

**THE STOLEN STATESMAN:
BEING THE STORY OF A
HUSHED-UP MYSTERY**

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The stolen statesman: being the story of a hushed-up mystery by William Le Queux

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WILLIAM LE QUEUX

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By **WILLIAM LE QUEUX.**

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PROLOGUE

"Look! Here he comes—at last!" cried a well-dressed young woman, evidently from the suburbs, who had been standing in patience for nearly an hour with a small knot of the curious in Downing Street, that narrow, official-looking thoroughfare which is the hub of the British Empire.

The dark-painted door of the Prime Minister's old-fashioned official residence had been opened by a sedate-looking manservant, and there had emerged into the sunlight of that June morning in 1913 a tall, alert, clean-shaven man of about fifty, whose features were aquiline, whose eyes were keen and penetrating, and who walked with light springy step towards Parliament Street.

The little crowd drew back respectfully as the constable on duty waved his hand. The people were there in order to see the Ministers in the flesh, for a meeting of the Cabinet had just been held, and one after the other its members were taking leave of the Premier.

The tall man in a silk hat and dark grey frock-coat smiled as he passed that knot of the curious, for, loud enough for him to hear, one working-man remarked:

"Ah! Monkton's the man! He'll be Prime Minister some day—you bet!"

Reginald Monkton, for it was he who was passing, glanced at the speaker and shook his head, whereat the little crowd laughed, while the man who had made the prophecy said loudly:

"Yes, you will, sir. And the whole country will support you!"

Whereat there was a hearty cheer, while the popular Secretary of State for the Colonies beat a hasty retreat, and the police constable grinned.

"A fine fellow! What a man!" declared another admirer in the crowd. "Yes, he always hits out from the shoulder, and doesn't mind a bit what people think!" said another, while a third declared: "He tells the truth—which is more than some of 'em do!"

"You're right!" shouted the working-man.

At that moment the door of Number 10 again opened and there emerged the Foreign Secretary, thin-faced, spare, and somewhat

ascetic-looking, and the attention of the little knot of London sightseers at once diverted from their popular hero.

Now Reginald Monkton had not noticed, nor had the constable noticed, that a dark-haired young woman neatly dressed in navy blue had separated herself from the little gathering, as though tired of waiting, and had followed Mr. Monkton out into Parliament Street, where, turning to the left, they were both lost to view. A keen observer, however, would have discerned that as the young woman turned out of Downing Street she took out her handkerchief and dabbed her nose—a purely ordinary proceeding. Across the broad thoroughfare, however, a youngish, well-dressed man, rather thick set and swarthy, who had been lounging on the kerb idly smoking a cigarette, saw the girl's action and at once crossed the road and followed her.

That she had signalled to him was quite evident. It was also evident that the pair were following the popular statesman who had just come from that very important meeting of the Cabinet.

With what intent? The Cabinet Minister, had he known that he was being followed, would not have given the matter a second's thought. Like all popular men, he was used to the way in which people whispered and nudged each other whenever he appeared, and he was also used to being followed by admirers of his policy.

CHAPTER I**CONCERNING SHSILA MONKTON**

As the Right Honourable Reginald Monkton walked towards Charing Cross on that June morning his fifty-odd years appeared to weigh lightly upon him. True, his hair was tinged with grey, yet that was but natural after over twenty years of political strife and Party bickering, of hard-fought divisions in the House, and of campaigns of various sorts up and down the country. His career had been a brilliantly outstanding one ever since he had graduated at Cambridge. He had risen to be a Bencher of the Inner Temple; had been, among other things, Quain Professor of Law at University College, London. In Parliament he had sat for North-West Manchester for ten years, afterwards for East Huntingdon, and later for the Govan Division of Glasgow. Among other political appointments he had held was that of a Junior Lord of the Treasury, afterwards that of Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Home Office, and now in the latest Administration he had been given the portfolio of Colonial Secretary.

His one regret was that while he loved the country, and more especially Fydinge, that fine old Elizabethan manor house in Leicestershire, not far from Melton Mowbray, yet he was compelled to live in London and endure the fevered political and social life of the metropolis.

That morning, as he turned from Charing Cross towards Pall Mall, he was in a pensive mood. True, that little knot of people had spontaneously expressed their approval, and perhaps he was secretly gratified. Whatever popular men may say to the contrary, it is always the small appreciations that please. Reginald Monkton was far more gratified by a schoolgirl asking for his autograph in her well-thumbed album, than by the roars of applause that greeted his open and fearless speeches in the huge halls of Manchester, Birmingham, or Glasgow.

The millions of Britain knew him. His portrait appeared regularly in the illustrated papers, sometimes in declamatory attitude with his mouth open, his right fist in the palm of his left hand, addressing a great audience. But that morning, as he