

The Book of Bad Faith

NOEL SLOBODA

Back when Mom first swore
Dad rated an entire chapter
I could not imagine anyone deserving
more than a footnote or two—
maybe for mowing the lawn late
or letting math homework slide.

I could not foresee a table of contents
swelling to capture voided contracts,
unwritten letters and missed deadlines—
good intentions disappearing
like so many quarters plunked
in a busted parking meter.

I could not anticipate my best
wishes being crushed between covers
worn thin by years of handling,
pages stained by tears of ex-lovers,
dog-eared by friends I forgot
to pick up at airports,
annotated by coworkers
intent on correcting names
I never managed to learn.

And I could not envision
appendices I would translate
from English into Japanese
(one of many languages
I plan someday to study),
then pen in invisible ink—
as if I might hide the broken
promises to myself.