

# *Beautiful Mamma*

by

**Beatrice Redpath**

Illustrated by

**Stanley Davis**

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# BEAUTIFUL MAMMA

By BEATRICE REDPATH

ILLUSTRATED BY STANLEY DAVIS

*There are some mothers that are just too good-looking — perhaps, even, Nanette realized this when she sought what every girl seeks. Did she find it?*

**I**t was such a singing day. The sea was singing below the cliffs, while across the fields a gay wind was whistling over the tall grasses, tossing them down into waves of green and silver. Every tree was shaken with bird notes.

Nanette stood on the balcony of the summer cottage listening to the singing day. A voice drifted out to her through the Venetian blinds.

“Nanette, darling, you’re so clever about making salads. Would you mind? Ellen always concocts something diabolical.”

“Yes, Mamma.”

“And the flowers. You always know just where to find such lovely wild ones. Only a few, dearest, for the tall blue jar.”

“Yes, Mamma.”

“And wouldn’t it be nice to take some little cakes to poor old Miss Stikeman when you go? If you catch the twelve o’clock ’bus, you’ll get back by six. I don’t know what time Anthony Fane will be here. His aunt seemed so uncertain in her letter. I don’t believe he’s very dependable.”

Anthony Fane. That was a nice name. The gay wind seemed to carry it away and sing it to the long grasses, the waves to murmur it below the cliffs; a bird high up in a white birch tree repeated it over and over. Anthony Fane —Anthony Fane.

She wished she hadn't got to spend the day with old Miss Stikeman. Poor old thing, she was so deaf that she wouldn't be able to hear the day singing all round her; she would talk about her rheumatism and the pains in her joints. But as she had promised Mamma, she supposed she really must go to-day. She didn't care very much about staying at home, either.

She never wanted to stay at home when those young men came for the week-ends. Of course, they were invited for her. Twenty-two, and not married yet. Poor Mamma was doing everything she could to help matters along, but all her efforts were wasted. It always ended in the same way: the young men fell in love with Mamma. You couldn't wonder very much at that. Mamma was so beautiful.

This was what always took place. The young man arrived and Mamma would send for her to come and sit with him, and then she would try and tell the young man what a wonderful little daughter she had.

“Nanette's so clever with her fingers. She made that frock she's wearing. I don't know where she gets it from. Not from me, for I'm perfectly useless —”

The young man would look faintly appreciative, turning his eyes for a moment away from Mamma to glance politely at the frock.

And then Mamma would go on, trying so hard.

“And she makes the most wonderful salads. And cakes—the most delicious cakes, as good as any confectioner's. I don't believe I could even boil a kettle of water.”

The young man would begin to look restive.

“Nanette, darling, what was that book you were reading? Something about Socialism, wasn't it?” Mamma would give that adorable little laugh that seemed like thousands of brooks laughing together. “Run and get it, darling. Your poor stupid mother can't even remember the name.”

And Nanette would leave then, and in a few minutes she knew that the young man would be looking into Mamma's eyes and telling her that he had never met anyone so beautiful in his life.

Then in a few days more he would leave very sadly, and Mamma would sigh and feel wretched because the young man had fallen in love with the wrong person again.

It always happened like that.

Nanette had begged her mother not to try so hard to praise her, but she always said with an air of reproach:

“Why shouldn’t I praise my own little daughter?”

Nanette sometimes thought it was a pity that she looked a little bit like her mother; only Mamma’s hair was like honey while hers was just mouse color; Mamma’s eyes were like wet violets, and hers were just commonplace blue; Mamma was tall enough to make her appear quite small; her voice had gay, fluting notes in it, while her daughter’s was quiet and low. It was very hard on them both. For, of course, as Mamma always told her, she wouldn’t dream of marrying while her little daughter was still unmarried.

Nanette turned from the railing with a sigh and entered the pleasantly shaded room where Mrs. Carter was still in bed, lace pillows piled behind her head, and letters and papers tossed all over the pink satin bedspread. She looked up from the letter she was reading with her gay smile.

“It’s from Charlie,” she said, “poor old Charlie. You’d think he had nothing in the world to do but write letters,” and she laid the budget of closely-written sheets away beside her. “Be sure to give dear old Miss Stikeman my love and tell her I’ll come to see her whenever I have time. I’d wear your wide blue hat, darling, and the frock with the rosebuds. Old ladies simply love to see pretty clothes. It’s going to be a very hot day.”

