

running, returning

by Jesse Jarnow

The broken car horn wailed for 40 days and 40 nights. It grew thinner in slow, afternoon-long decays, like an accordion exhaling, then thickened again at night. On the fourth day, C noticed, nobody mentioned it anymore, not even the catty salarymen she served, who talked idly of everything as she sat them, distributed menus, fitted their silver bib-smocks, and wheeled antediluvian sealife in dome-shaped platters before them, cracking the ancient exoskeletons into tender piles of millennium-old shell-meat. No one could find the car. Unable to sleep after closing, C went looking for it, west, through dim Chinatown and its dumpling parlors lit in quiet neon, towards the harbor. The sound was always one block beyond her. She passed the city's oldest buildings--a foundry in a cylindrical brick tower, the fish market--and arrived in a small neighborhood rebuilt after the occupation, now nearly a century previous. The lights were off in S's apartment. He'd been gone since just before the horn. She wondered what he'd say. The sound became no louder, only clearer, until--at an intersection by S's former laundromat--she felt she was at its center. There were no cars, no S, nothing broken at all.

