

## Poems by Anne Elezabeth Pluto

### *Hush puppy*

I stop taking notes when hospice  
arrives—and the notebook in my  
purse becomes a scratch pad  
for shopping lists—for restaurant  
menus—Shakin’ Seafood  
does not have fried okra  
no matter how many  
times I ask  
no red beans  
no, we are not in Texas  
but they do have a fried  
catfish basket with french  
fries, onion rings, and hush puppies.

the dog under the bed  
listens to the undulating sound of  
the mattress—your weight shifts in  
the night of disturbed sleep—in the  
beginning there is only the TV  
that I turn off once you are  
sound asleep—  
Hush puppy.



## *Chess*

There is no playbook  
for the dead.  
The dying  
The caretakers.  
The family.

Hospice provides a map—  
Drugs arrive delivered—  
Nurses—chaplains—social workers  
volunteers—  
Contraptions—beds that breathe  
throughout the day and night—  
oxygen that becomes a lullaby  
sheets of paper to keep score:  
Morphine—4  
Patient—0  
Haldol—5  
Patient—0

Syringes filled to  
the correct line—gently  
insert in the inside  
of his cheek.  
That didn't hurt  
until the end.

We play chess  
the set that arrived  
from Istanbul.  
I always play for Salaheddin  
you for Richard and  
his Templars.  
I walk you through  
every move—I let you  
win—and then  
the Knights  
the Pawns  
the Queens  
the Rooks  
the Imams and Bishops  
the King and Sultan  
get put away.  
I have not opened  
them since that day—it hurts  
to see them in  
their splendor.

## *What You Left Behind*

Your notebooks where there are  
messages I cannot bear  
to open you left  
guitars and music fishing  
line and reels—poles  
and lures—flies on  
the wall assemblages  
feather and white tailed  
deer fun to fool the large mouth  
Bass hooks and weights  
your clothes—I am separating  
by size to divide no one  
will play dice to receive  
a chess set from Istanbul  
a gift for me we played  
the first few months of hospice  
your focus shifting—I find notes  
on how the Queen moves as far as  
She can see in all directions—but how little  
joy enjoys the Queen thereof—for I am  
She and altogether joyless.

## *Into the Heart of the Dust*

I'm finding you in books—open  
the dust jacket reveals that  
*God is alive*—you were always  
a searcher—a believer—a  
deceiver—you took notes  
to remember what you read  
*God is love*—and heaven  
is a place where you wait  
at the gate for Peter—the rock.  
Roll away the stones—the  
Gospels of prosperity—the  
loud Pentecostal prairie pageant  
you were born into—the Texas  
wilderness—all tumbleweed  
and rifles—cows and horses  
second amendment—the well  
guarded militia—the assault  
rifles you carried as a Ranger  
all fade into the horizontal  
the looming highway: North  
to Amarillo—East to Dallas  
South to El Paso—West  
to New Mexico—I'm going  
to stand in the marketplace  
at Clovis and buy a pair  
of pointy boots—I'm going  
to scatter the dirt of the earth  
in memory of the dead  
the maligned—the innocent  
I'm going to sing my heart  
into the heart of the dust—  
that carefully tended  
acre of mistrust.

## *Bird Dream*

The tiny baby—with feathers and personality  
in the palm of my hand—his face resting and  
trusting—little things that fill up the heart—  
how did I miss the eggs—how did I miss  
the hamster who flattened out  
and snuck into the cage—now in  
the food watching me and filling  
his cheeks with millet.

As dreams go this one remains—the birds  
are always singing—not trusting me—but  
lose their appetite if a neighbor feeds them.  
How little did I know  
about love.