Not hot, just delicious, Nanette thought, as she climbed into the funny green ’bus that ran along the cliff road, stopping every now and then to take passengers on or to allow others to alight. The ’bus was practically empty this morning and Nanette sat down in a front seat.

“Fares, miss.”

Nanette plunged her hand into her bag and gave a small gasp of dismay. Except for a handkerchief the bag was empty.

“I’m afraid,” she stammered to the red-faced conductor, “that I’ve—”

He wasn't even listening to her. He was just standing there with his hand outstretched impatiently.

"Fares, miss, fares."

"I'm afraid," she began in a louder voice, when someone from the seat behind held out a coin. She turned quickly to see who had come to her assistance.

"Thank you, oh, thank you so much," she murmured to the man behind her. He was slight and tall and dark with brown eyes that had a glint of humor in them. "It was so stupid of me. I must have forgotten to put my purse in my bag."

"Perhaps I had better come and sit beside you," he said, with a smile that lit up his face; "you'll probably be getting off at the wrong place next."

He moved his bag, placing it at his feet as he sat down beside her.

"I wonder if you could tell me where I should get off? I'm supposed to be going to stay with a Mrs. Carter."

"Oh, but you've gone past. You should have got off where I got on."

**T**hen this must be Anthony Fane, the young man whom Mamma was expecting. She felt a twinge of regret. He was so nice. Somehow she didn't want him to fall in love with Mamma.

"You must get off at once," she cried, "*at once*."

He folded his arms and seemed to settle himself more comfortably. The little 'bus spun round a corner and plunged down a long hill, rattling and jolting until it seemed as though every window must drop out.

"That would have been exceptionally stupid," he said. "If I had got off where you got on. Besides, I'm not at all anxious to spend the week-end with Mrs. Carter. She's a friend of my aunt's, and she let me in for it. Mrs. Carter, I hear, is a lady who gobbles up every young man who comes within a mile of her. She has already gobbled up two husbands. I have no desire to meet that fate."

Nanette almost gasped, while her face grew crimson, she was so embarrassed for him. What a dreadful thing to say about Mamma! How on earth was she ever going to tell him that Mrs. Carter was her mother? She would hate to embarrass him so much after he had been so kind about her fare.

“Aren’t you going to get off?” she inquired, as he appeared to have no intention of moving.

“Not until you do.”

“But I’m going to see an old lady and spend the day with her.”

“Is that all? Then suppose you write a very nice note to the old lady tomorrow and tell her you missed the ’bus, and we’ll keep on going until we come to a place that looks like a nice place. Trees, and a stream and an inn where we can lunch. There, that’s decided. It’s no day for old ladies. And now, you may as well tell me your name.”

She had never met anyone so managing. He treated her as though he had known her at least for years instead of only a matter of minutes.

“Nanette Page,” she responded, knowing that she was going to do just what he said. For, obviously, it was no day for old ladies. That was what she had thought when she stood on the balcony. It was such a young day. Everything was young; everything was singing. Even the funny, green ’bus seemed to hum as it sped along the white road, past rows and rows of cottages within shining, winking windows. Children tumbled about in gardens, sailing boats staggered about on blue water, and the sky seemed to smile and smile. Oh, it was a very young day!



*"Of course you got your shoes  
wet crossing the stream," he said  
... He stooped over and  
pulled them off.*

**B**ut what on earth would Mamma say if she knew that her Nanette was spinning along in the green 'bus with Anthony Fane, the young man whom she was expecting every minute? What *would* she say?

The 'bus flew round a corner and passed Miss Stikeman's cottage. Nanette could see the old lady wrapped up in a white shawl sitting in the garden. But the 'bus flew along the white road without stopping, and Nanette made no attempt to stop it. At last the conductor with the red face shouted back to them that they had come to the end of the route.

"Then this is where we get off," Anthony Fane said, lifting his bag.

They found trees and a stream and saw in the distance a white house with a red roof that looked like an inn. Nanette sat down beneath a tree and took off her hat. Suddenly she felt herself lifted to her feet.

