FREQUENCY 17

A PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPERNATURAL THRILLER



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Prologue — The Last Transmission

Eighteen years earlier, at 23:34, Siham was alone in the studio at Ras al-Mawj Station when the first distress call came through.

She had been reading the weather bulletin from a sheet of paper when the signal light blinked twice. The voice in her headphones was thin and broken by wind.

“Ras al-Mawj, this is the Aster. We have seventeen aboard. Low Island is flooding. Requesting permission to enter the west channel.”

Siham stopped reading. The weather sheet slid from her hand and landed beside the microphone.

The Aster was not on the night schedule. No passenger vessel was supposed to be crossing the channel. The only traffic listed was a cargo ship due to clear the harbor before midnight.

She pressed the talk switch. “Aster, this is Ras al-Mawj. Repeat your position.”

The signal faded. She heard a horn, then a child crying somewhere behind the captain’s voice.

The studio door opened. Rashid, the young transmitter technician, hurried in with a headset around his neck. “You answered them?”

“I need their position.”

“The harbor director said not to acknowledge any unregistered vessel.”

“People are on that boat.”

“I know.” He looked toward the transmission room. “The director is on the other line.”

The telephone rang before she could reply. Rashid picked it up.

“Yes, sir.”

Siham watched his face change as he listened. He turned away from her and lowered his voice. “The channel is open. We’re holding it.”

A pause.

“No, sir. We haven’t logged the vessel.”

Another pause. The color drained from his face.

He hung up. “Read the all-clear.”

“What?”

“The director says the patrol boat is already moving. He wants the channel kept clear until the cargo ship passes.”

“Then let the patrol boat answer.”

“He said not to transmit the Aster’s name.”

Siham stared at the microphone. She could feel the headphones pressing into her ears. “I’m not going to tell the town the harbor is clear while a boat is asking for help.”

Rashid looked toward the dark window. Beyond it, the antenna mast rose into the rain. “If we lose this station, Low Island loses its only warning system.”

“Is that what he told you?”

“It’s what I’m afraid of.”

The signal light blinked again. The captain’s voice came through, weaker now. “We are approaching the west marker. Water over the deck. Seventeen aboard. Please answer.”

Siham reached for the microphone.

Rashid caught her wrist. “Wait.”

“Let go.”

“If you use the channel, they’ll shut us down before the patrol boat reaches them.”

“You don’t know that.”

“No. I don’t.” He released her. “But I know the director.”

Siham looked at the weather sheet on the floor. It said the storm would pass north of the coast. The rain hammering the windows said otherwise.

She switched on the broadcast mic.

“This is Ras al-Mawj. The harbor is clear. No vessels are reporting distress.”