

# tricks

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# A Poem by Eden Streit

## **Eyes Tell Stories**

*But do they know how  
to craft fiction? Do  
they know how to spin*

*His eyes swear forever,  
flatter with vows of only  
me. But are they empty*

*I stare into his eyes, as  
into a crystal ball, but  
I cannot find forever,*

*movies of yesterday,  
a sketchbook of today,  
dreams of a shared*

*His eyes whisper secrets.  
But are they truths or fairy tales?  
I wonder if even he*

*lies?*

*promises?*

*only*

*tomorrow.*

*knows.*

# Eden Some People

Never find the right kind of love.  
You know, the kind that steals

your breath away, like diving into snowmelt.  
The kind that jolts your heart,

sets it beating apace, an anxious  
hiccuping of hummingbird wings.

The kind that makes every terrible  
minute apart feel like hours. Days.

Some people flit from one possibility  
to the next, never experiencing the incredible

connection of two people, rocked by destiny.  
Never knowing what it means to love

someone else more than themselves.  
More than life itself, or the promise

of something better, beyond this world.  
More, even (forgive me!) than God.

Lucky me. I found the right kind  
of love. With the wrong person.

# Not Wrong for Me

No, not at all. Andrew is pretty much perfect. Not gorgeous, not in a male

model kind of way, but he is really cute, with crazy hair that sometimes hides

his eyes, dark chocolate eyes that hold laughter, even when he's deadly serious.

He's not a hunk, but toned, and tall enough to effortlessly tuck me under his arms,

arms that are gentle but strong from honest ranch work, arms that make me feel

safe when they gather me in. It's the only time I really feel wanted, and the absolute

best part of any day is when I manage to steal cherished time with Andrew.

No, he's not even a little wrong for me except maybe—maybe!—in the eyes

of God. But much, much worse than that, he's completely wrong for my parents.

# See, My Papa

Is a hellfire-and-brimstone-preaching  
Assembly of God minister, and Mama

is his not-nearly-as-sweet-as-she-seems  
right-hand woman, and by almighty God,

their daughters (that's me, Eden, and my  
little sister, Eve—yeah, no pressure at all)

will toe the Pentecostal line. Sometimes  
Eve and I even pretend to talk in tongues,

just to keep them believing we're heaven-  
bound, despite the fact that we go to public school

(Mama's too lazy to homeschool) and come  
face-to-face with the unsaved every day.

But anyway, my father and mother  
maintain certain expectations when

it comes to their daughters' all-too-human  
future plans and desires.

*Papa: Our daughters will find  
husbands within their faith.*

*Mama: Our daughters will not  
date until they're ready to marry.*

# You Get My Dilemma

I'm definitely not ready to marry,  
so I can't risk letting them know

I'm already dating, let alone dating  
a guy who isn't born-again, and even

worse, doesn't believe he needs to be.  
Andrew is spiritual, yes. But religious?

*Religion is for followers, he told  
me once. Followers and puppets.*

At my stricken look, he became not  
quite apologetic. *Sorry. But I don't*

*need some money-grubbing preacher  
defining my relationship with God.*

At the time, I was only half in love  
with Andrew and thought I needed

definitions. "What, exactly, *is* your  
relationship with our Heavenly Father?"

He gently touched my cheek, smiled.  
*First off, I don't think God is a guy.*

*Some Old Testament-writing fart  
made that up to keep his old lady*

*in line. He paused, then added, Why  
would God need a pecker, anyway?*

Yes, he enjoyed the horrified look  
on my face. More laughter settled

into those amazing eyes, creasing  
them at the corners. So sexy!

*Anyway, I relate to God in a very  
personal way. Don't need anyone*

*to tell me how to do it better. I see  
His hand everywhere—in red sunrises*

*and orange sunsets; in rain, falling  
on thirsty fields; in how a newborn*

*lamb finds his mama in the herd. I thank  
God for these things. And for you.*

After that, I was a lot more than  
halfway in love with Andrew.

# The Funny Thing Is

We actually met at a revival, where nearly everyone was babbling in tongues,

or getting a healthy dose of Holy Spirit healing. Andrew's sister, Mariah, had

forsaken her Roman Catholic roots in favor of born-again believing and had

dragged her brother along that night, hoping he'd find salvation. Instead

he found me, sitting in the very back row, half grinning at the goings-on.

He slid into an empty seat beside me.  
*So . . . , he whispered. Come here often?*

I hadn't noticed him come in, and when I turned to respond, my voice caught

in my throat. Andrew was the best-looking guy to ever sit next to me,

let alone actually say something to me. In fact, I didn't know they came that cute

in Idaho. A good ten seconds passed before I realized he had asked a question.

“I . . . uh . . . well, yes, in fact I come here fairly regularly. See the short guy up there?”

I pointed toward Papa, who kept the crowd chanting and praying while the visiting evangelist

busily laid on his hands. “He’s the regular preacher and happens to be my father.”

Andrew’s jaw fell. He looked back and forth, Papa to me. *You’re kidding, right?*

His consternation surprised me. “No, not kidding. Why would you think so?”

He measured me again. *It’s just . . . you look so normal, and this . . .* He shook his head.

I leaned closer to him, and for the first time inhaled his characteristic scent—

clean and somehow green, like the alfalfa fields I later learned he helps work for cash.

I dropped my voice very low. “Promise not to tell, but I know just what you mean.”

