

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.