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Inside the Sukkah

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INSIDE THE SUKKAH*

You may own a house with turrets and gables,
A mansion of the finest, strongest stone,
A brick duplex or a Levittown tract house,
But you always live inside a sukkah.

A small and fragile tent, of straw and twigs,
Open to the softest breeze or the wildest storm—
Though you latch one to the side of you house
For only seven days at harvest time,
You eat your meals and pray and celebrate inside this tent
To remind yourself that you have lived in there every day.

The peasants saw the rich fruits and wine
Through the chinks in the side walls' straw-tied twigs.
They came with horses and their angry, jealous torches
To burn you to the ground forever.
Yet you would not die; you moved away
To rebuild your sukkah someplace else.

The kings and knights, in a line of shields and swords,
With their glittering armor and white horses in reins with jewels,
Took you into their lands and castles.
But since you could not leave your sukkah behind,
The blazing gold of royalty would fade,
And the angel paintings on the ceilings looked dim,
While in your sukkah, only you could look up and see
The moon and the white stars swirling in pinwheels of
celebration—
Lit by the freedom, power, and infinite love
That streams from the home of G-d.

Continued

You have lived in clusters of sukkahs
With no room to build to the side,
So you built upward,
Your hands and tent poles reaching to touch the dome of the sky
In the same way that your mind did in the Yeshiva.

You even withstood the guards
Who peeped inside your sukkah with their guns,
And the mechanized men holding barbed wire whips
Who drove Hitler's bulldozers into your sukkah.
They called their act the "final solution"
But you have achieved a lasting resolution:
Though torn and flayed, you still survived,
And afterward, yet trembling, you still reached
For the hand of G-d and of all other men.

And your sukkah stays with you,
An eyesore to some, perhaps,
But nobody will succeed in tearing it down
Because your sukkah's fragility enduring
Reminds all people of the truth—
They are just like you.

Alisa Mayor

*A sukkah is a small tent built for a week of meals and prayer to celebrate the Jewish harvest holiday of Succoth.