

*The Year's at the
Spring*

Mazo de la Roche

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: The Year's at the Spring

Date of first publication: 1911

Author: Mazo de la Roche

Date first posted: Jan. 20, 2024

Date last updated: Jan. 20, 2024

Faded Page eBook #20240139

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

“THE YEAR’S AT THE SPRING”

BY

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

ILLUSTRATED BY J. SCOTT WILLIAMS

We three were kneeling at our bedroom window in the rear of Mrs. Handsomebody’s house—Angel, and The Seraph, and I.

It was a dismal outlook, for the rain was falling and there was nothing but a planked back yard for it to fall on; and you know what that looks like!

But in the Bishop’s garden, next door, it was quite different, and we all had our left cheeks pressed against the pane that we might get a good view of it. I was in the middle; and first The Seraph’s curls would tickle my nose and then Angel’s curls would tickle the back of my neck; but my hair did not annoy any one, being straight and flat.

If you could see the Bishop’s garden you would not wonder that we craned our necks at it. For it was covered with the smoothest, greenest grass—the kind you want to roll on—and in place of an ugly old board fence, it had a red brick wall, with hollyhocks and roses growing round it, and right in the farthest corner stood the Cherry Tree. It was the only tree in any of the adjoining back gardens, so we thought its proud bearing quite excusable, all covered with big red cherries as it was, and just washed clean by the rain.

Angel and The Seraph were trying to count the cherries, but I was staring at the fountain in the middle of the garden. There was a white marble boy in the basin, who blew the water through a shell that he held to his lips, and the spray he blew danced among the raindrops as though they were little brothers playing games.

The Seraph once saw a marble statue of the Christ Child, and at first he would call the Fountain Boy the little Jesus, but when Mrs. Handsomebody overheard him she was quite angry and reproved him for it. She is a Unaquarium—or something fishy—but we are ’Piscopalians, like the Bishop, and are very glad of it.

“Seven millions nine thousand and ninety-nine!” finished Angel—counting cherries.

“I don’t believe it!” shouted The Seraph, “I’d only got to ’leventeen!” And his curls tickled my nose defiantly.

“Here comes the Bishop!” I interrupted. “We’ll ask him to decide!”

This was said ironically, for, of course, none of us would have dared speak to him. He looked very stern as he walked in the garden with his head bent and hands clasped behind his back. There was a shady strip, made by the walls of the Cathedral that rose next door, on the other side, and he always walked on this strip of grass even on days when there was no sun. I suppose he could think of his sermon more easily when he was in the very shadow of the church. I know I could!

“Bishop man, it’s wainin’!” giggled The Seraph. “You’s get your gaiter wet!”

“Wait a minute,” said Angel, “and you’ll see Margery come to fetch him like she did the other wet day!”

We knew Margery was the Bishop’s niece, because we’d heard her call him uncle. Margery just seems to suit her; she is so pretty and jolly. Her hair goes in little brown crinkles and she wears brown shoes, with buckles on them.

Angel says any name suits any girl as long as she answers to it, but I said, what about Mrs. Handsomebody? and floored him for a minute. But he said, then, that after all it was her late husband who really was Handsomebody, and that, for all we knew, her name might be Susan Jane, or something equally suitable.

Well, in a moment, out ran Margery in her white dress and caught her uncle by the arm and pointed laughingly at the rain. He looked very sheepish, and then they both trotted into the house, arm in arm.

The garden looked very lonely when they had gone. We took our cheeks from the window pane and looked in each other’s faces.

The Seraph’s eyes got very big and the corners of his mouth went down. We knew what was coming.

“Angel and John,” he said, “I want my muvver!”

Angel and I shook our heads at each other. We each knew how the other one’s throats squeezed. Then Angel threw his arm around him.

“Say, honey boy!” he whispered, “just see that blackbird in the Cherry Tree! I bet he eats every one of the Bishop’s cherries!”

“I don’t see any blackbird,” said The Seraph, crossly, “and I want my muvver and four and twenty blackbirds, like she used to sing about—I do.”

“Well, you can’t have her,” said Angel, firmly, “’cos she’s gone up to heaven.”

The Seraph gazed up at the gray sky.

“Is that—,” he began, taking his finger out of his mouth and pointing upward, “is that weeny piece of blue a bit of her dwess?”

We followed his gaze. It was a lovely blue.

