My arm was caught between the ground and a set of huge, obsidian talons.

“You see,” the demon spoke haltingly. “It was me the whole time.” It licked its lips with a forked, black tongue, cherishing each word.

The demon peered out from beneath its hooded garment with yellow eyes.

“I broke the vase. I murdered the chauffer. And I started the fire at the *Théâtre de Pieds Palmés*.”

The wind picked up, sweeping soot and the outer leaf of a newspaper through the air. Far below us, the horns of impatient Lorryjacks hooted angrily, muffled by folds of smog. From this height I could make out the *Maisonette* quarter with its glimmering yellow lights. Beyond, the lanterns of distant fishing boats bobbed rhythmically in the harbor. I swallowed. I needed to buy just a little more time.

I couldn’t bring myself to say anything. The demon was too fearsome, too unearthly. Something soothing in the swirling tendrils of smoke whispered to a dark urge in me.

*Tell it everything.*

*Tell it where she is. Tell it how to find her.*

If I had opened my mouth, I was sure I would have said everything, generously spilled every secret I had. I clamped my lips together. The demon smiled, widely. Its teeth twisted and turned in its gums like thousands of tiny daggers.

“If you won’t talk, I’ll kill you.”

It was simple, really. If I didn’t talk, it would kill me. If I did talk, it would still kill me. And it would kill *her*. Its eyes narrowed.

“I’m absolutely serious.”

*Tell it. Tell it or you’ll die!*

It wasn’t gratuitous, mind you. Rather, my death was matter-of-fact. One moment, I was alive: A living, breathing human being. Hair, eyes, ears, fingers, and toes.

The next moment, I was looking down on my body. Blood-soaked white robes, eyes glassy behind a crushed bronze mask. Wet black hair sticking to my scalp. Dead.

I watched as the demon leaped to an adjacent rooftop. Its talons raked the shingles, spraying slate chunks onto the city below. I watched blankly from my position in the air as it barreled past chimneys and iron gables into the distance.

In the air?

I looked at my hands. Or rather, I looked *through* them. Pale and translucent fingers wiggled in my vision. My fingers.

“How strange,” my words hung in the air, a cold, raspy whisper.