

I Must Slip The Batman a Fin

by Steven Gowin

The Batman says it's his birthday. I take him at his word.

You can't ignore someone in sequined homburg, mask, cape, and crusader garb from the Halloween SuperStore.

The boys and I are having dinner in Los Angeles... that part downtown outfitted with lots of neon and enormous LED screens... the Shibuya wanna be. No Angelino ventures here.

But we're from up coast, the cold fog, and tonight happy for warm outdoor dining. Batman wanders about, on the other side of the low patio fence. He's doing alright, a couple of bucks here, a handful of coin there, but he moves lost, his body hesitant to go where he wants, hitched in his giddyup.

You've no choice. Once you see him, you're an accomplice. It's OK. What bad can come from intercourse with a hero of justice? Engage, I say, and I say, *I like your outfit, Mr. The Batman*. The Caped Crusader nods a bit, muddled and befuddled, drugs and a haywire brain very likely at work.

My kids say, *Do not talk to The Batman*. These college boys believe I am condescending and mean. Public transit, that petri dish of urban crazies, has sensitized them. They recognize nutsos and kindly leave the deranged alone. They can better cope with a Batman than I.

But I know the distance between The Batman and me, and appreciate it. Certainly he lives more natural than I. A natural man, he knows his role, The Caped Panhandler. He's looking for a dollar here or there, spare change, nothing more or less... always alive in the instant.

Tonight, he's ventured on this wild quest with only his glitter hat and his mask and his Batman outfit, stretched and stained...

sometimes alms are burritos... and now security is asking him to leave. Shinjuku does not permit hobo Batmen.

They've laid hands on his person and are herding him back to the Bat Cave. But victorious with his few bucks, he'll stop at the Kim Brothers' on Grand for a quart of St. Ides or head west to Alvarado for bump or smack or whatever takes him home again, a hero.

I wish him a *happy happy birthday day* and run behind his security escort. Before he's gone, I must slip The Batman a fin.