“Yes, old fellow,” said Angel. “It is.”

The Seraph was comforted. Then he said:

“Well, tell me ’bout her, so’s I shan’t forget. You tell, John; ’cos you can tell best.”

We three snuggled down together then and I began:

“Once upon a time, Seraph, a whole year ago, you were four and Angel was eight and I was seven, and we lived in our own big house in the country. *She* was there and so was father and the two pups and all the pigeons. There was green, tumbly grass, and a veranda for rainy days, and there wasn’t even *one par-tic-lar* room in the house that we couldn’t play in!”

“Even the parlor, with the stuffed birds and Mr. Handsomebody’s picture?” put in The Seraph.

“There were no stuffed birds, nor Handsomebodys, either, silly, but we *could* play in the drawing-room. *She* had her piano there, and she used to play and sing to father and us every night after tea, cosy songs——.”

“Angel can sing, too—,” interrupted The Seraph, eagerly. “Sing ‘My muvver’s like a wed, wed wose,’ Angel!”

“You mean ‘My *Love* is like,’” corrected Angel, “not ‘*mother’s* like’.”

“Anyway, muvvers *is* good for little boys to have, ain’t they, John?” said The Seraph, argumentatively.

“Yes,” I agreed. “But Angel can’t sing that song now, ’cos he’s forgotten it. Why do you forget them, Angel?”

“I dunno,” he replied, tracing on the pane with a moist forefinger, “except p’raps, *she* isn’t here to help me ’member. But I *can* sing ‘The Year’s at the Spring’!”

“Oh, the one ’bout the snail!” cried The Seraph. “Sing, Angelboy!”

Angelboy was *her* pet name for Angel, though his real name is David and The Seraph’s is Alexander. But you would never think it to look at them! They have big brown eyes and curly red-brown hair like mother. I have straight tow-colored hair and gray eyes, so I am just John.

Father said before he went to South America:

“You must look after the other two, John, because you’re made of tougher stuff than they are. They’re like *her*, you see.”

So whenever we got into disgrace with Mrs. Handsomebody I tried to remember “tougher stuff, John”—and took the blame. But sometimes I did not feel at all tough, especially when Angel sang.

Then he began—

“The year’s at the spring,
And day’s at the morn;
Morning’s at seven;
The hillside’s dew-pearled——.”

“Now comes the snail!” cried The Seraph, beating time on the sill.

“The year’s at the spring,
And day’s at the morn;
The lark’s on the wing;
The snail’s on the thorn——.”

His treble rose, sweet and reedy, in the crescendo—

“God’s in His heaven—
God’s in His heaven—
All’s right—all’s right with the world.”

Just as the song ended the sun came out, making a little rainbow in the fountain spray and glistening on the cherries. We all felt better.

Well, the sun and the rain between them brought the cherries to such fine perfection that one morning, while we were at our sums, The Seraph, who

was gazing out of the window over the top of his slate, sprang up and shouted:

“They’re pickin’ them! They’re pickin’ them! They’ll evey one be eaten! Oh, Angelboy, I’m *hungwy* for them!”

We crowded to the window.

Sure enough, there was Margery standing on a chair under the tree, while just convenient to her hand the Bishop held a basket, into which the cherries dropped, two by two, like—like drops of blood! My heart almost burst beneath my blue blouse.

The dark eyes of the other boys were large with longing, their lips were as red as the cherries. I noted their beauty with a glow of satisfaction. Let Margery once behold them—she was just like other women—and the cherries would be ours!

I looked them over with a mother’s pride—and a small boy’s guile.

“Angel,” I said, hitting him on the shoulder, “don’t let’s do any lessons this morning!”

“Don’t let’s!” chimed in The Seraph.

“What about Mrs. Handsomebody?”

“She daren’t lick us, and nothing else matters.”

“Not shuttin’ up in dark rooms?” gasped The Seraph.

“Of course not, Baby! ’Cos in the dark there’s lots of things you can’t see in the daylight—wild beasts, and jungles, and knights on horseback, and frigates, and pirates, and buried treasure, and——.”

Angel shied his slate at my head.

“Lead on, Lieutenant!” he said.

I thought he might have made it “Captain,” in view of the fact that I had taken the initiative. However, I grant he is my superior by right of seniority, but that is all, for beauty doesn’t count with men, except where ladies (and cherries) are concerned.

