

I'm Fine
by Larson Langston

If you really want to know how a person is doing,
hold the space after they've finished the lie: "I'm fine."
Let the silence settle, heavy but gentle,
like a hand on the small of the back.

Let it be loved—
the pause, the crack,
the trembling truth that sits just behind their eyes.
Catch them there,
as their gaze darts upward,
as if asking permission to be real.

The thing about "I'm fine" is it's both true and not.
A measure against some hidden scale:
fine, compared to disaster.
Fine, compared to the shame of being a burden.
Fine, because the world has taught us
that sorrow is unseemly,
that complaint is weakness,
that vulnerability is a door
better left closed.

How often has it been safe
to speak the language of aching hearts?
How often has it been met with
disregard, disrespect, or worse—
the fragile plaster of sympathy?
Empathy, real and raw,
an open ear bent toward the sound of breaking—
that's rarer than we'd like to admit.

So when I ask, how are you?
Do me the honor of your truth.
Even if it's halting, even if it's messy,
even if it feels like too much.

Because what we steal from the world,
and from those who do or might love us,
when we withhold the tender soil of our truth—
is possibility.
The chance for roots to meet.

And yes, it's okay to be fine.

There is a time and a place for that testament.

But maybe, just maybe,
one day let the words beneath your skin rise,
let them stretch and break the surface.
Let them spill,
woven into a response deeper, truer,
like the threads of a tapestry
longing to be seen.