

Casey's Slope

By: Ms. Sarah Fraser

Stage I

Name: Casey Jones.

Age: 61.

Witty, independent

Good-spirited and fun

Inspired with visions of pending retirement

35 years of good will at the steel mill coming to a close.

And opening -

Precious time with

Precious grandkids

Children

Marjoree, his wife

Absent of impairment

A nice and simple life.

Stage II

Set for enjoying the golden years

For Casey, everything is in place

Except his watch

– which lately has been hiding its face.

Where did it go? The good one - you know?

Friends assure him that memory declines with time

Don't worry; everything is fine

Although impractical,

Forgetfulness with ageing is quite natural.

Stage III

A visit to the doctor

At Marjoree's request

Was a battle

But only partially against his will

Doctor,

Other than the odd botched word

Everything is fine – don't you concur?

Count backwards, you ask?

An easy task -

75, 74, 71...no – 72, 73...

That's not right...

His face is tight

Muscles in prolonged contraction

Burn with lactic acid.

As the doctor leaves the room

Casey waits for a reaction.

Back in with a firm breath.

Alzheimer's disease?

Progressive degeneration?

That's an oxymoronic sort of way to say

I'll drive myself insane

Through self-mutilation; desecration of my own brain

Stage IV

His head loses weight
As alpha helices turn to pleated beta sheets
And as they build
Pills endeavor to conceal what is real -
Dense, plaque deposits
Deterioration of cognition
Something is choking the living daylights out of him
He wonders, would ignorance be bliss?

*Forgetting to fret would be a kiss on my face.
Where is that... watch, anyway?*

His reason wilts and exudes on him a guilt
That he will be a burden
On society
His family tree
Marjorie

As scientists search for a cure
A magic little vial
From *in vitro* to clinical trials
It looks like this may take a while

Stage V

A need for assistance with the mundane
Periodic feelings that he's verging on insane
His mind a myriad of dysfunctional molecules

Wearless that... what's it called?

The missing watch becomes a wrong name becomes an unfamiliar face
"Casey, she's your daughter. Her name is Grace."

The MRI says his brain will die.
It's shrinking in size
"Moderately severe cognitive decline"

I'd say my brain works 25% of the time.

Aggregated amyloids gain armloads of power in numbers
Daggers to neurons
Acetylcholine – minimal.
Memory and cognition – low.
But there still exists a familiar glow
Relationships hold strong and grow

Stage VI

With pajamas over clothes
And shoes on wrong feet
Casey wandered down the street
Marjorie had no clue
What she would do
Is he safe? Is he alive?

Five miles away
Found hours later by police
In the park, at night
Feeding ducks on the lake
With a smile on his face.

Same person, different life
Different day? Same wife.

Needing care for 24 hours, more or less
Powerlessness
Absence, apathy, happiness,
Cureless, careless, carless, sick.

Making love has taken on new meaning:
Caring for incontinence and spoon-feeding

*Who is bathing me?
She looks familiar - could she be my wife?
I don't know, but she is very nice.*

Stage VII

Age: 75.
Not entirely alive
Monosyllabic, senseless, but not useless words
I kreng kawfe mer jow
Leaves his mouth
Enters down a knowing earpath
Communication in emotions of the face
Smiling deep eyes, worried lips
Recognition of expression as a thrilling level of cognition
Meaning in moments

In death,
An avalanche of memories of
Love, flesh, colour, sin
Collide, collapse and conquer him
Rise over run
To the end of Casey's slope.