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Crossing Barbwire Fences

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Crossing Barbwire Fences

Howard Schaap

The best way is to cross them with two people,
one pressing a foot down on the second strand
from the ground while drawing up the strand above
with the hand, creating an extra large gap.
The other then ducks through, one foot carefully first,
straddling the bottom strand, body tensed against
itself in a position of yoga-like equipoise or
paused in some twisted ascetic punishment,
but leaning through and not dipping or coming up
too soon to slash a red crooked line across one's back,
then drawing the final leg through and reversing
roles, the first person spreading the wires from
the other successful side of the fence.

Of course, you must do it alone sometimes,
one foot on a wire, your whole weight suspended,
trying not to wobble or sway, praying the wire
stays pinned to post and doesn't snap down as
you swing your second leg over and the wire's
there at your crotch. So now it's between your legs,
your hands in between the hand-like barbs
which themselves grasp the wire with sharpened
thumbs up and pinkies down, hoping no
pant legs snag so when you attempt to lift
your final leg over or throw your weight suddenly
off to beat the wire's springing you don't find
your pants or skin tearing to get free.

As I said, it's best to do it together. Then, once
you're both free, you look up the line to where
the barbwire fence runs straight over the hill
to the yellowed horizon where the sun hides,
and maybe you see a deer leap it lazily,
not tripping in panicked haste, half-looking
over her shoulder for hunters, or maybe from
the grass ridge of the built up fence-line
a fox with black feet crawls from its hole, stretching.
Then you turn and don't consider if the fence
weren't there, for where there isn't fence the land
is tilled flat and featureless, with no need to help
each other and no fox with black feet come
stretching from its hole.