

ALASKA, 300 MILES NORTH OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE.

When he was ten years old, he had to memorize a poem for a school assignment.

His father gave him an old book of classic poetry to choose from. The book had been given to his father by his mother when they were first dating.

It was leather, and there were marks next to his father's favorite poems. Little stars drawn in pencil.

The one he picked had no star next to it.

It went like this...



"Some say the world will end in fire,



"Some say in ice...



"From what I've tasted of desire

"I hold with those who favor *fire*."



"But if it had  
to perish twice,

"I think I know  
enough of hate



"To say that for  
destruction ice

"is also great

"and would suffice."

His father didn't like his choice,  
said it was too grim for a boy  
his age. Why would he pick  
such a grim poem? But he  
shrugged his father off.

Said he'd picked it  
because it was short.

Easy to  
memorize.

But the truth is, he hadn't found the  
poem grim at all. In fact, he'd drawn  
his own little star next to it, in pen.

Because there was something about  
the first part that spoke to him. A  
world inflamed by passions, by desire...

He was ten and that word,  
desire, pulled on him.

A strange new door,  
hot to the touch.

"Victor!"

Nothing. Batman's voice sounds strange to him after hours of silence.

He checks the researchers, but the blast was too sudden, caused the water in their cells to expand, bursting vessels and capillaries.

They are people caught mid-explosion.

He lets himself think of their families, the pain, takes it in.

And then a noise.

EEEEEE - - - EEEEE - - - EE

A spiraling shriek that rattles his suit.

"Victor!" he says.  
"What have you done?!"

They shimmer as they merge.

He scans their biology. They're tough, with cells full of carbon bonded in tight lattices. Diamond dust, he thinks, as he arms the suit.

POOON  
POOON  
POOON

The batarangs are pure copper for maximum heat conduction.

Two-hundred and twenty-three BTUs.

When he first developed them, hours ago, in the blast of the great furnace, on no sleep, he'd held them up for Alfred to see and called them "mitten warmers."

Alfred had not found this funny. But Alfred never liked to be near the furnace.

Now Batman curses himself. There are too many of these damn things...

He can feel the fight turning the way they do sometimes, so fast, a screech of chalk, a math undone.



And now the howling is so loud, like a great wind that has gathered force over miles and miles of empty land.

And he has overheated the batarangs in his gauntlet.

And the coils are searing his arm.



And he can smell the skin burning when-- **ZZZZZT**

The suit goes cold.

And then that voice--more a transmission than a voice.



**“Welcome, Batman...”**

“...To  
the top

of the  
world.”



Ends  
of the  
Earth  
Part 1

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