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## Comic Vision

Gale Acuff

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## Comic Vision

On my bedroom floor I'm reading funny books, mostly superheroes, four-color and two-dimensional. Evil gives them a good fight but can never defeat them, not even in a continued story from last month's issue to this month's, or this month's to next's. I'm only nine years old and won't know the world is sick until I'm grown, and wicked, too, like a bad stepmother.

I paid twelve cents, plus a penny tax, for this copy of *Detective*, featuring Batman and Robin--I like their costumes --uniforms, I mean--and Robin is a kid only a little older than I am, though I identify with Batman more: nobody knows this man behind that mask of the night, and he wears a cape and sports that utility belt, which is full of surprises. I try to make one myself but I can't keep the empty pill bottles taped to my belt--they fall off in action and Mother will kill me if I glue them on with mucilage or papier-mache.

At the end of every patrol Batman and Robin return to Wayne Manor, where Alfred the butler is waiting and soon they're Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson again. They're rich and that's good--below, in the Batcave, are wonderful devices which only money can buy, and Bruce's brain designs.

I don't have a butler but there's Mother --she does all the things a butler does but a lot less formally. No computer here --it's 1965--but I've got a Timex and transistor radio. I've got no sidekick but then there's my dog, who's lying on his brown side on the rug. What he's missing in smarts he makes up for by being loyal--not that Robin's not. Or sometimes I call him Ace the Bat-hound when I'm tired of Robin and go solo.

I wish I had a uniform. Mother won't sew me one. *Don't be silly*, she says.

*And besides, you should be reading classics.*  
She means *The Last of the Mohicans* and  
*Moby Dick*. And *Huckleberry Finn* and  
*The Call of the Wild* and *Little Women*.  
*Wuthering Heights* and *The Little Lame Prince*.  
But there are too many big words and folks  
in the past write and talk funny. One day  
I'll read 'em all to see what all the fuss  
is for, but for now great literature  
belongs to the future, when it's too late  
to teach evil a lesson it won't soon  
forget, at least until next month's issue.  
I figure I've got time enough to lose  
what I am now. *Comics are for children*,  
Father says. *You're a big boy now--fourth grade.*

On the last page of the story Bruce Wayne  
and Dick Grayson are smiling, the Riddler  
safely back in a cell, where he belongs.  
All that's left is the letters page, and ads  
for X-ray specs, American Seeds, and  
Sea Monkeys. I'll save them for tomorrow.  
I don't ever expect to be Batman

though I might have a dream of him tonight.  
But I don't want to be Ishmael, either,  
or Huck or Natty Bumppo or Jo March  
--I'm too young to be serious, I think,  
like they are. Not that I've read their books but  
one day I'll have to--that's *education*.  
And then I'll get a job and forget them.  
For now, I'm happy not knowing too much:

crime must pay because there's so much of it  
and truth has a secret identity  
behind the face of evil and even  
good, too. On Monday I'll return to school  
and let Teacher think I'm learning something.  
better than what we both already guess.

--Gale Acuff