"Wasps," Anthony said laconically. "You were just going to lean up against a wasps' nest. We'll cross the stream and sit down under that big elm."



They sat down on the edge of the stream and Anthony sprawled beside her so that he could see her without moving his head, while he lit a cigarette. His glance fell on the grey suede shoes she was wearing.

“Of course, you got your shoes wet crossing the stream,” he said, looking at a spreading stain. “I might have known it. Take them off,” he ordered.

“They’re not really wet,” she laughed.

He stooped over and pulled them off and laid them down side by side to dry in the sun.

“You’re quite the most helpless person I’ve ever seen,” he said. “You’re the sort of person a man simply has to marry. He can’t help himself. How men have ever escaped you I can’t imagine. Any man would feel that he had to marry you so as to see that you didn’t get on ’buses without any fare, didn’t sit on wasps’ nests, didn’t slip into every stream and puddle. I suppose you add up your change on your fingers and get the cashier to make out your deposit slip every time you go into a bank. Just perfectly helpless.”

Nanette’s blue eyes opened wide with astonishment. She had never heard herself called helpless before.

“But I’m not helpless at all. I can do almost everything. I can cook and sew and—”

“Worse and worse,” he groaned; “you’re far more dangerous than a cobra. One of those helpless, domesticated little things who make a man so frightfully comfortable and happy that he can’t bear to think of another man being made so comfortable. I’d have been safer if I had gone to stay with the lady who gobbles up young men. Far safer.”

What nonsense he talked. But she really wished that he wouldn’t speak about Mamma like that. It made it more and more impossible to tell him he was speaking about her mother. He talked so much nonsense that she really couldn’t listen to it all. She liked even better to watch him: liked the way he looked at her out of the corners of his eyes without moving his head: liked the way his hair grew, the way he suddenly burst from gravity into the gayest laughter without even an intervening smile. She was tremendously glad that she wasn’t sitting with old Miss Stikeman listening to an account of her last attack of rheumatism.

They had lunch at the inn with the red roof, and a very smiling waiter called her “Madame” each time he swept her plate away, and she grew red as fire while Anthony laughed joyously.

“Tell me how you’ve ever escaped being ‘Madame.’ I can’t make it out. How any man could sleep at night thinking of you going about by yourself getting into all sorts of trouble, I can’t imagine. I know it’s going to keep me awake. I shan’t get a wink of sleep.”

“You talk the most awful nonsense.”

“I wish it was nonsense. I don’t want to get married. I’m perfectly happy as I am. At least I was,” he corrected. “But I can’t for the life of me see how I’m going to be happy again after this.”

The afternoon flew past on little silver wings. The sky became like a huge apricot and then turned to a milky yellow, and clouds that were soft and pink and round as cupids floated across it. It was time to take the ’bus home.

“I’m going to stay on here at this inn for a few days,” Anthony explained as they waited for the little green ’bus. “You get on the ’bus to-morrow morning at the same time and I’ll be here to meet you. Do you think you can manage it? Do you think you can remember to bring your fare? I’ll be here waiting to see that you get off at the right place.”

“But—but,” she stammered, “what about—”

“Mrs. Carter?” he laughed. “I’m going to send her a message to say that I can’t manage it this week-end. You’ll be here in the morning?”

“Oh, I couldn’t. I simply couldn’t.”

“Then I’ll come over and get you. Only then I might run into Mrs. Carter and be gobbled up before I could find you. It’s far safer this way.”

The green ’bus swung round the corner and stopped beside them. He put her on and paid her fare and waved his hand to her through the window.

“Remember—to-morrow morning,” she heard his voice faintly through the glass.

“Oh, I couldn’t. I *couldn’t*.”

“You’ll come.”

The 'bus started and she settled back on the slippery seat and tried to see the top of his head in the distance.

Of course she couldn't come to-morrow; she couldn't think of coming. She gave a long, contented sigh. She had had a wonderful day. She was glad that she hadn't been stupid and got off to spend the day with Miss Stikeman.

He had talked an awful lot of nonsense that gave her a feeling as though sunlight was shining right through her body. He made her feel warm and happy with the nonsense he talked. And the way he looked at her out of the corners of his eyes without moving his head made her feel happy, too. It had been a delicious day.

