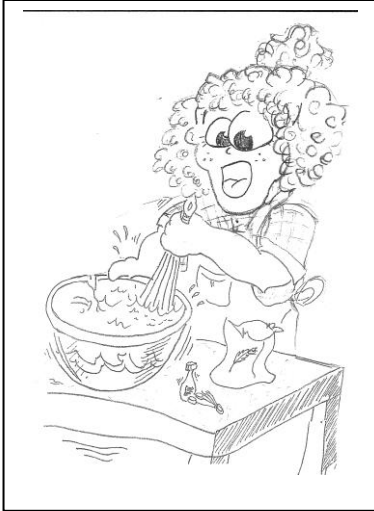


# Mother's Day Mayhem

By D. A. Chase



Illustrated by Ryan Francis Peirce

“It’s an easy enough recipe. We’ve made it a million times,” Darcy, the slightly older, middle sister, said earnestly, trying to sway her younger sister’s vote of confidence.

“Scones take a certain ‘finesse,’ Mom says. When they’re good, they are so good, but when we’ve messed them up, they are like rocks, lumpy rocks, more like cement with pebbles in them, even more like . . .” Dawn was having a great time replaying earlier fiascos in their kitchen attempts.

“I get it already, but I really want to do this for Mom. You know, breakfast and a rose in the vase kind of thing. We won’t be this perfect age of 10 and 11 ever again. It’s just got to be this year.” Darcy was more dramatic than her usual self, this time with a fear behind her eyes.

“Darcy, what’s going on?”

“Well, you see, I mean, you know, I’m not very good at a lot of things, and one of the few things I love to do is play in the kitchen. I mean, I really want to be good in the kitchen. And someday, someday, I might open my own bakery and breakfast house. I shall call it *The Breakfast Branch*,” Darcy said, waving her hand in an arc as if filling in a grand banner across the sky.

“You tell really great stories, Darcy. And create adventures like no one else in the world. It’s one of your hidden talents.”

“I do love to spin a good yarn, as they say. But can’t I be good at two things? We both know for certain that school is not high on that list, but making stuff up is my forte. So, this is important to me, trying out my dreams and all.”

“This might be the perfect time for you to do just that,” Dawn said. “Dad’s in the backyard getting the coals ready to cook the bacon and eggs on the barbecue, talking with Mom, who has her feet up in the lounge chair. Our older two siblings are practicing a duet—with Deanna on the piano and Dallon on the guitar. And little Nickel is making a picture for Mom

with his set of paints. I think he needs a little help, especially in the keep-the-watercolors-on-just-the-paper part of the project. I thought I would make a card for Mom while Nickel paints. I'll be just a holler away," Dawn said, with a chuckle as she walked through the doorway into the adjoining dining room to their little brother on his knees in a chair, leaning over the protected part of the table, with a small bowl of water and his paints.

"So, the kitchen is all mine," Darcy said, as she drifted into the narrow galley kitchen, past the small table, then the short counter with a sink under the window on one side and the stove and refrigerator on the other.

"Recipes, I've been collecting them." She took down her small wooden recipe box from a cupboard shelf and let her fingers walk across the tops, reading the titles as she passed.

"It's a really good thing no one but me, and maybe Dawn, will ever see these," she said, and laughed at her own splotched cards, some with missing letters due to water sprinkles from when she had her box too close to the sink. "Ah, well, every baker has her own signature something."

"There you are," Darcy sighed happily, and pulled out the card, set it up on top of the others, and leaned it back against the open lid.

"Just let me pull my hair back," she said, as if she were the lead on a cooking show, "and grab my apron, then wash my hands, and we'll be ready to bake!" She bowed slightly to her imaginary audience on the opposite side of the table, hearing the applause in her head.

A colorful nest of bowls clanked as the show host in the red plaid shirt pulled them from the cupboard, while she hummed. The curly-headed baker showed the set to the audience as she positioned it on the corner of the small table.

"Now," she said, as she built her ingredients and the measuring cups and spoons, and pastry cloth like a display case. "Let's create!"

Darcy continued to teach her following, with an added flourish of the wooden spoon as she talked.

"And finally, the best part, kneading the ball. Wait! This doesn't look like a ball!"

She looked sadly down into the big yellow bowl at a very sticky, glump of whitish goo. She had already sprinkled flour on top of it, anticipating the ball, that would appear when she reached in with her hand to pick up the dough. And now, her hands, that had been covered with flour, were coated with the sticky, lumpy mess.

“Um, Dawn,” she said with her hands still attached to the stringy glob. “Could I have a little help?”

“It’s ‘may’, I have a little help, and should be followed by the magic word, ‘please,’” Dawn said as she entered the kitchen, but stopped short when she saw her white pasty-faced sister with her hands glued to the wet concoction in the bowl.”Ohhh!”

“I’m, um, stuck,” Darcy said and blew a copper curl out of her face.

“That you are,” Dawn said with her finger to her chin, trying to determine how to help. “Perhaps a little more flour? Yes, that’s what Mom would have said.”

“Are you nuts! I’m like the flour kid. . . oh maybe that’s what I ought to call my show, The Flour Kid Creates.”

