

HOW TO LIE ON A BED OF NAILS

It looks impossible—flesh pressed
against a thousand reasons to hurt.
Don't fool yourself into thinking this.
It is not magic, just pressure

divided across a body. Go slow.
Ease onto the bed with purpose.
Know what it is you suffer for, then
ask your nerve endings to stretch

over rows of tiny sharp reminders.
You may fear they will sink inches
deep, but the surface tension of each
being so close together will keep skin

from breaking. But to grow graceful
at it, you must practice. Rehearse.
Let it become dance, a soft waltz.
Trace a hand over the nails, feel

each slight scrape tingle your palm,
like static. Imagine this electricity
is not from waiting metal teeth, but
from taut dress fabric hugging the

small of a lover's back, you have yet
to meet. Convince yourself of this,
until you forget the teeth altogether
so when you must finally perform

for a crowd, all anxious and rowdy,
they will be hushed, awestricken
by your daring act—by just how
effortless you make suffering appear.

(FOR E.C.)

*What we are practicing is suffering,
which everybody practices, but
strangely few of us grow graceful in.*

—Tony Hoagland

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