Mrs. Carter was waiting on the lawn as the 'bus drove up and stopped at the gate. Nanette got down.

There was a man sitting talking to Mamma. It was Charlie—Charlie, who so much wanted to be her third husband. He was a little bit fat and his hair was growing thin across the top, but Nanette was very fond of him. He was always so good to her, and then she felt apologetic towards Charlie for keeping him waiting so long. If only she was married, then Charlie would marry Mamma.

“Well, darling, did you have a lovely day?”

“Yes, lovely—perfectly lovely.”

**M**rs. Carter looked a shade surprised. There was such enthusiasm in Nanette's voice. She herself had never found old Miss Stikeman very entertaining.

“Miss Stikeman is a dear old soul. Did you have tea in the garden?”

Nanette had quite forgotten Miss Stikeman. Her face grew very red. She noticed that Charlie was looking at her with quiet amusement.

“I don't believe that she has been to see old Miss Stikeman at all,” Charlie put in, with a wicked gleam in his eyes. “I don't believe that Miss Stikeman ever had a glimpse of her.”

“Don't be absurd, Charlie,” Mrs. Carter exclaimed. “By the way, dear, Anthony Fane never arrived. I had a telephone message half an hour ago saying that he couldn't manage it this week-end. His aunt did say that he wasn't at all dependable.”

Nanette's face grew hot again, and she moved away from Charlie's wicked eyes that were turned upon her with a smile of secret amusement. She knew that Charlie could tell just by looking at her that she hadn't been spending the day with Miss Stikeman.

Mamma was looking so lovely, sitting with a flowering thorn bush behind her and a few yellow rays of sun tinting her hair to a fiery gold, that Nanette was glad that Anthony wasn't a very dependable young man. Mamma was wearing a lavender frock and her eyes looked more than ever like wet violets. Yes, she was glad that Anthony couldn't see her. He would forget to talk all his amazing nonsense; he would forget the really dreadful things he had said about Mamma; he would fall in love with her as everyone else did.

**M**rs. Carter sighed as she watched Nanette cross the grass and go into the cottage.

"The dear child is so wonderful that I don't know what I'd ever do without her. But I should like to see her married. But there doesn't seem to be much chance."

"I don't know about that," Charlie responded, "she rather looks as though she had something up her sleeve."

"Don't be absurd, Charlie. Nanette's not a bit like that. She's so tremendously shy. If she ever marries at all, I feel I shall have to do the whole thing for her. If you only knew," and she sighed gently, "of the hundreds, literally hundreds of young men I've invited to the house and shown her off to until I feel just like a showman. And the trouble is—"

"That you always end by capturing them yourself."

Mrs. Carter sat up straighter and looked at Charlie in innocent surprise.

"Charlie, you don't think—you surely don't think that I—"

"Of course not, my dear, of course not." Charlie broke in hurriedly. "I know you can't help yourself."

Mrs. Carter considered that thoughtfully for the fraction of a second, and then put it aside with a tiny shrug.

"I don't want Nanette to marry anyone she isn't in love with," she said, "but by the time a girl is twenty-two she might be engaged, at least. And Nanette would make such a wonderful wife. The child is so capable; there's

nothing she can't do. She always makes me feel what a perfectly useless, helpless creature I am."

"Men like helpless creatures, you know," Charlie said, with a sentimental expression on his round face; "it makes them feel so manly and strong."

"Charlie, don't. You simply mustn't be sentimental out here," she said, as Charlie leant forward to look into the wet-violet eyes, always so alluring.

Nanette came into Mrs. Carter's room quite early the next morning wearing the wide blue hat and a funny little frock with blue pleated frills and very short sleeves.

"Going out already, child! You are so dreadfully energetic."

"I don't think I'll be back for lunch, Mamma."

"Very well, dear. I may be out for lunch myself. I rather thought of going motoring to-day with Charlie."

That was exceedingly satisfactory to Nanette. But she was conscious of a twinge of deceit as she climbed into the green 'bus. She hadn't intended to go to-day when she went to bed last night. She had gone to sleep quite sorrowfully, in fact thinking that she would probably never see Anthony Fane again. But when she woke up early this morning and heard all the birds singing and saw the sunlight dancing over the ceiling in long bright waves, she felt that she would have to go, if only to tell him that she could not come again.

