

## **Concrete that Has Defaced the Hamlet**

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Translated by Mohamed Daoudi

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The trees that my grandfather planted are gradually drying up, withering one after the other. It will not be long before they will all disappear. The orchards will become a wasteland.

Why are the trees of the hamlet dying? Is it the water that is drying up in the depths of the earth, or is it the determination that has dried up in the hearts of the people who dwell there?

There were times in the past when the hamlet provided its residents with the food they needed. If it died out, they would die as well. Now, things have changed. The hamlet is dead; yet they are still alive. They are dead anyway.

My grandfather used to break a big loaf of bread, and throw it in the hood of his djellaba, then head to the fields. He used to have figs for lunch, figs that were fully ripe between the big leaves. He would fill his stomach and then walk back up toward the house. But now, had my grandfather still been alive and had he gone down to the orchards, he would certainly not have come back up from there full and satisfied. He would be groaning with angry frustration down there. He would have swallowed the figs, even if they have now become totally withered and dry. The drought has even dried up the hearts of the hamlet's residents.

Now, everywhere you look, concrete pops up right in front of you. It has dried up our eyes, our sight. The hamlet has morphed into concrete, and concrete has invaded us. Whoever yearns for the smell of earth will find only concrete left. Gone are the days when people used to wash the outsides of their homes with mud.

Concrete... concrete... concrete has eaten up all the beauty of the hamlet, crawling up the walls like termites, burying our history right in front of our eyes, killing, with its rock-hardness, all our feelings and emotions. It has turned time itself rock-hard. Time, it seems, has become mixed with cement.

Concrete is like a fire, consuming and devouring all the beauty and charm that there is. Had my grandfather still been alive, he would not have let concrete creep into the hamlet. And what about our earth? What will become of it when concrete invades our way of life? We need that earth to wash the face of our existence, and to cover us when death claims us.

Even our graves have been infected by concrete; the cemetery walls are all concrete. I can feel my grandfather in his grave crying and weeping desolately. I can feel him struggling to breathe under the asphyxiating roughness of concrete. He comes to me in my dreams asking about the fig tree where he used to pick his delicious figs. I can only reply saying:

“Rest, grandfather, and sleep. Don’t you worry! Concrete has left no fig trees, no gardens, no orchards. It’s all over the hamlet now. It has dried out your history and turned it into a fading memory.”

His face turns gloomy and dark, bemoaning the news I’ve broken to him; he falls back uneasily into his deep sleep.

**Said Belgharbi** was born in 1974 in Dar El-Kebdani in the region of Driush (between Al-Hoceima and Nador). He has published one novel entitled *Nunja tanecruft izerfan* (*Nunja, the Captive of Customs*) in 2009. He has also published three short story collections: *Aswad yebbuyebhen* (*Hoarse Reflections*) in 2006; *Asfiget* (*The Omen*) in 2008; and *Tariwriwt n raxart* (*The Ululation of Death*) in 2015. He has also published a translation of stories from Kurdish literature into Tamazight (Tarifith) under the title *Anfarar* (*The End*, 2015). Belgharbi also writes in Arabic and has contributed to the Arabic story collection *Hatta yazoula Assoudaa* (*Until the Headache is Over*), published in Fes (Morocco) in 2011. He currently lives in Dar El-Kebdani, Driush.