

New Poetry by Emily Hyland: “Rehab Day 1,” “Rehab Day 4,” “Rehab Day 9,” “Rehab Day 11,” and “Rehab Day 19”



THAT PARTICULAR REGION / *image by
Amalie Flynn*

REHAB DAY 1

He hadn't told me, hadn't stopped drinking
drank beer in the hallway near recycling

where people bring garbage and broken-down boxes
he guzzled, and I was here on the other side of the door

thinking him sober,

reversing redness and the inflammation
from an otherwise young and healthy liver

and *I* was sober—

how would it help for me to sip a glass of wine
while he drank water with our chicken piccata?

My first thought after drop-off was rebellion

to pull the cork from a long glass throat
and pour full garnet into stemware

I wanted that right again. In my home
the right again

to not finish a bottle and know
it will still be there in the morning

Then I felt a kind of shame

I checked him into a rehab facility
and all I could think of was wine

to unleash my desire for want

drove hours home like a Christmas-morning kid
thrashing through ribbons and crinkled paper

so soon as it was in sight
enrapt and hungry for vice.

REHAB DAY 4

He's been in rehab four days now, four days without hands on
my body

how indulgent that every day I've had hands plying my nerves

into delight

delight like the tickle and lick of sharing a bed with the same person

and when I finally call my dad, my dad who I'd been avoiding telling

I tell him how lonely it was to arrive back home after leaving him there

with nurses in their face shields, yellow gowns, and their masks

and the globe eyes of his counselor, who stood just back on the sidewalk

and my dad says with unintended harshness that he takes back

as soon as the truth hits the mouth of his phone: *You don't have to tell me that*

at least he's coming back and I imagine him there alone, barefoot

in shorts with a solid color shirt, some sort of mauve, doodling spirals

and checker-box patterns at the kitchen table on a yellow legal pad

in felt-tipped pen while he talks to me, and I remember how in the month

between funeral and stay-at-home, he was well-booked—every day

somebody stopped by with a crumb cake. Baked goods multiplied

on his countertop: cookies mutated into blondies into muffins into baskets

filled mostly with crinkle paper with pears and crackers atop

and underneath

the suffocation of plastic tied with ribbons. We worked in shifts

so he would not be alone, alone where he watched her for months and months

and months and months, he danced with her bald in her walker. Oh, how

she resisted that walker until she fell over! How there was a friend each day

on the calendar for lunch, how we took turns staying the night frying two eggs with toast in the morning—he always ate breakfast—

the plate hearkening back to the diner in Waldwick. How he does not have a return.

My call—a child seeking solace from a parent who only understands

in the way the child will only know as real in some future

hard to materialize in the livingness of abundance and relative youth

how he too was young once with a wife who had long hair she permed

curly and he would tug on her locks under their blankets. When I say *future*

I see Jim again, clear-eyed with warm hands playing my rib cage,

The National on in the car as we drive up 95 to some version of our life

twenty-four days from right now.

REHAB DAY 9

of course the doctor finds a cyst
on my left breast uphill from sternum
rolling around like a glass marble
of course this is the first day he calls
of course I cannot tell him this news
washed from normal humdrum stress
he swims in progress
and my secret would not serve him
any more than it serves my own
malicious asshole cells
dense like perennials since puberty
of that particular region
of course I cannot even examine
the terrain of my own human lumps
with one arm raised like a branch
fingers ambling around suspicion
every time I've been terrified
I'll find what mom found
and it all feels like oatmeal anyhow

and he's helpless from there anyhow
to distract from my cycle of peering
into imagined crystal balls and storylines
seeing only the worst, seeing coffins—
if he does not know he cannot worry
and I cannot put that upon him now
make him worry for me
while he does so well in there

REHAB DAY 11

It's time to take the IUD out.
This is what I think about today, my body
doesn't want this preventer centered anymore.

I remember the day it went in:
man-doctor's hand inserting copper
I winced. He said *I know, I know*

generic bedside assuaging
irked my nerves I sharpened back
No, no, you actually don't.

And mom came along for support
all frail in her bird limbs, climbed broken
into a chair next to me at the outpatient place

and pain got to the point I needed her hand
to squeeze like citrus pulp out of my grip
as something external opened me up—

I want to be opened from the inside instead
dragged ragged in the riptide of giving birth—

I realized I'd break her frame of softening digits
and knuckles of chemo bones if I juiced
so I unfelt her skin and took hold of my gown
wrung into wrinkles and sweated holes
it's only a sheen of thin paper anyway...
When he comes back, he will come back
to some levels of absence—and so in turn
open space comes back in, to come in
like syrup into my hungry self.

REHAB DAY 19

His absence heightens hers
so this is how I communicate with mom

I feel each breast one by one smushed
between a plastic pane and its baseboard
goosebumps prickle against machine sounds

in a room alone with the rumbling
inherited path toward lobular cancer

where will my tissue light up a mammogram
like a late-summer campfire sparkler?
Today the ultrasound is a shock

The technician skates a roller over my mound
and I see with clarity a round black orb

She talks to me lump to lump
on the same table she undid her robe years ago
except her skin puckered like a citrus punch

breast vines weighted
by clusters of rotting berries, overripe

mine are bright on the doctor's screen
netted fibers the rind of a cantaloupe's dry skin
I see roadways toward lactation

and roadways toward demise
and this marble eye from god

like an omen is benign
has come out as a reminder
of how to spend my days.

** Variation on second line borrowed from Barthes's Mourning
Diary*

**Last line borrowed from Anne Dillard quote, "How we spend our
days is how we spend our lives"*