He was waiting for her as he had said at the place where the 'bus stopped. He gave a sigh of relief as he helped her down the steep steps of the 'bus.

"I was positive that something would have happened to you. You really did remember your fare this time? You're still wearing those foolish grey shoes that slip into puddles. Now, where shall we go?"

It was even more enchanting than the day before. They found a wood where the ground was soft with pine needles and they sat down on the warm, sweet ground, while woolly, white clouds floated over the patches of blue high above their heads. No one came to disturb them except an occasional squirrel looking for nuts. And when the sun had finally climbed to the top of the sky they went to the inn with the red roof for lunch. The

waiter beamed on them the moment he saw them, and hurried to show them to the same table between the windows.

“What will ‘Madame’ have to-day?” he inquired, with a sweep of the tall menu card beneath Nanette’s nose.

“He thinks we’re on our honeymoon,” Anthony remarked, as the waiter scuttled away with their order.

Nanette’s face became like a rose. Anthony gravely offered her the tall menu card.

“Do you really want to hide them?” he inquired sympathetically. “It’s so painful to blush.”

**B**ut Nanette was really troubled, for she had to tell him that she couldn’t possibly come again.

“Mamma happened to be going out to lunch to-day. But to-morrow—I couldn’t come.”

“There’s nothing to prevent me from riding on the ’bus myself,” Anthony remarked.

Nanette moved her spoons and forks nervously about on the shining white cloth. Of course there was nothing to prevent him, only she didn’t want him to meet Mamma. That was the honest truth. But she couldn’t tell him that. If he met Mamma she knew what would happen. And she couldn’t bear it.

“I thought you said—” she began and stopped.

“Of course, I forgot. The lady who gobbles up young men. Well, if you can’t come, I’ll have to risk it. She doesn’t know me by sight, so I’ll be able to escape her, perhaps. You haven’t told me if she lives near you. I’ve got to see you somehow or other.”

Oh, she would have to tell him! It couldn’t go on any more. The blood leapt into her face. Anthony picked up the menu card and gave it to her gravely again.

“Only this time I don’t know what they are about.”

“I’m so embarrassed for you,” she stammered.

“For me. And why for me?”

“Because—oh, I’ve got to tell you—Mrs. Carter is my mother.”

Anthony's eyebrows went up; his lips pursed together as though he were going to whistle, but no sound came. A glint shone in his eyes, but Nanette didn't see it. She was still so busy with the knives and forks.

"I see, I see. I believe," he went on with excessive gravity, "that you really wanted to save me from the fate of all the others."

"Won't you ever be serious?" Nanette said, raising her eyes to look at him. "I thought you'd feel simply awful. Everything you've said—I really didn't know how on earth I was to tell you. And now, you don't seem to mind at all."

"It was a bit of a surprise, I'll admit. But I begin to think it makes everything quite nice and simple. I'll come and stay with you, that's all."

"Yes, that is what you'll have to do," Nanette said thoughtfully. "I couldn't go on deceiving Mamma any longer."

But she had a nasty sinking sensation around her heart.

*Mamma welcomed him with her lovely, lovely smile, the jade green shawl she was wearing, slipping half way to her feet, until she looked like some beautiful flower emerging from its sheath.*



**M**rs. Carter was sitting in her favorite spot beside the flowering thorn bush when the 'bus stopped at the gate, but to-day she was quite alone. She watched Nanette come across the grass between the flower beds, followed by a tall young man carrying a bag. Mrs. Carter appeared mystified. Nanette with a young man!

"Mamma. This is Mr. Fane. We met—on the 'bus."

Mamma welcomed him with her lovely, lovely smile, the jade green shawl she was wearing, with its heavy silken fringes, slipping half way to her feet, until she looked like some beautiful flower emerging from its sheath, Nanette thought as she stood watching them. She was suddenly conscious of looking hot and dusty and crumpled. There were pine needles in her shoes. Anthony was gazing at her mother as though he had forgotten that she was waiting to take him indoors. He must have already forgotten all the dreadful things he had said about Mamma. He seemed to have a very short memory indeed.