“All right, Captain,” I assented cheerfully, bearing the lady and the cherries in mind. “To the ramparts, then!”

Down the staircase I led the expedition, past the enemy’s very door, where the sound of Mrs. Handsomebody’s tongue berating Mary Ellen

showed that there was trouble in their own camp; then we felt our way through the dark back hall, where ammunition in the way of umbrellas and rubbers was stored.

In the kitchen—forbidden field—I took possession of a chair; the others armed themselves similarly, the Seraph dragging his bumpety-bump down the back entry steps.

Their faces showed some concern, it is true, when I placed my chair against the Bishop's wall, but they never wavered, and as I mounted mine they both followed suit, and in an instant more we three were gazing— The Seraph could just manage it by balancing on tiptoe—right into the Bishop's back garden!

I could have touched Margery. Her teeth showed white between her parted lips. Suddenly she gave a start as her eyes met mine and all but lost her balance.

“God bless me, child!” cried the Bishop from below. “Whatever are you trying to do?” Then he detected us. But we never flinched.

He took off his spectacles, wiped and replaced them with nervous haste.

“I declare!” he exclaimed. “Those three heads popping up so suddenly on the wall startle one! No doubt there are bodies behind them, too, but from where I stand the effect is quite singular!”

Margery's face was close to mine. She was laughing.

“You funny little tykes!” she said. “Whoever are you?”

“I am John,” I explained. “But these are Angel and The Seraph. They're called that because they're beautiful.” And I indicated them with modest pride.

“What perfect darlings!” she cried. “Look, uncle! Aren't they exactly like those cherub heads by Reynolds? What aureoles of hair! What eyes!”

Being thus commented upon, they both dropped their long lashes somewhat sulkily, and I saw in an instant that Margery was lost—and the cherries won.

“The basket, uncle—the basket!” she demanded. “Quickly! Oh, the precious baby one!” If The Seraph had known this last referred to him I think he would have fallen off his chair in horror—but, there were the cherries, a basketful, pushed into our very hands to loot at will—nothing else mattered. She made us fill the fronts of our blouses, and then, as we

were about to clamber down, she kissed each one. I was the last, and she said:

“I like you, John. I wish you and I could be friends.”

Somehow that kiss made me not want the cherries at all—but something far more unattainable. I pressed my tow head against the brick wall on our side and everything looked hazy.

The sight of the other two eating cherries reminded me of what father had said, so—“tougher stuff,” I said to myself, “tougher stuff, John.” I wiped my eyes on my sleeve.

We were just half-way up the steps with the kitchen chairs when Mrs. Handsomebody caught us. We were hustled and scolded and questioned all at once in a way women have of making themselves seem like several different people at the same time, and quite dazing a fellow.

“John told us to!” The Seraph shrilled.

“He did not!” said Angel, manfully, “and—and—Mrs. Handsomebody, you’ll please not push our backs like that, ’cos we’re not your boys, you know; we’re father’s, and he’ll be coming for us some day!”

Well, we went early to bed on bread and butter and weak tea. But we were very full of cherries. It almost seemed to us that they must be made manifest in our looks, so conscious we were of them.

That night I dreamed that Margery and I sat together in the Tree, eating cherries. But Angel and The Seraph would give us no peace at all, but kept shouting from below—“Tougher stuff, John, tougher stuff!”

Day by day, after that, the weather grew warmer and warmer; our daily walks more and more uninteresting; and the planks of the back yard where we played, drier and dustier. We were very dull. Even a letter from father with its accustomed promise of coming for us some day scarcely roused us. We were so stupid with our lessons and so peevish at table that Mrs. Handsomebody was always vexed with us. The best time came after we were in bed at night, lying close together, while I told in a whisper all the tales I had ever heard or imagined, and the deeper they were steeped in gore the more my audience shivered with delight in their little night-shirts.

One August night it was too hot even for story-telling. Neither could we sleep. The room was flooded with moonlight.

Suddenly Angel, who slept on the outside, rolled out on his feet. The Seraph and I sat up in bed and stared at him.

He stalked to the window like a small white ghost.

“We could easily get out on the back kitchen roof,” he mused, “and from there to the wall is not much of a drop. Then along the wall to the Tree, and once in the Tree!—Lieutenant” he turned to me, “we’ll risk it!”

I was out of bed in an instant, and as for The Seraph, I never knew him to fail us in any exploit, however hazardous. With unquestioning valor he stepped serenely to the fore, game to the smallest curl.

