

ALISON TURNER

A Runner
(Excerpt)

IV. Lima

“Try the tunnel,” Russell says, and grasps my hand, like it’s the floating head of a dandelion, and tugs.

The water tunnel is a warm-up exhibition for Lima’s fountain show. Water shoots from both sides of a hallway, leaps over our heads, and falls on the other side. Every color of light beams through at different angles, and kids run left and right and through the water tunnel the wrong way, screaming because they think they will get wet and gaping above them in awe because they do not.

“This is . . . strange,” Russell says, looking around us at the liquid lights. We’re surrounded and stuck in here and I don’t like getting wet, and it should be Tammy.

“The show’s starting,” I say. Across the park people line the edges of a shallow pool the size of a football field. “Hurry!” I run towards the end of the tunnel, knowing he’s right behind me, but not because I feel him.

We join the crowd already three or four rows back, and I stand on my tiptoes to see.

Dun dun dun dunnn booms over us at the same time as four forms jet into the air, staccato bursts of spray. They dance as fluid bodies, timed perfectly to color and music.

Tourists take pictures that will not turn out. Moving water, neon-colored beam lights, and nighttime are too many factors for the amateur to consider.

Lima has a network of sidewalks that traces the cliffs above the city and also along the edge of the water where the ocean might get your toes. There are moms in Spandex pushing babies in strollers, kids hooting when they pass on skateboards, men young and old pulling yellow freezers full of ice cream. And more runners than I’ve ever seen.

My high school had a track team like every school in the Midwest, but ours was small and joined only by awkward, lanky boys with acne; I can’t think of a girl who chose running over volleyball or cheer. And my family, with so much TV to watch and crescent rolls stuffed with slices of American cheese and hot dogs to eat, is not the running kind.

Last night Tammy and Russell went out after the fountain show. Only now, halfway through my run, do I remember that Russell asked me to wake him if he wasn’t up when I left, just in case he had too much fun last night, ha-ha. He can go with Tammy later, or on his own. I’m surprised he’s so eager to run with others: I like running alone.

I nod like the other runners in passing, avert my eyes when someone coughs up and spits out a loogie, and am not disgusted by sweat that sprays off of men’s skin. We’re not out here to assess one another’s bodies or stamina, to chat about the weather or where we’re from. I’ve only been running for three weeks but I am like them: we are runners.

I can see the lighthouse on the cliff, which is really a small museum about the ocean and Peru’s economy. I’ll turn when I get there, because my leg muscles are

suctioning down as if tangled in seaweed.

I run beyond the lighthouse, past the tall buildings that I can barely see from the lighthouse, until I am too tired to be only halfway. It feels like back home when I can't read or watch TV or go to bed until seeing Lane, but worse; satisfying what I need on the inside is harder.

I feel cranky, and as I turn the faucet on in the shower my hand shakes. My skin is flushed and shows new shapes, especially in my thighs. Lane wouldn't recognize them. It's the same problem as before: my body doesn't know how to stop.