

# MOLTEN DEATH EXCERPT

*567-word excerpt (the quote marks are reversed, because it's published in England)*

It looked alive—like some slithering beast come up from the depths to crawl slowly towards the sea. Orange fingers flowed from the main body at all angles, taking on new forms and hues as they made their way down the slope. A fine filigree of black floated on the surface of the lava, where the viscous fluid quickly cooled in the ocean air. But just underneath you could see the fiery magma, its edges a searing yellow-white where the fingers stretched till they burst, spilling forth their contents of molten rock.

‘Wow.’ Valerie stood there unmoving, unable to take her eyes from the sight.

‘Well, I’m gonna head uphill a bit and get some shots back this way before that amazing backdrop disappears,’ Isaac said, peering down to check the settings on his Nikon camera in the dim light. Valerie turned around and saw what he meant. A crescent moon hung low in the now-purple sky, with a single planet burning brightly above. She could just make out the thin line of the ocean, edged in the foreground by jagged black rock.

Kristen pulled her phone from her pocket and tagged along after Isaac, but Valerie stayed put. She wanted to simply sit down and watch the show. It was mesmerizing, the way the lava beast spread its limbs in its nonstop march downhill, and how it continually morphed into crazy shapes: a heart slowly breaking in two; a woman’s face with long, streaming hair; a winged dragon. The flow came nearer and she felt the force of its heat—as if the doors to a massive oven had opened wide. Standing back up to step back, she wandered down-flow, watching a small finger dribble into a crevice and quickly fill it in. Tiny ferns had sprung up in a few of the cracks nearby—resilient little plants, doomed though they were.

Looking out toward the sea, Valerie saw that the sun was now above the horizon. The low-lying clouds had turned orange and gray, and the sky was a pale blue. She faced back uphill but could see no sign of Kristen or Isaac.

*Nice.* To be alone, with only the sound of the wind and the crackle of rock being blanketed by the newest land on the planet. She continued on, skirting the edge of the flow. Now that the sun was up, she could tell that there were two different types of the cooled lava rock: a twisty, ropey-looking kind and a more pillowy, smooth variety. And she could see that while the older flows were a dull gray, the brand-new rock was a shiny black, sparkling in the sunlight.

Her eye was caught by a color that didn’t belong—a flash of fluorescent green—at the very edge of the flow. Curious, she walked over and saw that it was a shoe. No, more like a workman’s boot, with bright-green laces. *Now, how could someone leave their boots here?* she wondered. *You’d never be able to hike back over the lava field without your shoes on.*

And then she got that queasy feeling you experience when there's a disconnect between what you expect to see and what's actually there. For the shoe had not been left behind, after all: it was still on a foot.

But that was all that was visible, because the rest of the body had been covered over by hot lava.