“You see,” continued Angel, “I’ve just got to run barefoot on the Bishop’s grass and play in the fountain. I feel all fuzzy and that’s the only way to stop it.”

“I feel fuzzy, too,” said The Seraph, “and I want to frow water at the Fountain Boy!”

I leaned over the sill and reconnoitered.

With my eye I followed the line of progress that my chief had suggested. I could find no flaw in it. The only wonder was that we had not thought of it before.

We held a whispered consultation. The Seraph insisted on bringing his wooden sword with him, and after a moment’s doubt we acquiesced, for it lent a touch of romance to the expedition.

Then out into the moonlight sallied three silent figures, stealthy of foot, scarcely breathing. The night air played deliciously upon our bare legs. We gained the wall in safety.

Along the wall we crept in Indian file, Angel leading, The Seraph bringing up the rear, somewhat hampered by his trusty blade. The way seemed very narrow. The yawning blackness on either side was fear-inspiring. But Angel was sure-footed as a young goat, and we followed blindly in his wake.

At last I heard him give a grunt of satisfaction as he threw his arm about a limb of the Cherry Tree. I, in turn, clasped his waist, and I felt The Seraph’s fat arms clutch me tightly.

“Now men,” said our leader, “just you keep a good grip on the tree, while I lower myself to the ground, and give you the signal to advance.” Suiting the action to the word, his agile figure swung from hand to hand till he was within easy jumping distance. Then came the soft “plump” of his bare feet on the grass.

He made an elaborate survey of the surrounding country. Then apparently satisfied, he said:

“Good! Now, men, descend in order of rank!”

Performing a few little stunts on the way down just to show the Captain that I was quite his equal physically, I was soon at his side. We both peered up expectantly in the direction of The Seraph.

“What’s the trouble up there, Sergeant?” we asked anxiously.

“I can’t weach it!” he wailed. “I’m *too wound!* Oh, Cap’n, an’—Oh, Lieutenant, don’t you wun an’ leave me, will you?”

“Never mind, Sergeant,” said Angel, kindly. “You jump right down and we’ll catch you.”

Never did subordinate give a more blind obedience than The Seraph. Barely had the words left Angel’s lips when the stout little sergeant cast himself upon us, sword in hand, and in another moment we three were sprawling on the grass, rolling over and over, laughing for joy.

Surely there never was such moonlight, such tender, sweet-smelling turf, such all encircling shadow as that which fell from the gray Cathedral across us!

After the first roll we stretched our bodies, worn with heat, upon the blissful dewiness and lay quite still, looking up at the stars.

The Seraph was the first to speak.

“In the morning,” he said, dreamily, “my muvver’s dwess is *blue*, but at night-time she has *weal diamonds* in her hair.”

“Cut out that kind of talk, Sergeant!” interposed Angel. “That’s not soldier talk.”

“Well, I was a little boy before I was a sojer,” replied The Seraph, plaintively, “and the little boy part *will* keep worryin’ ’bout his muvver, Cap’n!”

After a little he wriggled to the brink of the fountain and peered at his reflection in the basin.

“Hm—m!” he cooed. “My muvver has frowed all her diamonds in the water! Just watch me chase them——. Oo! they’re wunnin!”

He splashed ecstatically.

“I can do something better than that,” said Angel, sitting up. “I shall jump in beside the Fountain Boy, right under the spray.”

“You’ll get soakety wet, Cap’n!” gurgled The Seraph.

“Who cares?”

The Seraph and I squatted together on the basin’s brim watching with admiration the flying leap, in which he looked all legs and fluttering nightshirt, and which gained him a precarious foothold on the pedestal with his arms around the Fountain Boy.

They looked very uncanny standing thus in the white moonlight with the shimmering spray falling about them. Angel had on his singing face. We all forgot about the Bishop and Margery. Angel made a trumpet of his hands against his mouth. Then “mother’s song” came:

“The year’s at the spring.
And day’s at the morn;
Morning’s at seven;
The hillside’s dew-pearled;
The lark’s on the wing;
The snail’s on the thorn;
God’s in His Heaven—
All’s right with the world.”

He too, seemed but a Fountain Boy, pouring out his soul in liquid notes.

I was just enjoying this charming fancy when there issued a gurgling yell from The Seraph, and at the same instant he plunged headlong into the basin. Then a woman screamed.

