

A

NICHE

IN THE

KITCHEN

Ouida Sebestyen

5 Some days my mother asks me,
How can she possibly cook
With me underfoot, and her
Cookbook full of pressed flowers,
And clay on the rolling-pin
From projects I'm doing at all hours
There in her kitchen?

10 She says, how can she move around
Anymore, surrounded by hobbies
And models and crafts and
Tools and messes, no matter
Which end she works in?

15 I tell her I don't know.
It's just more fun when I'm
Larking around in the kitchen,
Working where she's working and
Making things while she's baking things.

20 She says, yes, but where can she stand
Without standing in the spot where,
For instance, I'm sanding a new bird-feeder?
I tell her I don't know, but
I need her a lot. For company.
I keep saying I'd rather be
25 There where she's dicing carrots
And icing éclairs, in the kitchen,
Than making things upstairs.
Or anywhere.

She just glares.

30 So I say, can't I have even one
Little niche in the kitchen?
Even if I'm a bother? Please?
Even when I'm not helping? I say,
I don't mind getting down on my knees
To pick up any split peas that scatter,
35 (Won't they make a beanbag?) while she
Lets the hamburgers spatter
And tries to answer the phone.





40 I say it's neater,
Smelling what's cooking and
Looking for raisins in the cookie batter,
Than playing alone.

She says, what's wrong with your room,
Or the yard, or playing with Joan?

45 I explain to her, well, it's just nicer
Knowing she's right on my heels
Behind me, slicing bologna
Or spicing the applesauce.
But she's the boss,
And if that's how she feels
50 I'd better just gather my stuff up
And go.

She says, well...no.

I say, no?

55 She says, no, that time will come soon enough.
Too soon. So just bring your stuff
Back into the kitchen.

60 She smiles and gives me a taste of
Tomato paste and makes more room
On the counter beside her, so I can lace
The pieces of wallet from my leather kit
Or do some tooling.
Working together like that for a bit
Is great. I string beads
While she strings beans,
65 Or I glue seeds to plaques,
Or illustrate books between
Racks of cake-layers cooling.

70 My mother says, when she was young
A kitchen was where everyone hung around
Telling what happened that day
And feeling at home.
She says it had a table for schoolwork
And mending and crewel, and

75 A stool for cutting hair,
And not so much chrome.
She liked it there.

I say I like it here, too, in this kitchen,
And I'm glad it's okay if I stay.
80 We get on with whatever we're making—
Shaking the steak in flour and
Squashing papier-mâché in a tray—
Feeling like artists
And getting in each other's way.
She doesn't scream
85 When she opens the oven and
Steam pours out of the mouth
Of the scary mask I'm baking.
She only sighs when the poster I'm drying
Falls into the meat she's frying.

90 Every once in a while
She tells me it probably would be grand
To have a kitchen no bigger than a minute—
So small that only one person could fit in it.
But then she folds a slice of warm bread
95 And puts my favorite jam between,
And I know she doesn't mean it.

I know when she laughs and
Gives my hair a muss,
And swipes the counter to clear a spot,
100 She's saying our kitchen will always be
Large enough for both of us—
For her, and the things she likes a lot,
And the things I like a lot,
And me.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ouida Sebestyen, an only child, was born in Vernon, Texas in 1924. Both her parents were teachers and, though she didn't like school much, she loved to read. In high school, she decided to become a writer. Her young adult years were spent writing, traveling through the American West and, during WWII, repairing airplanes for the U.S. air force. Sebestyen wrote many plays, stories, and books, but no one would publish them. When a story she wrote about a child was finally published, she decided to become a children's author. Since that time, Sebestyen has written poems, stories, and six novels for young adults. Sebestyen lives in Boulder, Colorado.



1. What is a *niche*?
2. What are you doing, when you *tool* leather?
3. What is this poem about? Just give a short, simple answer in two or three sentences.
4. How many sentences are in the first stanza?
5. Give five rhyming pairs or sets of words in the poem.
6. Describe four activities the child is involved in. Describe four activities the mom is involved in.
7. Where do you like to play or do homework? Why?