. Perhaps you've never been on a bush campaign, Austin. No. One follows imperceptible tracks, the army in single file. The green-black gloom presses down upon one's shoulders. The

silence is appalling—an immense quiet that *towers* over one. Yet the silence is full of creeping stealth. The green walls at one's elbows, the dripping liana, and the horribly tangled underbush are full of movement. Death is poised in that green quiet. From the flash of an arrow, fish-bone tipped and poisoned, to the whirr of a flying ant whose bite is fever, there are a score of secret deaths in wait. And then the sweat and the stinks, the quiet and the sudden tumult of the quick-born fight, the spreading of the Kalbs through the trees, the crash of the undergrowth, the throbbing drummings as the hand-drums beat to war, the heavy, hard shocks of firing away amid the inscrutable greenery; then the rush into the clearing, and men going down, and the women screaming and the head-hunters getting busy—a fitful sleep in the midst of battle, and here I was in London, with my fellow-clerks telling me I was a dry old stick without an ounce of romance in me... Who was it? Blenchem—joined the Territorials. He tried hard to explain to me what soldiering meant, but he gave it up. I couldn't understand—*I!* The night before he spoke I had beaten in pitched battle the most redoubtable chief in the island, and had spent all my will—successfully—in persuading and forbidding my blood-drunk Kalbs from putting the whole of the enemy at once to death by slow and ingenious torture.

"But you will find all that in Pollard's book. Pollard tells the story of the whole of my fighting and the work I did. The work I did was good, Austin. I was making Kalbina—I made it; the Kalbs are good material. I taught them the value of industry and the waste of raiding and piracy. I straightened out their lives. I broke all their enemies and gave them the chance of realising themselves in peace. All this made *me*, of course. In time I became the man that counted there—the biggest man, apart from the Ranj, but he didn't count. He was a weak creature, soft with drink. I was the real force, the real drive—I was Kalbina.

"And by the time that Kalbina was worth while it was something in the world; its trade was big, its standing was notable in the East—my work was good to look upon."

"Yet you never used to look upon it?" said Lowndes. "That's the queer point, Bernard. You remained here, in London, an obscurity—you never went out to Kalbina."

"No, for several reasons. One was that

I couldn't afford it, another was my dread of spoiling things—of losing Kalbyna. What would have happened if I had set sail for the island, if I had reached it? Could Bernard Anstey and Oswald Sleath fuse in the same way? Or would the spell be shattered and— No, no, Austin, I dared not risk that. As things were I had to accept them—I must go on as I was.

"In time the Ranj died. I think they killed him—bamboo splinters in his food, you know, the usual method of removal in those parts. Their idea was that the Ranj's son, a strong, passionate, evil little cur, would become ruler, and I would be kicked out. If he had ever ruled, I should have been kicked out—that was the extent of his regard for me—but I was too strong for them. Before Kalbyna knew the Ranj was dead—but I knew it—I had the son out of the island—an easy but decisive bit of Machiavellism, but it worked. His life was too unclean, and he saw the wisdom of going before European justice separated him from his life as well as his kingdom. Gabo allowed some personal details of his unlovely career to leak out, and his people became full of hatred for him. It was only after this that I let the Ranj die—publicly.

"And I became Ranj. I didn't want to become Ranj—not particularly, anyhow—but there was nobody else. The people wanted me to be Ranj, and I knew it was to the benefit of the people. I was right on top of my power, and with all the best of my work to come. It was not a moment when I could afford to run risks, so I became Ranj... I remember just about that time they gave me a rise of two-and-six a week at the Ruby Insurance and promoted my junior over my head—the two-and-six was to soften the blow my incompetence had brought to me.

"My becoming Ranj was an excellent thing for Kalbyna—you will see why in Pollard—but of course from that moment onward I was Their decisive enemy. There could be nothing for it but war to the death."

Lowndes interrupted.

"Who are They?" he asked.

"A bush society—a secret society. You know these native secret societies are all over Africa, and they are in Kalbyna, too. Religion is in it—a beastly sort of religion, blood sacrifices and other abominations. In the old days they—they call themselves the Brotherhood of Skulls; we're head-hunters in Kalbyna, or, rather, we were—had a

most sinister power. They terrorised the superstitious people, just worked their will through threat of witchcraft, witch-doctory, and the like. If a man crossed them, he knew his life was forfeited; they'd denounce him as the cause of tribal misfortune, and he'd go to the stake. I've been out against them from the first. Under the old Ranj I weakened them. Under my own rule I did my best to stamp them out. But we can't stamp out religions. The process of stamping may make the bulk smaller, but the remnants actually become stronger, more determined, more fanatical. Religions cannot be killed; they must decline and expire. That might happen in Kalbyna, because the people have learned the folly of the old bloodthirsty cult. But it hasn't quite happened. Fanatics yet remain. In the blackness of the bush black rites go on secretly. Latterly, even, They have become bolder—bolder, yes, and stronger."

