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Rare Books

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Rare Books

Bob De Smith

In the rare book room,
Tan codices—
Margins doodled
By the inattentive—
Are stained with ale,
Their gutters
Sprinkled with bread, hair,
And cheese.

DNA, too, I suppose.

My father's toolbox
Preserves his greasy fingerprints,
Cuticles,
Coffee stains.

Marks on tools,
Handwritten labels,
Shed skin in the creases
Of a folding knife.

There, too, are found
His odd collection of re-purposed
Punches—odds and ends,
To apply the phrase literally—
And one-off tools,
Their precise purpose lost.

I think of this as I
Run the valley of my book,
Removing traces of me.