Now my awakened senses perceived that three people were running toward us, Margery, the Bishop, and a young man.

This last knelt by the basin instantly and fished out the struggling Seraph, while Angel waded across and clambered drippingly out on the grass.

“God bless me, Margery!” cried the Bishop.

“It’s the Reynolds cherubs we saw on the wall. They’ve brought their bodies with them this time, too—and did you ever hear such bird notes, Arthur?”

“It was great,” replied the young man, “but I’m afraid that will be the last of them if he doesn’t get in out of the night air and have some clothes

on.” He looked questioningly at our scanty attire.

“Right you are!” said the Bishop. “Right you are! Oh, the unconscionable little rascal to tamper with a gift like that! We’d best bundle them right into the library and dry them out before the fire, eh, Margery? Arthur, will you lead the way with that protesting infant of yours?”

Arthur strode ahead bearing The Seraph, who was still kicking vigorously, and the Bishop followed with one of us in each hand. Margery was laughing again.

We all filed into the room with the French windows that opened on the garden. How often we had entered it in fancy, little dreaming that the reality would be so humiliating!

We had speculated on its possible furnishings: Angel and I agreeing that in all probability it was very like our drawing-room at home, all white and gold with water colors in oval gilt frames and silver candlesticks on spindle-legged tables. We knew there was a piano, because Margery played on it every day.

The Seraph insisted that it was just like Mrs. Handsomebody’s parlor, only that the enlarged pictures were of the late Mrs. Bishop, and that the stuffed birds were fatter and not so moth-eaten.

But we were all equally wrong.

It was a long, low room with dark paneled walls lined with books, and the only picture hung over the mantelpiece. It showed a group of men in long robes sitting around a table. There was food on the table, but they all seemed to be watching the man in the middle who was looking very sad, indeed.

There was a carved table littered with books which I longed to handle, and in one corner stood a piano of unpolished wood. Lighted candles, set in the panels, shed a soft glow on the keyboard and the scattered music on the rack.

Angel and I stood taking in all this in silence. Arthur had set down The Seraph and he had run and clung to us with his great eyes staring back at the strangers. Then Angel spoke.

“We’re very sorry——,” he began.

“Sorry!” cried the Bishop, fiercely. “I should think you would be sorry! To have wet feet with such a voice! Now tell me, which is the one that sang?”

Angel hung his head.

“I did, sir.”

The Bishop turned to the young man.

“Test him with the piano, Arthur,” he said. “I can’t be contented till I hear that voice separated from the moonlight. The two combined are a bit bewildering to an ordinary mortal. Margery, child, have you a shawl for the boy?”

Margery and Arthur gave each other a look as though amused at the Bishop’s enthusiasm. Arthur wore eyeglasses, behind which his eyes smiled very dark and bright.

“Well, uncle,” said Margery, “if you wish to hear him sing, the Angel one, you’d best not waste any time, for it’s awfully late for such little chaps to be out of bed. Whatever were you trying to do, boys? And what will your mother say?”

I volunteered to explain.

“You see, ma’am, we felt all fuzzy ’cos of the hot room, and we wanted to tumble around on your grass. Then Angel got excited and he sang. He always sings when he gets excited. He just can’t help it. And we’re not Mrs. Handsomebody’s boys, please. We’re David Curzon’s boys, and some day he’s coming to take us away and make a home for us.”

“Would that be Curzon, the civil engineer?” interrupted the Bishop. “Why, I knew him as a boy!”

“Yes, sir!” I cried, and went on proudly: “He’s in South America building a railroad. We’re staying with Mrs. Handsomebody because she’s father’s old governess, but she must have been ever so much nicer then or my grandmother wouldn’t have kept her.”

“She’d—she’d have spanked her!” put in The Seraph, grimly.

“Shut up, Seraph,” said Angel, pushing him.

“Well, well,” said the Bishop, beaming, “I am glad to meet Davy Curzon’s boys.” Then he shook hands with us all around; The Seraph, of course, giving his left one.

“Now, I said to you only this morning, Margery, that I wondered how it could be possible such a very plain body——. If ever a name was a misfit! This lad now,” and he indicated me, “is the counterpart of Davy.”

“Then I should like to know Davy,” said Margery, putting her arm around my shoulders.