"How is that?"

"The dissatisfied have gone over to them. In progress there is always reaction. There are always elements who are the enemies of advance—the baser and the indolent, who see themselves threatened by a common honesty and a common industry; the conservative, who hate change; the superstitious, who consider a new order irreligious; and there are those, mainly of evil trade, whom progress will ruin. The latter especially have added a new and wicked vigour to the Brotherhood of Skulls."

"But how?" asked Lowndes. "That the lazy and the orthodox might be hostile, I can understand; but who can be ruined by progress?"

"The opium sellers," said Anstey. "When I—when Oswald Sleath first went to Kalbyna, there was opium—everywhere. Opium has been forbidden. There is still a secret trade, but it is vanishing fast."

"I see. And the opium sellers, to save themselves, have entered into an alliance with the Brotherhood of Skulls?"

"That is it. They ranged themselves in a solid coalition against me. I was to feel the weight of their power. I was to be won over—by threat—or removed."

"Ah! And you were not won over?"

"Two sly and subtle Kalb grantees interviewed me. They were ineffably bland and innocent, but in their elusive way I was able to see that I had the choice of two evils. Frankly, I was to undo all that I had done in Kalbyna, or die!"

"And——"



“Somewhere about four p.m. Bernard Anstey would be taken to task for sending Mr. Smith, of The Acacias, Stamford Brook, a fire, burglary, and housebreaking renewal notice instead of a fire and burglary renewal notice :...

“And I am afraid I was a trifle too blunt. I told them brutally I knew exactly what was in their minds, and that I would have no truck with them. This happened yesterday—last night. Some time this week they’ll strike. How, I don’t know—a poisoned kris flung in the dusk, bamboo splinters in my food, or—I don’t know. But it’ll come certainly. I wanted to explain it all to you, but I’m afraid it’s too late. It’s nine-thirty.”

“I know,” said Lowndes, “but I must hear more. Surely—”

“There’s a lot to do in Kalbyna,” said

Anstey—“an awful lot to do, and they may strike any moment. No, it’s nine-thirty. You must go, Austin.”

“But they might— I mean, I only half know,” began Lowndes, but Anstey was already crowding him towards the door.

“You will find all the facts in my papers,” said Anstey. “That is why I have told you, to prepare you. It’s all there. Now you must go, my dear fellow. I must sleep. There is such a lot to do in Kalbyna—”

“But can’t I help? Well, can I come to-morrow?”

“Yes, come to-morrow. Yes, come



at two a.m. (London time) the same person, under the name of Oswald Sleath, would be in the Court of Kings and outwitting the cruel but suave diplomacy of enemy Ranjs; and a word from him might launch armies."

to-morrow. Good-bye. No, you can't help. Good-bye."

"It's horrible!" protested Lowndes.

"Inevitable only. Good night, old fellow."

Lowndes was turned out. He left with his head in a whirl. It was all incredible, but when Anstey spoke one had to believe. It was all strangely unreal, fantastic, yet it

was so true in texture. One man with two personalities—Bernard Anstey, of London, sharing one mind and soul with Oswald Sleath, of the East Indies—absurd, impossible, an insane idea even, but he had heard Anstey state it as a fact, and Anstey had spoken in tones of rock-like veracity.

And if it was true, then, good Heavens, it was hideous. It meant death. Sleath was



doomed to die; that meant Anstey must die. All the way home, all through the night, Lowndes turned over in his mind the amazing, the impossible problem. It was inconceivable, this double life and double death, yet he could not convince himself it was untrue. He argued it all out during the night. He rose in the cold sensibility of dawn, and, with practicality of morning and the chilly sanity of his tub, he scoffed.

"It's all absurd," he declared finally—"the maddest of dreams or series of dreams. It's unreal and it's impossible; and I'll go round at once and talk sense to Bernard. Immediately after breakfast I'll go round and knock sanity into him."

But he didn't even breakfast.

He was on his first cup of coffee when he came upon that paragraph about Oswald Sleath.

Oswald Sleath, the King of Kalbyna, had died suddenly in Kalbyna yesterday—that is, during the night. A three-line cable reported the fact.

In an agony of fear Lowndes taxied to Westminster. He met a doctor on the step.

Bernard Anstey had died suddenly during the night.

"A very queer case," said the doctor—"sudden and violent stomach and bowel trouble. Snuffed him out with awful abruptness. Most queer case . . ."

Lowndes thought of bamboo splinters.

*They* had carried out their threat.

