

## **"The Man in the Static"**

**By Cristian Garcia**

The television began turning on at 3:17 every morning.

Always 3:17.

Emma lived alone, and the first night it happened, she thought she was dreaming. The sound was faint at first, a slow, dragging hiss that seemed to come from everywhere at once. When she opened her eyes, the television glowed a sickly blue across her living room wall.

The screen showed static, but not the usual fuzzy kind. It moved like it was breathing, the noise pulsing in and out. If she listened long enough, she could almost hear a voice inside it. Words too soft to understand, but too deliberate to ignore.

She turned it off. The room went silent. Then she noticed her reflection in the glass, or what she thought was her reflection. The face on the screen was still looking back at her, but she had already turned away.

She did not sleep for the rest of the night.

The next evening she unplugged the TV completely. She left the cord coiled neatly on the floor. That would fix it.

At 3:17, the static came back.

The plug was still on the carpet, untouched.

Emma sat frozen in her bed, staring through the doorway at the pale light flooding the hall. The sound filled the air again, thicker now, wet and heavy, like something trying to push its way through the static.

Then came the whisper.

Not loud, not even clear. Just one word.

“Emma.”

Her stomach twisted.

The sound faded slowly, like a breath slipping back through the wires. She did not move until sunrise.

On the fourth night, she recorded it.

When she played it back the next morning, the video showed nothing but clean white noise. No whispers, no voice, no strange movement. But if she turned the volume all the way up, she could faintly hear something breathing. Not through the speaker, but behind her.

The following night, she moved the TV into the hallway and shut her bedroom door.

It did not matter.

At 3:17, the television came on again. The static poured through the crack under her door, washing her room in a soft, pale light. The sound of breathing was closer this time.

Then, the doorknob started to turn.

It clicked twice. Stopped.

Then came the scraping, slow, patient, deliberate. Something dragging its fingernails down the wood, inch by inch.

Emma's throat locked. She whispered, "Go away," but the moment she spoke, the TV clicked off.

The silence after was worse than the sound.

The maintenance man came the next day.

He was a broad, quiet man who smelled faintly of cigarettes and rain. He ran his tools along the wall and frowned. "Power's fine," he said. "But this outlet looks strange."

He moved the TV away from the wall, and Emma's heart stopped.

There were prints. Not dust or smudges, but actual black handprints burned into the plaster, small and long-fingered, as though something had pressed its hands flat against the wall from the other side.

The man looked confused. "You burn candles here or something?"

Emma shook her head.

That night, she stayed at her sister's apartment.

She did not say why, only that her place was giving her weird vibes. But every time she closed her eyes, she saw those dark handprints.

When she finally went back to collect a few things, she found the television turned on again.

But it was not static this time. It was a picture.

Her own living room.

The image looked live, the same couch, the same lamp, the same framed photo on the wall. Except the lighting was darker, like there was only one faint bulb burning somewhere off-screen.

And there was someone sitting on the couch.

A man. His face was colorless and hollow, as though the static had formed the shape of skin. He did not move, not until Emma did. Then, very slowly, he turned his head toward the screen.

She froze.

On the television, the man tilted his head the same way she did. Like a reflection caught half a second late. His mouth opened slowly, wider and wider until it no longer looked human. The noise rose until it filled the room, a screeching, bubbling distortion that felt alive.

Emma lunged forward and yanked the plug out of the wall. Sparks jumped from the socket. The picture vanished.

For a few seconds, there was silence.

Then, the faint outline of two handprints appeared on the screen. They pressed outward, stretching the glass until it creaked.

She left everything behind.

When the landlord asked why she was breaking her lease, she told him she was moving for work.

He just nodded. “You are the third person who has left that place this year,” he said. “The last woman said her radio used to talk to her. Guess it is something about the wiring.”

Emma did not answer. She just smiled tightly and handed him the keys.

But later that week, while brushing her teeth, she saw it again, that faint shimmer behind her reflection. Not light. Not movement. Static.

And something behind her shoulder.

When she turned, there was nothing there.

Months passed. She bought a new apartment, a new television, and tried to forget. Everything worked fine. For a while, she convinced herself it had been a breakdown or some kind of sleep paralysis.

Then one night, her phone screen lit up on her nightstand.

3:17 a.m.

The display flickered with static. Not a notification, not a video, just the same pulsing noise she thought she had escaped.

Her reflection appeared faintly in the glow. But it was not her.

The mouth on the reflection was already open.

And then, very quietly, the voice returned.

“Found you.”