

When I was training to be Batman, traveling the globe, it struck me how many different cultures cite the heart as the location in the body where happiness lives.

There's science to it, though. Happiness, joy, they require more blood from the heart than other emotions.

It's what you reach to protect when you're scared. Not your throat or other real vulnerabilities like exposed arteries or nerves--the things I target when I fight.

That night in the alley, as the gun rose, I remember my father's hand covering my chest...his fingers like an extra set of ribs, filling in the spaces.

Then his hand was falling away...and everything was different.

When the explosion came, I thought I'd been hit. I was sure.

But my heart had only skipped a beat.

That missing beat though... sometimes I think I live my whole life inside that missing beat.

WE'RE LOSING HIM!



THE WHOLE CAVITY IS BLOOD, DAMMIT, NOTHING BUT BLOOD! EVEN IF HE INCURRED THIS WOUND *INSIDE AN OPERATING ROOM*, HE'D STILL LIKELY DIE.

THIS *IS* AN OPERATING ROOM. SUCTION, ALFRED.

THERE IS NO WAY--

ALFRED. THE *SUCTION*. YOU'RE LETTING IT SLIP.

SIR, HE'S NOT GOING TO MAKE IT.

HE IS.

...FINE.

IF I MIGHT ASK, THOUGH, AT A MOMENT LIKE THIS, WHEN SOMETHING AS AWFUL AS THAT *LAUGHING DEMON* HAS COME TO THIS CITY--

DON'T.

YOU WOULDN'T BE KILLING HIM, BRUCE. THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT. I HAVE HIM SO DRUGGED THAT EVEN IF HE WAKES, HE CAN'T SEE, CAN'T MOVE...

ALFRED.

AT THE VERY LEAST, IF HIS HEART STOPS FOR A FEW MINUTES...IF HIS BRAIN IS DEPRIVED OF OXYGEN...WE COULD KEEP HIM ALIVE. HE WOULDN'T BE DEAD!

I KNOW HOW BADLY YOU WANT THIS MAN GONE. BUT YOU WILL NOT LET HIM DIE.

TO BE FRANK, RIGHT NOW WE HAVE A BIGGER DAMN PROBLEM THAN JOKER, AND THE ONLY WAY WE BEAT THIS MONSTER... IS BY STAYING TRUE TO WHO WE ARE...



... WHATEVER
THE HELL IT
TAKES.

THE BATMAN WHO LAUGHS

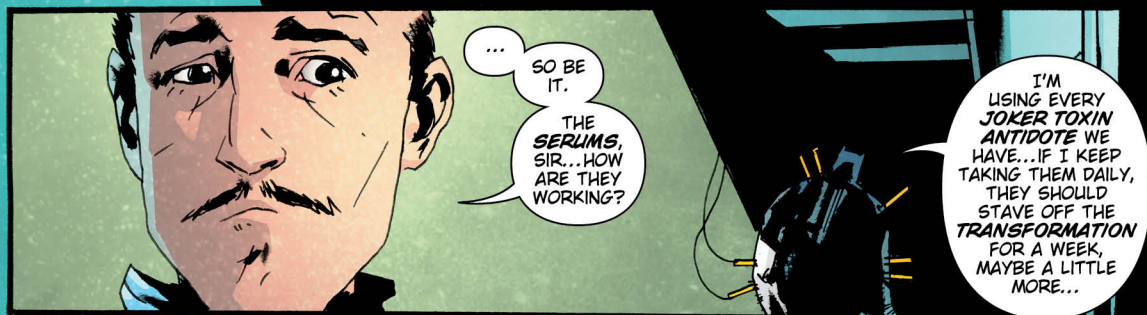
THE LAUGHING HOUSE PART 2

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...
SO BE IT.
THE
SERLIMS,
SIR...HOW
ARE THEY
WORKING?

I'M
USING EVERY
JOKER TOXIN
ANTIDOTE WE
HAVE...IF I KEEP
TAKING THEM DAILY,
THEY SHOULD
STAVE OFF THE
TRANSFORMATION
FOR A WEEK,
MAYBE A LITTLE
MORE...



A WEEK?! BEFORE YOU TURN
INTO THAT...THAT **THING**?!
WE NEED TO STOP HIM
BEFORE--

WHAT
YOU NEED TO
DO, ALFRED, IS
SHUT UP AND
MIND YOUR
PATIENT.

NOW GET
YOUR **###@!#**
HANDS BACK IN
THE **###@!#**
CLOWN.



...
LOOK,
I--I'M SORRY...I
JUST...THAT THING
OUT THERE. SEEING
MYSELF LIKE THAT. HE
FEELS LIKE THE LAST
ONE. THE ONE AT
THE **END**.

