

"WHY, JIMMY"

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"Why, Jimmy" by Margaret A. Holding

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MARGARET A. HOLDING

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BY
MARGARET A. HOLDING

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DEDICATION

This book is affectionately dedicated to
My Mother,
HELEN CLARK HOLDING

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"WHY, JIMMY"

CHAPTER ONE

JAMES MCGEE CURRUTHERS (known to his friends as "Jimmy"), private secretary to Jacob Fellersbee, president of the Fellersbee Manufacturing Company, lit his pipe, closed the door of the house (set back in the trees), thrust his hands into his pockets and strode away. It was a soft, starry, moonlit April night that proclaimed spring in every breeze that blew.

There are two things to be explained about Jimmy: first, his appearance, and, second, his disposition. He was tall—about six feet one or two and thin, too thin for his height. He was naturally white, with straight black hair and blue-gray eyes. He was not handsome, but his square jaw, honest eyes and well-proportioned features made him good looking in a homely way. He was possessed of a very even temperament (usually), a very level head, very acute conscience, a very keen sense of right and wrong and a truthful tongue. Now his dis-

position had never been given a fair test of what it really was like, for in twenty-five years he had never "run into" anything to unbalance his even temperament; never had use for anything but a level head; never had opportunity or desire to be anything but conscientious; never had anything but the right thing to do and never had been compelled to tell else but the truth. He smoked, he danced, and once in a great while, when the occasion seemed to demand it, he had sworn a little. Yet with all of these virtues he held aspirations of becoming a writer.

He had tried for two or three years, but instead of accepting his "works" with at least a smile, they had returned unchanged, with many thanks for the opportunity to read them; no thickened plots, no snarled mysteries, no thrilling romance nor humorous tales had manifested themselves either before his eyes to copy or in his mind to be thought out and written.

An hour after he had left the house he returned, climbed the steps, opened the door and switched on the light in the living-room. In the chair by the window, her feet curled under her, her chin resting on the interlocked fingers of both hands, her elbows on the arms of the chair, sat a girl. She was perhaps twenty-one or twenty-two, of medium height and medium weight. The dull black hair twisted high on her head was a contrast to her smooth white face, just slightly pink. A pair of large black

eyes were raised to him when she heard him enter.

James McGee Curruthers was surprised, but he did not jump; the Curruthers were not a jumping family. He just stared. It rather nettled him to see her there; he wanted solitude, he wanted to concentrate his mind, he wanted to be alone and undisturbed. Perhaps his mind was on these things and not on what she was saying when to her cheerful "Hello" he echoed "Hello."

He continued to stare but not to speak.

"I'm so glad you aren't going to ask me why I'm here. That would mar your delightful hospitality. I judge you are the owner"—he was not, but he let it pass—"and you know I could not tell you, so you are polite and refrain from asking questions." She smiled a forced smile. Jimmy thought her talking was forced. It seemed to him that she was doing it only to cover embarrassment.

"I'm sure you won't mind having me stay here for a few days. It must be lonesome for you."

"That's why I'm here. I don't care about company." Here was a place to lie, but Jimmy did not take advantage of it.

Her smile faded and then returned.

"Yes, I know it seems that way when company *first* comes, but afterward one is glad they came. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, yes, that's so. Come to think about it, I *am* lonesome to-night." Jimmy was *not* lying this time.

"Well then, that's fine. Isn't it grand to-night," she went on, "so springy and moonlight? Do sit down and act as though we had known each other more than five minutes."

He sat down opposite her and at last found his tongue.

"That's so; we *had* better be friendly since you are planning to stay awhile, and since neither of us owns the house—"

"Oh, are you a—"

"I don't know whether I am or not. But it's not mine; it's my brother's. My name is Curruthers. Jimmy we'll call it."

"And mine is Josephine Smith. We'll call it Jo." They laughed and then for half an hour said but little.

At eleven o'clock she smothered a yawn.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Sleepy?"

"Rather."

"Let's turn in."

"All right."

"There is only one bed made up. I'll show you to your room."

"Oh, no, you keep it. I'll stay here."

"Certainly not. You're my company, remember."

At the door of the bedroom he left her and went back to the living-room, where he sat down to think. He would like to have asked how she got in, but even

this he had refrained from doing. As though hearing his thought she appeared in the doorway.

"I came in the kitchen window, the south one. You had better lock it or we may have a house-party."

"Thanks for telling me. I'll see to it."

"And I won't steal anything."

"Of course not. I know from your looks you wouldn't do that."

She laughed a little.

"Good night."

"Good night. I breakfast at eight."