

# 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 prickles 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"*