

# After working sixty hours again for what reason

By Bob Hicok

The best job I had was moving a stone  
from one side of the road to the other.  
This required a permit which required  
a bribe. The bribe took all my salary.  
Yet because I hadn't finished the job  
I had no salary, and to pay the bribe  
I took a job moving the stone  
the other way. Because the official  
wanted his bribe, he gave me a permit  
for the second job. When I pointed out  
that the work would be best completed  
if I did nothing, he complimented  
my brain and wrote a letter  
to my employer suggesting promotion  
on stationery bearing the wings  
of a raptor spread in flight  
over a mountain smaller than the bird.  
My boss, fearing my intelligence,  
paid me to sleep on the sofa  
and take lunch with the official  
who required a bribe to keep anything  
from being done. When I told my parents,  
they wrote my brother to come home  
from university to be slapped  
on the back of the head. Dutifully,  
he arrived and bowed to receive  
his instruction, at which point  
sense entered his body and he asked  
what I could do by way of a job.  
I pointed out there were stones  
everywhere trying not to move,  
all it took was a little gumption  
to be the man who didn't move them.  
It was harder to explain the intricacies  
of not obtaining a permit to not  
do this. Just yesterday he got up  
at dawn and shaved, as if the lack  
of hair on his face has anything  
to do with the appearance of food  
on an empty table.

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Bob Hicok is the author of several collections of poems. He once worked in the automotive die industry and owned his own business, Progressive Technology. He has also taught creative writing at Western Michigan University and Virginia Tech. When asked by interviewer Laura McCullough about the relationship between restraint and revelation in his work, Hicok replied, "Because I don't know where a poem is headed when I start, it seems that revelation has to play a central part in the poems, that what I'm most consistently doing is trying to understand why something is on my mind. . . . Maybe writing is nothing more than an inquiry into presences."

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