

What's that phrase? The one about only living once? I don't remember it, honestly. Kids always coin strangest terms. Or maybe it only seems odd because it didn't apply to me. That might be it.

They say death is peaceful. I mean, they say that, but you can't exactly say it with any kind of authority. If you knew whether or not it was peaceful, you'd be *dead*. And then what would be the point in knowing be? See, death is sure as hell not peaceful. Take drowning, for example. I've probably drowned eight or nine times by now. All sorts of ways, too! Third time, I got dragged under the water by an orca. It thought I was fish or something. Dumb sea cow.

But you aren't interested in hearing about something boring like drowning, so I'll try to give you something better. No promises, though. After all, when you've lived hundreds-- maybe thousands of times, every death seems pretty boring. But here's the best one I've got:

"You sure this is safe?" The fox following behind me asked. Her name was Sasha. Or something that began with an 'S'. Shit, it really didn't matter. She didn't matter.

"Of course," I stress. "Why else would we be here?" I'm lying. I always do. How else would I get to do half the shit I do if I didn't lie? Sandra stayed quiet the rest of the hike. She couldn't see it through the suits we were wearing, but I was grinning like mad and just barely stopping from running. Too bad she was such a whiny little shit, or I could have been enjoying myself.

You ever seen a hazmat suit? What we were wearing was pretty similar. Some kind of special tin-foil looking material made you able to get a lot closer to the molten lava than normal. Another thing Suki couldn't see was my tail wagging. It was all wrapped up nice and tight with the rest of my body in that stupid gear.

We reached the top, and Samantha starts breathing into her little walkie-talkie like it'll make her calm down faster. "Shut the fuck up," I yelled. She stopped, thankfully. I think she was pretty freaked out, though.

Picture a beach. It's got a nice, gentle incline in the sand that leads down into the waves, slowly lapping at the shore. Okay, now take the sand and replace it with pitch black rock. Take the waves and replace those with molten earth that would melt you if you came within a few feet of it.

The reason I had you picture a beach, honey, is because that's exactly what I did. Once Sarah caught up with me, I turned to her and smiled. "What?" she asked. The confused tone she gave was pretty cute.

I shoved her to the ground and stooped down. I pressed my visor to hers and yelled as loud as I could into the walkie, "Beach party!" Then I took off, cackling like the madman I am.

Her eyes might have popped out of her head. I honestly didn't stop and pay much attention to Sharon. "Last one in is a rotten egg!" Pretty cliché, I know. But maybe you don't see exactly why I do this crap. You know how some people get addicted to extreme stuff, like cliff diving or speeding on a motorcycle? Well, this is how I get my kicks now. The fun's all in their reaction.

"What-" Shirley didn't get a chance to finish before I cannonballed into the pool. The suit held up for a second. Not even, actually. And my lower body being completely incinerated was painless. It burned me faster than my nerves could keep up. The last thing I heard was Susan screaming bloody murder and calling base camp. She was bawling and hysterical. I loved it.

And then I opened my eyes, back home in my bed.