SIR--

HE KNOWS
EVERYTHING I KNOW.
HE'S GONE THROUGH
EVERYTHING I HAVE
AND THERE'S NOTHING
HE WON'T DO TO **WIN**.
HE... WINS, ALFRED. HE
HAS NO WEAKNESS
I CAN DISCERN.
ME...

...THERE
HAS TO BE A
WAY TO BEAT
HIM! A WAY I
CAN BEAT
HI--



HEEHEEEHEEE!

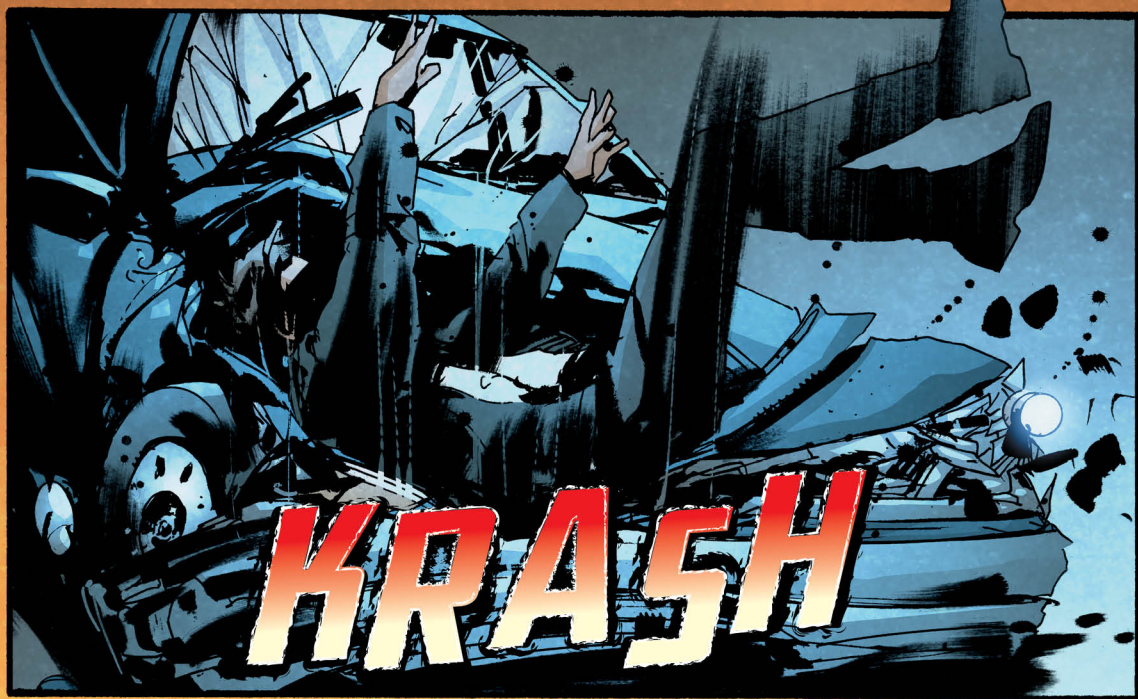
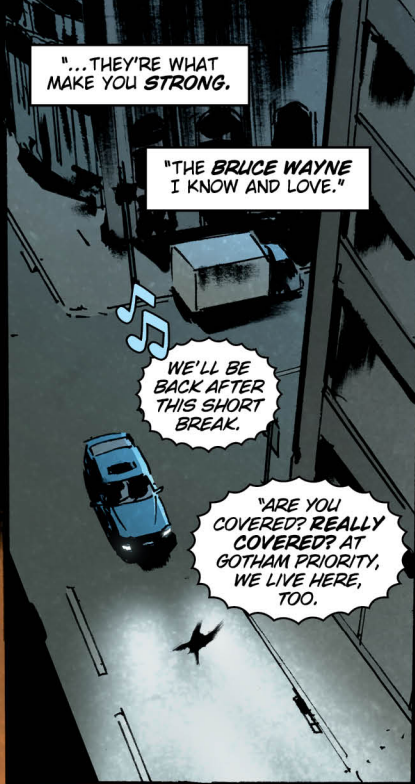


JOKER?



IT'S JUST A
PHYSICAL RESPONSE.
MOST PEOPLE GASP.
I SUPPOSE IT MEANS
HE'LL **LIVE**.

AND...IF
WE'RE SAYING WHO
WE ARE...YOUR SOFT
SPOTS, THE THINGS
YOU'RE WORRIED
MAKE YOU
WEAK...?



LATER.