Arthur, we learned afterward, was the organist in the Cathedral, and a great favorite with the Bishop and Margery. He used to come in the evenings and play for them, while Margery sewed and the Bishop thought out things, and I suppose the music helped them both.

After some coaxing Angel sang for them, and Arthur played his accompaniment very softly, just as mother used. He looked very funny, standing by the piano in his nightgown, with his hair all on end. However, Arthur and the Bishop did not seem at all amused, but listened as though they feared to miss a note.

Margery fetched a big shawl and wrapped The Seraph in it and cuddled him. I sat on a stool at her feet, trying to count the Bishop’s books and wondering what Mrs. Handsomebody would do with us when she discovered our iniquities.

When they had made Angel sing two songs and run the scale a couple of times, the Bishop and Arthur spoke in an undertone for a moment, after which the Bishop said to Angel:

“Now, Angel, my man, we want you to help us out in our boys’ choir with that beautiful voice God has given you. All you will be required to do is to practice an hour with Mr. Arthur here three times a week. There are two services on Sunday, with occasionally an odd one during the week, and, of course, you will get pocket money like the other boys, and a good musical training free. You will have jolly times, too, with the other choir boys, who are very nice fellows, though mischievous—very mischievous! What?”

“Can they come?” Angel asked, nodding toward The Seraph and me.

“Can they sing, too?” The Bishop questioned eagerly.

“No—,” stammered Angel, “but——.”

I stood up.

“If you please, sir,” I said, “I can ’splain things a little better than Angel, though I can’t sing, and it’s like this ——.”

“Speak up, John,” piped The Seraph encouragingly from Margery’s knee, and every one laughed.

“I can hear you nicely, John,” said the Bishop. “Go ahead!”

“Well, you see,” I went on, “Angel and I have never been separated, even for an hour, except for the eleven months he was born before me, and I don’t believe Angel could sing one bit if I were not there. He’s very difficult, Mrs. Handsomebody says. I would keep pufickly quiet.”

“Will it be all right, Arthur?” asked the Bishop.

“Certainly it will!” cried Margery. “It would be a shame to separate such a quaint little trio! Let them all come! Just think of The Seraph in a surplice!”

So everything was settled except Mrs. Handsomebody, and the Bishop pulled a very long face when he found that he was expected to settle her.

It was not so very late after all, it seemed, so he jammed his flat hat on his head and led the way out of his front door around to hers and rang the bell, we three doing our best to hide behind him.

Mary Ellen answered the door, and we were shown into the parlor where Mrs. Handsomebody was sitting among the stuffed birds. She rose with a terrible look.

“David! John! Alexander!” she gobbled, “what new atrocity have you perpetrated?”

I expected to see the Bishop quail, but I suppose he remembered she was a Unaquarium and knew no better. He held out his hand and said:

“Mrs. Handsomebody? I am Bishop O’Sullivan next door. I am charmed to have the opportunity of making your acquaintance through these three little charges of yours, to whom, I suppose, you fill the place of a mother.”

We never knew how it happened, but in a few minutes the Bishop and Mrs. Handsomebody were chatting away like old friends, and she was telling him all about Mary Ellen. The Bishop seemed to think that Mary Ellen was a very bad lot, for which we were sorry, as she had been so good to us.

Finally Mrs. Handsomebody ordered us quite kindly to retire, and begged us to rub ourselves thoroughly dry before getting into bed.

So we scuttled off and they had it out in the parlor alone. I should have liked to hear that conversation. The next morning at breakfast Mrs. Handsomebody informed us that she had arranged that Angel go three times a week for a lesson in music from Mr. Arthur. The Seraph and I were to accompany him. She imparted the news in a tone that implied that the

lessons partook of the nature of a punishment for our escapade of the night before.

However, remembering Margery and her uncle, we could afford to be magnanimous, so we meekly bent our heads with a chastened air.

This was the beginning of very delightful times for us, neglected little fellows that we were! Every Saturday there was a practice in the Cathedral with the other boys. However, we did not bother much with them, being quite sufficient for one another. But the lessons with Mr. Arthur at the Bishop's were something to be looked forward to.

While the lesson was in progress The Seraph and I sat demurely in the window seat looking at whatever books we chose. I think I liked that part best. But when the lesson was over we played games, in which Margery and often the Bishop joined. Sometimes they took place in the garden, and I noticed the Bishop and The Seraph played in exactly the same fashion, making a great deal of noise and seeming rather puzzled at times to know what the game was all about.

