

Bob Hicok

Mum's the word

The Depression wasn't a good time
for birthday cakes. Whatever was around
sufficed. In '37 it was an onion, then potato
bugs, everyone passed on the three-layer cake
of gravel. You're seventy-five today,
you can have any cake you want.
With seven kids, a cake of stretch marks
seems right. Eat what time
has done to you. Cake of bad heart.
Of husband love. If getting older's
a test, reaching one hundred's
an A+. I give you, Mom, a solid C. Time's wingéd
defibrillator. I've never asked how old
you feel you are in your pineal gland,
my soulimage is seventeen, he runs and runs
on liquid legs. For talking purposes,
say you're eight in the mirror
of how you see yourself, a veritable punk,
so of course you'll die young.
I'm right behind you if it helps
in trusting the afterlife's not my problem.
Say we become static on the AM dial.
Say we wear the silly hats of popes.
Say the slogan of eternity is "One Size
Fits All." There's something after this,
even if that something is nothing,
just as, when you were a kid, the words
"you're it" made the person it, and whatever

it was, you chased it, didn't you, all afternoon
for years, until dusk told you
the trees were getting sleepy. Soon
you were in your pajamas, sticking your arm
out the window into the night, wondering
if your hand would come back, it did and will
every time but once.