

**First Place Prose**  
**“Late Spring” by Rachael Rosenthal**  
**Harbor Light Christian School, 11th Grade**

The morning sun flickered through each crack of the blinds, until all stripes of light adorned the poster-scattered walls of Oswald’s apartment. He awoke with a weak groan and turned over in his bed, squinting to see the blur of numbers on his alarm clock.

The sun has started to rise early again, to accompany the recent welcoming of spring. It’s been making him wake up before his alarm. There are worse things to be irritated by, but it was the little things that got to him lately. Like how even little matches can add together to start large fires.

Oswald sat up and stared at the floor. He ran his fingers through his straight auburn hair, bangs falling back to cover his eyes. No thoughts ran through his head at this hour. Well, maybe one—one thought that had a secret passageway that led to a spiral staircase of other thoughts, woes, ideas— he hated change.

He hated when the seasons and weather changed. Even with a slow transition, he felt he couldn’t keep up. He detested when people came and went, when feelings come and go. He didn’t particularly like how most things in life were temporary. He couldn’t handle it at times.

Even now, it’s spring, and the world around him has been altered. Again.

Oswald stumbled out of bed, caring enough to throw on a decent outfit and clean himself up a bit. He grabbed his messenger bag and opened the front door of his apartment, turning back to eye the narrow hallway. A small window looked back at him. The morning sun had crawled in with perfect timing to reach his skin. He remembered his waking resentment and scoffed, slamming the door behind him and rushing to the stairwell.

Oswald bounced down the front steps of his apartment complex, halting to take a deep breath of the fresh spring air. There was a light breeze, gently rustling the budding branches of trees, guiding cheerful birds through the air, brushing stray hairs to tickle his cheeks. It was a fight to stay moody now.

Bicycles ringed by, individuals and their dogs passed as Oswald headed to a nearby café, where colleagues had invited him to join them for a light breakfast. In honesty, only one had invited him, assuring him through his nervous refusal and reminders of social anxiety that it would be, to say the most, tolerable. The colleague had said straightforwardly that Oswald needed to get out more; he tended to shut himself in when he felt down and under the weather.

And now, facing the weather, he stood in front of the café, hesitating to go in. As a breeze carrying the scent of blooming flowers made him sneeze, he heard a familiar voice call his name. He had been spotted; the acquainted group had chosen to sit outside. Oswald stared down at his shoes as he walked over and braced introductions.

He patiently sipped at a hot coffee, raising a brow in surprise of how friendly everyone was to him, how welcomed he felt. This same morning he wanted to dig a hole and hide at the thought of everyone and everything outside of his comfort zone.

He glanced at his familiar colleague, who was amid a humorous conversation with another, but locked eyes with him. The man paused and shot an idiotic grin.

Oswald couldn't help but smile back, the sun casting a spotlight on his face.

Maybe change wasn't so bad after all.