The lawn was ours to roll on when we pleased, and on wet days we played quiet games in the library and had tea and buttered toast, which Mrs. Handsomebody never allowed, it being bad for our digestion. However, that lady never made any objection to our playing with the Bishop, though she went right on being a Unaquarium herself.

The summer led the way to winter when we snowballed each other in the garden, and made a great snow-man to be a father to the Fountain Boy. But The Seraph cried so because there was no mother for him that we had to make a snow-woman, too. And Margery lent her one of her own hats, so that the Boy could tell her from his father.

Then after the winter came Easter, and the most exciting time of all.

Angel was to sing the solo at the morning service on Easter Day, and Mr. Arthur had composed it. I forget now how it went, but at the time I could *think* every note of it in my head just as true and clear as Angel. He was very nervous about singing alone before so many people, for his voice was to come as a surprise to the congregation. He said:

“Remember now, John, to stand close to me, and when I begin to sing be sure to open and shut your mouth all the time so no one will know but what it is you.”

I practiced this before the mirror in odd moments, and the singing face became me so well that I admit I was quite willing to be taken for the boy

soprano.

Easter morning dawned, sun-splashed and radiant.

For the first time that Spring the fountain had been turned on, and the Fountain Boy was blowing vociferously through his shell, as though to make up for lost time. We three had had our hair cut the day before, and were experiencing that sensation of almost immodest newness associated with that ceremony. We wore stiff white Eton collars, and in the choir vestry Margery came and pinned a half-blown rose on each boy's surplice.

Through the open door we could hear the decorous rustle of the congregation and smell the dreamy sweetness of the Easter lilies. Then came the beat of the great organ's heart in the opening bars of the Processional. The Seraph and another little boy led the procession with Angel and me immediately behind them. Just as my feet passed from the stone floor of the vestry to the matting of the aisle a storm of boy voices broke from our ranks and shook the scented air. We traversed the aisles with creeping steps past throngs of women in their flower-garden hats and deep-voiced men joining in our hymn, and mounted the chancel steps to our stalls embowered in lilies.

"I will arise and go to my Father——," sounded the Bishop's voice, deeply resonant.

The rows of faces below me were blurred. "My father"—how I wanted him! I looked at Angel. His face seemed very small and white this morning. Our hands met under our surplice sleeves; our fingers gripped.

Step by step, like an advancing army, the service proceeded. With unthinking zeal we little chaps threaded the mazes of the Athanasian Creed and chimed our amens to every prayer. Now the Offertory was being taken.

The Seraph and his small companion had pushed their velvet bags under all our noses in the stalls, and now stood on either side of the Bishop with bent heads and folded hands. It was the time of Angel's solo.

Softly the solemn prelude broke the stillness. There was an expectant moment in the congregation. Angel's fingers clutched mine warmly. Then a strange thing happened.

The blossoming chancel faded from my sight, and in its place a vision of our old home rose, luminous in the Easter sunshine. The white and gold room—the white dress of my mother—her red gold hair—her fingers stroking the keys! Then, caressingly, like an exquisite memory, I heard her favorite song in a boy's flutelike treble:

“The year’s at the spring,
And the day’s at the morn;
Morning’s at seven;
The hillside’s dew-pearled——.”

After a second’s hesitation the organ melted into the unexpected accompaniment. Then I seemed suddenly to wake up and become conscious of my real surroundings. My heart thumped as I realized the awfulness of what Angel had done. *Had he forgotten his own solo*, the one Mr. Arthur had taught him? I stole a glance at him. His cheeks flushed confidently as he rose to the crescendo:

“The year’s at the spring,
And day’s at the morn;
The lark’s on the wing;
The snail’s on the thorn;
God’s in His Heaven—
God’s in His Heaven—
All’s right—all’s right with the world.”

I turned, trembling, toward the Bishop. He was gazing at us with the peaceablest expression in his eyes, and the odd thing was that he looked quite, quite young.

As in a dream I saw him take the alms plates at the chancel steps and present them at the white-draped altar. The Seraph’s little stiff white surplice rustled as he came back to my side.

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.”

At last it was all over. As we passed out I could see every one staring at Angel and some whispering behind their hymn books. I had forgotten all about making the singing face! But whatever would Mr. Arthur do to Angel?

He had just pulled off his surplice and was unbuttoning his cassock when in rushed the organist. Angel’s face was pitiful.

