

## Chapter 1: The Perfect Apartment

The key felt unnaturally cold in Elliot Carter's palm.

He turned it over, studying the tarnished brass, the faint scratches along its teeth. A good key, he decided. A key with history. The kind of key that should open a door to something interesting.

"It's a steal for the price," the landlord, Mr. Greer, had said, avoiding Elliot's eyes as he handed it over. "Quiet building. Good light."

Elliot hadn't missed the way the man's fingers twitched when he mentioned *the last tenant*.

Now, standing in the dim hallway of the fourth floor, he slid the key into the lock of Apartment 4B. The mechanism groaned, then gave way with a reluctant click.

The apartment was—perfect, too perfect.

High ceilings, hardwood floors worn smooth with age, a bay window that bathed the room in honeyed afternoon light. A writer's apartment. The kind of place Elliot had imagined when he first moved to the city, back when he still believed his manuscript would sell, back when he could afford delusions.

He dropped his duffel bag onto the floor, the sound swallowed by the thick silence. No street noise. No neighbors. Just the faint hum of the refrigerator and the occasional creak of old pipes.

Elliot ran a hand along the desk tucked into the corner—solid oak, scarred with ink stains and cigarette burns. A writer's desk. He smiled. Maybe this was a sign. Maybe this was where he'd finally finish his novel.

Then he noticed the dust.

Not the usual layer of neglect, but something deliberate. Words. A single sentence etched into the film of grime on the desktop.

*You'll hear them too, eventually.*

Elliot frowned. He wiped his palm across the surface, erasing it. Some asshole's idea of a joke. Probably the landlord, trying to spook him into backing out of the lease.

He turned toward the window, shaking off the unease. Outside, the city stretched out beneath him, indifferent.

That night, as he lay in bed listening to the unfamiliar sounds of the building settling around him, he heard it, a whisper. Not from the hallway. Not from the street below. From the walls.

He sat up, heart pounding. The room was empty. Silent.

Elliot exhaled. Just the wind. Just his imagination.

But as he sank back onto the pillow, the whisper came again.

Faint. Hungry.

***Keep reading.***

## Chapter 2: The Unfinished Manuscript

Elliot woke to sunlight slicing through the curtains and the distinct feeling that he was not alone.

He sat up too fast, his head swimming. The apartment was still... no whispers, no phantom voices. Just the hum of the refrigerator and the distant sound of traffic far below. He exhaled, rubbing his face. A dream. It had to have been a dream.

But his fingers still tingled with the memory of that whisper. *Keep reading.*

Shaking it off, he dragged himself to the kitchen and made coffee, the bitter smell cutting through the stale air. As the caffeine hit his bloodstream, the paranoia of the night before felt foolish. Old buildings made noise. That was all.

He needed to unpack.

The boxes were few, Elliot had never accumulated much but as he lifted a stack of books from one, his elbow bumped the desk drawer. It slid open with a groan, farther than it should have.

Inside, tucked beneath a yellowed newspaper, was a manuscript.

Elliot frowned. He hadn't put that there.

The title page was brittle under his fingers:

### WHISPERS IN THE WALLS

*by Daniel Hargrove*

The name prickled at the back of his mind. The last tenant. The one Mr. Greer had avoided talking about.

Curiosity won. He flipped to the first page.

The prose was sharp, visceral—the kind of writing that made Elliot’s own work feel amateur in comparison. It was a horror story, of course. About a writer who moves into a new apartment and begins hearing voices in the walls. Voices that know things they shouldn’t.

Elliot’s grip tightened on the paper.

*The whispers started on the first night.*

*At first, he told himself it was the building settling, the pipes groaning. But then he heard his name.*

A chill skittered down his spine. He read faster.

The protagonist in Daniel’s story found scratches inside his desk drawer. Words etched into the wood. *You’ll hear them too, eventually.*

Elliot’s breath caught.

He looked down at the desk beneath his hands. Slowly, he pulled the drawer all the way out, tilting it toward the light.

There. Faint, but unmistakable.

Etched into the wood, in jagged, frantic letters:

***YOU’LL HEAR THEM TOO, EVENTUALLY.***

His coffee went cold in his hands.

A coincidence. It had to be. Maybe he'd seen the words last night, half-asleep, and his brain had woven them into a nightmare. Maybe Daniel had lived here years ago, and the desk had come with the apartment. There were explanations.

But then he turned the page in the manuscript.

*By the third night, he found the first note.*

*It was in his own handwriting.*

Elliot's head snapped up.

A sound.

From the corner of the room—a dry, mechanical *click*.

The typewriter.

It sat on a small table by the window, an old, hulking thing he hadn't noticed before. Dust coated its keys, but the roller was clean, as if recently used.

And in its grip, a single sheet of paper.

Elliot didn't want to look.

He crossed the room in three strides.

The page held one line, the ink still dark, still fresh:

***Why did you stop reading?***