

# Seven Poems by G.S. Payne

© 2023, All Rights Reserved \*

[Boundaries](#)

[Like Ivy](#)

[Sitting Outside at Night](#)

[Three-Hundred Feet Up \(Or Notes from Another Man's Head\)](#)

[Somnambulist](#)

[Concerning My Coiffeuse](#)

[The Things You Find in Desk Drawers](#)

\* Reprints allowed. Just please ask for [permission](#) first.

## Boundaries

Lieutenant Stanton, a Civil War ghost,  
lives in my neighbor's cellar.  
It's an old cellar, in an old house,  
within walking distance of the battlefield.

They say it was used  
as a makeshift operating room.  
Grisly amputations,  
without anesthetic.

We don't know what Stanton died of  
(he has all his ghostly limbs)  
and he never says.  
He never says much of anything, really.

He's pleasant enough, and terribly polite,  
offering to help my neighbor carry her groceries in,  
take out the garbage,  
sit for her dog.

He can't actually do any of those things,  
though she appreciates the silent offers.  
He mostly limits himself to the cellar –  
although she caught him upstairs once,

trying to use her computer.  
There are boundaries, she reminded him,  
and he sheepishly returned to the cellar.  
Still, I can't say why

she lets him stay in the place at all.  
She's old, my neighbor, and alone.  
I think she likes the company.  
Last night I saw him outside the house,

looking wistfully toward the woods.  
He stood there for the longest time,  
and as I approached he disappeared into the air,  
like a dying breath on a July breeze.

GS Payne

## Like Ivy

So this is where it must start.  
Teasing and taunting  
on a playground like this one.  
Acceptance, the currency of the realm,  
where she's trading  
her freedom to stretch, to grow,  
to reach like ivy

on the school's dirty walls.  
Children can manage more than we think.  
Your voice  
is reassuring to me.  
And to you.  
We're all blessed  
with selective amnesia anyway.

None of this will matter.  
Another stage of growth,  
another field of graves,  
the endless fields of graves  
we have to cross.  
Aren't we stronger for it?  
Forged into men,

and women,  
strong and able and mature,  
advanced beyond reaching,  
into comfortable paralysis.  
Now we know how to deal with it.  
You and I, dealing with not going anywhere.

GS Payne

## Sitting Outside at Night

I heard nothing,  
but the wind in the leaves.  
Saw nothing,  
but the radiance of the moon.  
Felt nothing,  
but a delicate sensation of falling,  
falling, into the moment, witness  
and accessory  
to the day's hushed surrender,  
as though I was in  
the very anteroom of God, peaking  
behind His slightly open door  
as I sat –

as we sat.  
Yes, of course.  
You were there too.  
I remembered because everything  
broke  
when you told me  
not to forget  
to take your car in for service tomorrow.  
And the falling stopped,  
and the door slammed shut,  
and the moon  
ran away  
with the leaves.

GS Payne

## Three Hundred Feet Up (or “Notes From Another Man’s Head”)

From three hundred feet above I see me  
treading along the shoreline. It’s inspiring,  
the gull’s view from here.

The Gulf of Mexico stretches outward,  
morning sky joining it in a perfect curve,  
far beyond the limited vision of the man below.

But from here there’s no texture  
of sand under foot or cool of breaking water,  
and I have a vague longing for the physical again.  
I move lower – thoughts entering –

Like how, when I order  
a raspberry mocha frappuccino at Starbucks,  
I can’t seem to wait the ten seconds it takes  
to find a chair and so I take the frappuccino  
from the girl behind the counter  
and as I’m walking – walking! – I try to drink it,  
and I almost always get foam and cream and raspberry  
on my face, which everybody in the place notices,  
especially, I’m afraid, the girl behind the counter.

Or how my brother-in-law has a stupid way  
of arguing by using the word “nevertheless”  
when he’s out of ammunition.  
He’ll just look at you, after you’ve delivered  
the perfect counter to some stupid thing  
he’s trying to claim, and say, “Nevertheless.”  
Which is only slightly less stupid  
than when he closes an argument with,  
“I’m just saying.”  
What the hell is that supposed to mean?

And a wave breaks cold over my feet, kissing  
me gently back down, and I am left dazed  
by the fact that I never – ever – go to Starbucks,  
don’t really know for sure what a “frappuccino” is,  
and don’t even have a brother-in-law.  
Then I remember I’m not really at the shore.  
Not really.

GS Payne

## Somnambulist

Morning brings the discovery  
that the items on the kitchen counter  
have been moved around again.  
The coffee maker is unplugged,

my sleeping self making a clear statement  
that my waking self will ignore.  
I don't know why a glass has been filled  
with water, bending morning light,

redirected, colors broken, beamed  
against the wall. How did I know  
just where to put it? The cat must have  
seen it all (he never misses a thing)

but he isn't saying. I imagine him  
watching, giving his little head a shake,  
to ask if there is some mistake.  
(Miles to go, but I'm asleep.)

The lack of evidence disturbs,  
and intrigues. There's no sign  
that I went out and thwarted, once again,  
the evil Dr. Peculiar, bent on

destroying the world with his giant  
army of alien carpenter ants.  
And yet the world persists this morning.  
How do you explain that?

GS Payne

## Concerning My Coiffeuse

I have a crush  
on the young woman who cuts my hair.

She's Thai and I understand  
about half of what she says.

She combines a shampoo  
with a head massage that always  
leaves me delirious.

I want to talk to her about T.S. Eliot,  
and Faulkner,  
and ask her if she's read Whitman,  
or ever listened to Beale Street Blues,  
or ever read a box score,  
or ever kissed a guy who has,

or ever would.

We talk about the weather.  
She leans over me with her  
powerful scissors and her  
perfect breasts,

and we talk about the weather.

And I remember something about  
Whitman, I think, reading a box score.  
Or Eliot playing Handy,

or something. And we agree  
that it's much too hot.  
And I tip her  
much too much.

GS Payne

## The Things You Find in Desk Drawers

Uncluttering my desk a few months back  
I found to my surprise an extra day  
sandwiched between Tuesday and Wednesday.

It was in the very back of the bottom drawer.  
It's funny because I don't recall having put it  
in there, and have no idea at all

how I even acquired it in the first place.  
It's an old second hand desk.  
Maybe it was in there when I bought it.

It's been a godsend, this day. How nice to wake up  
the morning after each Tuesday and know  
I have twenty-four hours to get caught up,

clean the house, do the laundry, run errands, run the vacuum  
fix the squeaky bedroom door, hack away at the creeping charlie,

even get an early start  
on Wednesday's work.

Not that I do any of those things.  
Tuewednesday has become a day to flitter away,

to drowse in unbroken, undisturbed respite,  
energy enough perhaps to drift downtown  
where the only people around

are the few lucky others  
who happened by whatever means,  
to have also acquired such access.

We nod at each other knowingly,  
sit down sometimes over lunch or tea,  
and whisper about those whose lives



skip directly over our secret day.  
It's unfortunate for them, to be sure,  
although there are rumors –

just rumors mind you – that there is,  
perhaps,  
inaccessible to us,

an entire weekend between Thursday and Friday.  
I prefer to think it an urban myth, the injustice  
being simply too great to consider.

GS Payne