

3rd Place
High School Grades 9-10

To Fix the World
By Erin Baughn

I know that if I fix the world, you will love me. I know that I might get insane with power. It's a risk, but for you, I'll do it. If you will love me, I'll be fine.

I remember when we first met. We first met at a protest. You were protesting the war and I was just there to see what all the fuss was about. You tripped and fell onto me. I caught you, brushed you off and set you back on your feet. You thanked me and began protesting again.

I didn't see you for a month and eight days, not that I was counting. I was just hoping to see your face again, but I knew it was pointless to keep looking. We met for a second time at a coffee shop. It was one of those co-op places. I was there because I was meeting a friend nearby and I needed a coffee. You were there because it was the only place in town that lived up to your standards for organic and fair-trade.

All the tables were filled and you walked in and ordered that tea that I learned to love during the months that we spent together. You stood there and tried to see if someone was leaving. You spotted me, recognized me, and asked if I would be so kind as to share a table with a stranger. I chuckled and stated that we weren't really strangers—remember that protest? You smiled and your eyes got all squinty, they almost closed, but didn't. You looked at me like you knew that it would draw me in even more. I know it sounds stupid to say but your laugh sounded like wind blowing through the trees and birds chirping and water flowing all at once. We talked for forty-five minutes—we both got up for more to drink and that's when I heard your order for tea. When we sat down, I wondered aloud if that was your natural hair color. You responded by ranting on all the chemicals that are in dyes and how you wouldn't slowly kill yourself that way. I forgot about my friend and I left that place with my breath taken away and your number written on a napkin.

I didn't get the guts to call you until three days later. It wasn't because of that stupid rule. It was because I was too flustered and I couldn't form the words, not even in my head. And right as I was dialing your phone, mine started to ring. I looked at the number and it was you and I took a deep breath and said hello. You said hello and my name to make sure it was me because it didn't sound like me since I hadn't spoken in a while and I was scared. I smiled, but realized you couldn't see me, so instead I said your name. We talked for a while and we hung up after planning a time and place to meet.

Did you notice that every time we met, the same things happened? I would get there early and you would arrive just a minute or two late. We would exchange greetings and talk and talk and talk. But I never went to your house. And you never came to my apartment. And we were okay with that.

There was that one time, a few months after we first met when we were saying goodbye and you looked—as always—so sad to leave. And you kissed me on the cheek

and I kissed you on the lips. And we both left. And we didn't see each other for a while after that, but it was fine with me.

The next time we met, we greeted each other with a kiss. By then, I knew about you. I knew that you were vegan because it was your personal way to stop climate change. I didn't mind meat; it was what I grew up with, but I became vegan for you. I knew that you were for rights of any kind. Women's, LGBTQ, racial, you name it. I knew that you cried when you heard about that tsunami that hit Indonesia and booked a flight with what little money you had and raced over to help. I donated a few dollars to Red Cross, but nothing more. You promised me that if there was another disaster—and there was—you would bring me with you, and you did. I knew that you loved your sister though she was your opposite. I knew your cats' names and what color each of them were, though I had never seen any of them. I knew that you had read the dictionary one summer during high school when you were bored. The only books I ever read in high school were the ones assigned by teachers, so you started recommending books that are now my favorite. I knew that you had few friends, but the friends you had were amazing and you didn't like to go long without them and they felt the same about you.

I remember when I told you that I love you. And you stumbled over your words and looked at your feet and said thank you, but did not return the statement. I didn't hear from you for a week after you said that. I got a call on a Tuesday afternoon. It was you, telling me that you wished you could say that you love me but you just weren't sure. It was best for you to devote all your love to fixing the world, rather than figuring it out for one person. You told me that it was best if we break things off right then and there and I just listened and you said goodbye and I said I love you and you hung up.

I lived my life normally—for the most part. I went to work, I did what I did, but it wasn't enough. I was retracing my steps one day and happened upon that cafe that we had met for the second time in. I sat at the last empty table and you walked in. You walked in and didn't notice me and got your tea with a spoonful of honey and a dash of your brown sugar. You looked around and after a moment, saw me. You walked over to me and asked to sit like that second time we met. I still love you, so I said yes. We spoke of what we had done in the months that we had been separated, but not like we did before.

I asked you as we both stood up to leave what it would take to gain your love. You told me to fix the world.

I am going to fix the world. I am going to become president or king or prime minister or emperor or dictator of somewhere and I am going to fix everything. I'm going to stop all the wars. I'm going to fix the world so that you will love me. I'm going to stop everyone from using oil and killing animals and hating each other. I'm going to make technological advances in what's right, rather than stupid things that I'll just have to fix later. I'll colonize the moon and name a city after you. I want you to love me and I know that you want to love me but you can't unless I do this.

So I'm going to fix the world and it doesn't matter if I become power-hungry. Because the world will be fixed and I know that despite things I might do after, you will love me. If you will love me, I'll be fine.

