

The deft of it

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [June 25, 2014](#) issue

Just spent four days with my mom and dad,
Who together are hundred and eighty-four
Years old, and there are so many wry funny
Things to report, and some saddening things
Also, like fragility, and the ravines that pain
Cuts in faces after years of wincing. But I'll
Tell you just one: my dad at one point tosses
A bag of bread from his seat at the oak table
Onto the thin counter to his right. Maybe six
Feet of air, and he didn't glance at the target.
A little flick of the wrist, and the bread lands
Exactly right. This nailed me, but Pop didn't
Look up from the crossword puzzle. It could
Easily be explained: former excellent tennis
Player, knows the spatial music of the house
In his bones, probably made that throw sixty
Times, but still . . . the silent casual easy grace,
The deft of it! He's all bones now, he weighs
Less than he did when he was a reed of a kid
Away to the war they thought would kill him
For sure, but when I hug him he's still all tall
Though some of the tall is bent. Look, I get it
That someday he won't be sitting at the table.
I get it. Believe me, I have examined the idea.
But that his deft won't be there, his sideways
Smile when I gawp at something he says; I'm
Not quite getting that. He says he'd like to be
Buried in a military cemetery in a deep forest
About an hour away. There's oak and cypress
And pine. This will happen, I guess, and then
He'll be a thin kid again somehow or the most

Deft of the falcon chicks or the willow branch
That finally figures out how to sip from a lake
All easy and casual, like it didn't take practice.