

Fine

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Artist's Statement

This poem about the nuanced interaction between caregiver and patient was written during the author's first weeks of a psychiatry clerkship. It is an invitation to the reader to join this trainee in learning how to be present for patients, beyond the standard question-response interview structure. What the patient says is important, and so is what the patient does not say.

Fine

So she says.
But her body
Betrays her, betrays the lie.

Mood: how patient says she feels.
Affect: how patient looks to you.

Mood: "Fine."
Affect: Not fine.
Deep frown, arms crossed, poor eye contact.

Is it okay
If I ask you a few questions?
Is now
A good time?

Fine, she says.
Leave, she means.

How did you
Sleep—Fine
Eat—Fine
Feel—Fine
Finefinefine

Okay, I'll let you get some rest, maybe I'll come back later

Then
She reaches
Holds my hand?
Warm flesh to flesh,
Squeezes my palm, once, twice,
Pressing her feelings into her fingertips.

"Yes. Come back."

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