# It Was a Defining Moment

For me, who had never dared confess  
that I have questioned church dogma

for quite some time, mostly because I am  
highly aware of hypocrisy and notice

it all too often among my father's flock.  
I mean, how can you claim to walk

in the light of the Lord when you're  
cheating on your husband or stealing

from your best friend/business partner?  
Okay, I'm something of a cynic.

But there was more that evening—instant  
connection, to a guy who on the surface

was very different from me. And yet,  
we both knew instinctively that we needed

something from each other. Some people might  
call it chemistry—two parts hydrogen,

one part oxygen, voilà! You've got water.  
A steady trickle, building to a cascade.

# If Andrew

Was the poser type, things would probably be easier. I mean, if he could

pretend to accept the Lord into his heart, on my father's strictest of terms, maybe

we could be seen together in public—not really dating, of course. Not without a ring.

But Andrew is the most honest person I've ever met, and deadly honest that night.

*Did you have to come to this thing?  
It seems kind of, um . . . theatrical.*

We had slipped out the back door, when everyone's attention turned to

some unbelievable miracle at the front of the church. I smiled. "Theatrical.

That sums it up pretty well, I guess. You probably couldn't see it in back, but . . ."

I glanced around dramatically, whispered, "Brother Bradley even wears makeup!"

*Andrew laughed warmly. So why do you come, then? Pure entertainment?*

I shrugged. "Certain expectations are attached to the 'pastor's daughter' job

description. Easier just to meet them, or at least pretend they don't bother you."

It was early November, and the night wore a chill. I shivered at the nip in the air,

or at the sudden magnetic pull I felt toward this perfect stranger. Without a second

thought, Andrew took off his leather jacket, eased it around my shoulders.

*Cool tonight, he observed. All the signs point to a hard winter.*

He was standing very close to me. I sank into that earthy green aura, looked

up into his eyes. "You don't believe in miracles, but you do believe in signs?"

*His eyes didn't stray an inch. Who says I don't believe in miracles?*

*They happen every day. And I think we both knew that one just might have.*

# It Was Unfamiliar Turf

I mean, of course I'd thought guys were cute before, and the truth is, I'd even kissed

a few. But they'd all been "kiss and run," and none had come sprinting back for seconds.

Probably because most of the guys here at Boise High know who my father is.

But Andrew went to Borah High, clear across town, and he graduated last year.

He's a freshman at Boise State, where his mom teaches feminist theory. Yes, she and his rancher

dad make an odd couple. Love is like that. Guess where his progressive theories came from.

That makes him nineteen, all the more reason we have to keep our relationship discreet.

In Idaho, age of consent is eighteen, and my parents wouldn't even think

twice about locking him up for statutory. That horrible thought has crossed my mind

more than once in the four months since Andrew decided to take a chance on me.

# Four Months

Of him coming to church with Mariah,  
both of us patiently wading through Papa's

sermons, then waiting for post-services coffee  
hours to slip separately out the side doors, into

the thick stand of riverside trees for a walk.  
Conversation. After a while, we held hands

as we ducked in between the old cottonwoods,  
grown skeletal with autumn. We joked about

how soon we'd have to bring our own leaves  
for cover. And then one day Andrew stopped.

He pleated me into his arms, burrowed his face  
in my hair, inhaled. *Smells like rain*, he said.

My heart quickstepped. He wanted to kiss  
me. That scared me. What if I wasn't good?

His lips brushed my forehead, the pulse  
in my right temple. *Will I burn if I kiss you?*

I was scared, but not of burning, and I wanted  
that kiss more than anything I'd ever wanted

in my life. "Probably. And I'll burn with you.  
But it will be worth it." I closed my eyes.

It was cold that morning, maybe thirty degrees. But Andrew's lips were feverish against mine. It was the kiss in the dream you never want to wake up from—sultry, fueled by desire, and yet somehow innocent, because brand-new, budding love was the heart of our passion. Andrew lifted me gently in his sinewy arms, spun me in small circles, lips still welded to mine. I'd never known such joy, and it all flowed from Andrew.

And when we finally stopped, I knew my life had irrevocably changed.

# Day by Day

I've grown to love him more and more.  
Now, though I haven't dared confess

it yet, I'm forever and ever in love with  
him. After I tell him (if I ever find the nerve),

I'll have to hide it from everyone. Boise,  
Idaho, isn't very big. Word gets around.

Can't even tell Eve. She's awful about  
keeping secrets. Good thing she goes to

middle school, where she isn't privy  
to what happens here at Boise High.

I'm sixteen, a junior. A year and a half,  
and I'll be free to do whatever I please.

For now, I'm sneaking off to spend  
a few precious minutes with Andrew.

I duck out the exit, run down the steps,  
hoping I don't trip. Last thing I need

is an emergency room visit when I'm  
supposed to be in study hall. Around one

corner. Two. And there's his Tundra across  
the street, idling at the curb. He spots me

and even from here, I can see his face  
light up. Glance left. No one I know.

Right. Ditto. No familiar faces or cars.  
I don't even wait for the corner,

but jaywalk midblock at a furious  
pace, practically dive through the door

and across the seat, barely saying hello  
before kissing Andrew like I might

never see him again. Maybe that's because  
always, in the back of my mind, I realize

that's a distinct possibility, if we're ever  
discovered kissing like this. One other

thought branded into my brain is that maybe  
kissing like this will bring God's almighty wrath

crashing down all around us. I swear, God,  
it's not just about the delicious electricity

coursing through my veins. It's all about love.  
And you are the source of that, right? Amen.