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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