



A Hello in the Hallway

Grace Martin



Sunlight spills across Clair's bedroom as she stands before her mirror, nervously adjusting her hair and smoothing down her school jacket. She is twelve now, starting her second year at school, and the familiar flutter of butterflies fills her stomach as she thinks about seeing Alex again.



Glancing at a small keepsake on her desk that reminds her of last year's silent moments, Clair takes a deep, grounding breath to steady her pulse. She slings her backpack over her shoulders, grips the straps tight, and steps into the crisp morning air with a mixture of excitement and fear.



The street leading up to the school is alive with chatter, bicycles, and eager students arriving for the new term. Clair walks steadily forward, her boots crunching against autumn leaves as the large school entrance looms ahead under bright welcome banners.



Inside, the long hallway echoes with ringing bells, slamming lockers, and cheerful reunions among classmates. Clair moves carefully through the morning bustle, her gaze darting through the vibrant crowd in search of a familiar face.



Near a row of bright yellow lockers, she catches sight of him leaning casually against the doorframe. Alex has grown taller over the summer, his signature dark messy hair falling effortlessly over his forehead in the warm hallway light.



Alex turns to share a laugh with a friend, his bright, effortless smile lighting up the entire corridor. Watching that warm smile brings last year's hidden memories rushing back, making Clair's heart skip a nervous beat.



Duck instinct kicking in, Clair quickly steps behind a cluster of loud upperclassmen gathered near a water fountain. From her hiding spot, she peeps out with flushed cheeks, battling the familiar urge to stay safely invisible.



Leaning back against the cool wall, Clair closes her eyes for a moment to calm her pounding heart. She decides that this year must be different, refusing to let another term pass by built on silent, missed opportunities.



With a swell of quiet determination brewing in her chest, Clair steps out from behind the group and walks directly down the center of the hall. The surrounding noise seems to quiet down as every intentional step brings her closer to the yellow lockers.



Clair stops beside Alex just as he closes his locker door, offering him a warm and genuine smile. She takes one final deep breath and asks softly, 'Oh hi Alex, how did your summer go?'