*Nanette was suddenly conscious of looking hot and dusty and crumpled . . . . Anthony was gazing at her mother as though he had forgotten that she was waiting to take him indoors.*



She felt dreadfully tired all through dinner. The pine woods had made her sleepy. Mamma was in one of her gayest moods, and Anthony appeared to have eyes for no one else. Nanette saw that it was going to be the same as it had always been. She couldn't eat the Pêche Melba of which she was usually so fond.

Afterwards they sat on the lawn, and Mamma tried to bring the conversation round to Nanette.

“You've no idea what a clever little person she is. There is nothing she can't do. She makes me feel so helpless and useless.”

From the tilt of Anthony's head in the shadows of the thorn bush Nanette didn't think he was even listening. He seemed to be thinking of something else.

And then, suddenly, at a pause in the conversation, he leant towards Mamma and said in a very earnest voice that made Nanette feel hot all over with embarrassment:

“But, Mrs. Carter, no one would ever want you to be different from what you are.”

And Mamma’s soft, pleased laugh broke out, and Nanette knew that she was delighted with Anthony.

She couldn’t stay with them, for he went from one outrageous compliment to another. At first Nanette thought he was laughing quietly to himself in the shadows, but his voice was quite serious when he said:

“I feel as though twenty-eight years of my life have been wasted not meeting you before.”

Nanette sprang to her feet. It was perfectly indecent going on like this before her.

“Are you going in, darling?” Mamma asked in such pleased tones.

“Yes, Mamma.”

“Good night, darling.”

“Good night, Mamma. Good night, Mr. Fane.”

It was the same all the next morning. Anthony and Mamma sat on the lawn in long wicker chairs and laughed and talked in such low tones that she could only hear an occasional word as she passed in and out of the cottage, trying to appear so busy picking and arranging the flowers. But the occasional word made her cheeks burn.

“What a busy little bee we have in the garden,” Anthony said once as she passed them without looking at them, and again she had the queer sensation that he was immensely amused about something. “I don’t think she cares very much about us.”

And Mamma laughed her gay fluting laugh.

“She’s much too busy and capable to care about useless idlers like you and me.”

Nanette felt as though she couldn’t bear it any longer. This was what it was like then to be in love. To feel something aching inside of you until you felt as though the tears would come in floods any moment; to wish that you

could shut your eyes and float away on that blue water below the cliffs until you had forgotten that there was such a person in the world. Only something told you insistently that you could never forget—never forget. She could not imagine why people thought it was pleasant to be in love. It was the most terrible thing that had ever happened to her in all her life.

She was picking a few ferns to fill the tall blue vase when she saw Anthony get up and cross the lawn and stop beside her. She didn't look up or stop picking the ferns. But she felt his eyes, and they were like hot coals against her cheeks.

“Your mother sent me to ask you if you would come for a walk with me.”

Sent—by Mamma! The tears rushed to her eyes. That *was* more than she could bear. She turned quickly away, tripping over a boulder, and fell headlong along the ferns and bushes.

She was furious when he picked her up.

“You've scratched your cheek on a thorn,” he said, getting out his handkerchief and wiping her cheek very carefully. “Let me see if you've got anything in your eyes,” and he put his hand under her chin and forced her face up—made her look straight into his own eyes.

“I think you've got something in both of them,” he said, and before she could imagine what he was doing he had kissed her. “Perhaps that will take it out.”

She was so dazed and bewildered and happy that she could only hear Mamma's voice from a long way off. She didn't hear what she was saying. Then Anthony put his arm round her and drew her a step forward.

“Mrs. Carter,” he said very seriously, “this is the most helpless little creature I've ever known. There is nothing for me to do but marry her so that she'll have someone to look after her every minute.”

They were talking in very low voices down beside the thorn bush that evening. They could hear Mamma's voice from inside the cottage talking to Charlie, who appeared to be in the best of humors.

“But you must think she's beautiful,” Nanette said, so happy that her voice had queer little notes in it. “You do think she's beautiful?”

“She’s got nice brown hair.”

“*Brown*. It isn’t brown.”

“Isn’t it?” he said leaning forward as though he were endeavoring again to see what it was that Nanette had got in her eyes. “I really didn’t notice.”

## 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.

Some photographs have been enhanced to be more legible.

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 *Beautiful Mamma* by Beatrice Redpath]