“I couldn’t help it!” he began penitently. “Everything else went right out of my head—I’m awfully sorry!”

But before he could say another word Mr. Arthur had caught him round the waist and whirled him up and down the vestry in a sort of wild dance, right before every one.

“Oh, you little trump!” he cried at last, out of breath. “It was just great! Why, it’s the best boy’s solo I’ve ever had! But what a scare you gave me at first!”

“But what about *your* solo—the one you made?” asked Angel, wistfully.

“My solo? Oh, it can go to pot!” said Mr. Arthur. “And here come the Bishop and Miss Margery!”

They, too, it turned out, were just as pleased as Mr. Arthur about Angel’s solo, though they were more dignified in showing their pleasure. We were all grouped about the Bishop, the rest of the choir having dispersed, and I was in the middle of a long explanation, when something so tremendous happened that everything else was swallowed up in it just like cherries in tart.

As I said, I was standing with my back to the door, trying to explain why I thought Angel had sung mother’s song instead of Mr. Arthur’s, when suddenly I was lifted up from behind and held suspended so by a man’s strong hands, while all the rest were staring open-mouthed at the man who held me. Then I was turned slowly around till my face was on a level with his, and I was looking straight into my father’s gray eyes.

Angel and The Seraph shouted, “Father!” and threw themselves on him joyfully, but I just sobbed against his shoulder and held him close.

“Why, John,” said father, “I thought you were made of tougher stuff!”

“He’s a brick,” said the Bishop, kindly. “But we have all been a bit unmanned this morning. I can’t tell you how delighted I am to see you, Curzon! Margery, this is Mr. David Curzon; I hope you’ll be great friends. Curzon, let me introduce our young acrobatic organist, Mr. Arthur Cromwell, who successfully jumps accompaniments without notice.”

Father and Margery shook hands, and father and Mr. Arthur shook hands; father complimented Mr. Arthur on his presence of mind.

“You will find this small son of mine rather a difficult bird to tame,” he added, with his arm around Angel. “You could have knocked me down with a feather when he began that song. I hadn’t heard it for a long time. It was a favorite with my wife”—his hand closed on mine tightly—“but I had no idea the boy could sing so well.”

The Bishop told father how Mr. Arthur had trained Angel’s voice, and then he invited us all to dinner with him, because he wanted to hear all about father’s work in South America. We thankfully accepted.

At dinner father told us a great many interesting things, but the best was that he had come purposely to take us back with him. He had not sent word because he wanted to take us by surprise.

“Mrs. Handsomebody was at church when I arrived,” he said. “Of course, she had informed me that the boys sang in the choir, so I came right on to the Cathedral; but the maid had told me nothing of the solo. You can depend on it I was the one who got the surprise. Why did you sing that song, Angelboy, eh?”

Angel’s mouth was very full of charlotte russe; it was some moments before he could answer.

“I think—” he began, “I think——.”

“Speak up, Cap’n!” encouraged The Seraph.

“I think,” he went on, his eyes wandering dreamily over the table, “I think I should like some more charlotte russe.”

“I can ’splain,” I put in eagerly, “’cos I *think* what Angel *sings*. Well, when the time came for the solo and the organ was making that sweet humming sound like as if all the notes were honey bees, then everything in the chancel just went out of Angel’s sight, and he saw instead our own white and gold parlor and mother playin’ the piano after tea. He stood with his head right against her shoulder. There was some perfume on her hair smelled a little like Easter lilies, and he liked it. Then she began to play ‘The year’s at the spring,’ and Angel *had* to sing it ’cos *she told him to*.”

Every one was very quiet for a little, then father took my chin in his hand and looked down into my face with the nicest look, and I stared back at him. Then he said, smiling, but sad, too:

“Don’t talk any more now, John; eat your charlotte russe.”

And he gave me more, though I hadn’t quite finished my first helping. I wished Mrs. Handsomebody could have seen him do it!

The dinner, like all other happy times, had to come to an end; but it was by no means the end of our interesting events, for Margery came back to South America to take care of father and us. She is Margery Curzon now.

But the one thing that seems a bit sad to me is the thought of the poor Bishop walking in his garden alone, and nobody to bring him in out of the rain.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by J. Scott Williams (1877-1975) have been omitted from this etext.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this eBook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Year's at the Spring* by Mazo de la Roche]