“Here’s some more,” Dawn said as she angled the flour sack and gave it a good shake. “It’s not coming out.” The youngest sister, wearing light blue, looked up into the bag, then back at Darcy. Just then, the weight of the light flour shot a clump down the open bag just past Dawn’s face and into the bowl, some of which puffed into the air. A light layer of flour drifted down, covering both girls, the bowl, all the items on the table, and the floor all around them.

“Step one had got to be ‘Do not take a step,’” Darcy said, trying really hard not to laugh at her sister’s blinking blue eyes.

“Poof,” Dawn sputtered and sent some flour that covered her lips flying toward the crook in her arm.

“It’s working! Darcy said as she continued to work the flour into the lump with her caked hand, stirring with the fork. Slowly, it became less like a white spider and more like a layered stone.

“Finally,” she said, and clapped her hands together to get the last of the flour into the bowl. She picked up the ball and dropped it onto the floured pastry cloth, sending up another plume of white.

“Out of here,” came a shout from Dawn as their family cat left tracks down the middle of the galley kitchen toward the opened side door beyond.

“You’ve got it now,” Dawn said as she tried to figure out what to do next. “I can just reach the dish towel. Pretty hard to do without moving my feet.” She swung her blonde braid onto her back with a shoulder shrug, balanced herself, and reached way over to turn the water on and soak the towel. Dawn shook her head when she looked at her flour-covered light blue jeans

and white shirt with little blue flowers, as she wiped her hands off. “Oh, well. I still have time to change, I guess. Right after I create a path.” She started at her own feet, then, on her hands and knees, wiped a path to Dawn’s dark blue jeans covering her hiking boots and on toward the oven door.

“Look at these beauties,” Darcy said. Two flat disc, each patted into the shape of a heart sat almost touching on the large metal cookie sheet. “Just a dab over the top with cream and a sprinkle with sugar and . . . Ta-da!

“Breakfast will be served in 15 minutes,” Dad called in his deep voice from outside through the screen door.

“Righty-o,” Dawn said proudly as she slid the creations into the oven. “Wait! This isn’t right. The oven is cold.”

“It says right here on the recipe card to preheat the oven to 400°.”

“Yah, well, I obviously missed that step. No problem, I’ll bake in a hotter oven to make up the difference in time,” Darcy said, and cranked the knob for the oven until 500° was at the top. Done!”

“I don’t think that’s quite how it works,”

“Who cares, I am going to have it come out at the exact time. Meanwhile, we can clean up the floor before Mom sees our mess.”

“Our mess? I’ll help you clean up your mess as long as you claim it as yours.”

“Okay. My creation, my mess, for the benefit of us all!”

On their hands and knees wiping the floor of vinyl squares over and over again when the pleasant smell wafts from the oven filling the kitchen.

“See I told you it would work.”

Soon after that luxurious smell, a acid black smell permeated the room, and the two girls started to cough violently. Darcy jumped up to sit on the counter by the sink and open window.

Just then, Mom and Dad and all the siblings poured into the kitchen as black filled the room. The other windows and doors in the house, open them all,” Dad said disappearing with the others as Mom turned off the oven, yanked down the oven door and fanned the smoke toward the open window and side door. She looked up at her daughters, then looked again. There they stood, Darcy and Dawn, covered in flour, looking like old ghosts crying.

The two hearts on the cookie sheet smoldered from their place atop the stove.

Dawn drew out the homemade card from her back pocket. The youngest daughter started to hand it over to her Mom when she looked at the wrinkled blue card with the white doily heart, the top half spattered with water and sprinkled with a coating of flour. When she saw the wilted card, she started to pull it back, but Mom gratefully and gently reached for it.

“Well done, Darcy. The hearts were a very clever touch. And you found another clue for what works and what doesn’t when baking! And Dawn, what a beautiful card. Heartfelt, and just my colors too.

“Have I ever told you about the time I messed up in the kitchen?” She said using words she had heard her children use. “I was about your age, when I tried to make my first pie.”

“But Mom, that’s not the same. You are known for the excellent pies you make.”

“Perhaps, but that wasn’t always the case. Let’s just say that it was a good thing we had our own apple trees when I was growing up. Oh, the number of times I had to start over: fillings like glue or like water, chunks of apples too thick to ever soften the way cooked apples should, soggy crusts, burnt tops . . . I could go on and on. But I can tell you, anything that makes you happy while you create it is a win, no matter the result. And over time, that tenacity and practice lead you closer and closer to your dream. Therefore, every try is a win!”

“And that holds for artists of every kind, be it drawing or baking or storytelling. It is all about the joy of doing, creating that makes it valuable, without exception.”

Just then, Dad called from the backyard to say breakfast was ready, and beautiful music filled the living room. Dallon followed Mom out the back door, continuing the song while the harmony of the two oldest siblings filled the open space. When Mom was seated, Dominic brought over his painting of the Chase family house, with black smoke circling out of one of the windows on the side where the kitchen would be. “Nickel,” Mom said, to her youngest of five children, “This is the best painting you have done yet. A great reminder of a great day.” She gave him a big hug and let him bounce away as Dad was serving up breakfast.

“The most unique and best Mother’s Day ever,” she said, smiling broadly to each and every member of her precious family.

“We are certainly unique,” Dawn said.

“And we are getting better at it all the time,” Darcy added.