

## The Vise

Elizabeth Scott Tervo

They stylized the alphabet into a maze  
and the words convey no meaning in any language.  
A bully, carved in solid wood, hands off a little church.  
Don't worry, I can say that. We know each other.  
Every year I go and venerate his tomb and I say,  
"I'm sorry I hated you so much."  
We're okay now.

The brilliant floor he built of marble is all right  
but I would rather see the concrete underlayer  
which is hallowed now  
retroactively  
because Akunda stepped there when it was new and empty.

We walked the high ridges while both sides fell away.  
That pile on the hill,  
that fortress against robbers, lunatics, and wild beasts,  
it is a beacon, but not for me.

I'm not at home there, but I'm not a stranger either.  
Why, even after all this time,  
does the place still squeeze me in a vise?  
I've tried and tried.  
I can pray for 10 minutes, I can stand there freezing for 45,  
but then I'm done. I just don't have the stamina.  
Over and over I drag the rubbish out of my own soul  
the fertile mud of repentance  
to find out what went wrong, why I am still incapable of peace  
but I never get an answer.

It was meant to be a fountain, but it isn't, not for me.  
Give me your blessing so that I can stop trying to understand. ✨



*Elizabeth Scott Tervo's* poetry and stories have appeared in *St. Katherine's Review*, the *Basilian Journal*, *Eye to the Telescope*, the *New Haven Review*, and Waystone Press's anthology *Visions of Paradise: Eucatastrophe*. Her memoir about the end of the Soviet period, *The Sun Does Not Shine Without You*, is forthcoming in the republic of Georgia. She is also co-coordinator of the Doxacon Seattle writers' group for Christianity and Science Fiction/Fantasy.