

Wincing at the Beautiful by Paul Hostovsky

So my friend Phil is telling me how
he can't get a date
how he loves women and how
they're always giving him looks
so I ask him what kind of looks
so he winces at the beautiful
braless young woman passing by
at that particular propitious moment
giving her a look of such
longing and longevity
that she returns his look with a look
that kills his entire family tree
from the roots to the unimagined
blossoms of the great grandchildren shriveling
on his shriveling bough
and I think I've diagnosed his problem now
and I think of quoting some lines from Rilke
but on second thought I think
a sports metaphor might serve him better
so I steer the conversation round to basketball
and the three second rule
which says you can only stand inside
the key for three seconds
before they blow the whistle
they're just blowing the whistle on you Phil
for breaking the three second rule
for standing there with your eyes
popping out like basketballs
it's a game like any other I tell him
then I ask him if he wants to score
and now that I have his attention
I throw in those lines from Rilke
I tell him that beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror
we're still just able to bear
and the reason we adore it so
is that it serenely disdains to destroy us
and he winces again and this time
it's at the beauty of those lines
or maybe their truth which hits him
like a three-pointer now
that Rilke hits all the way from Germany
at a distance of a hundred years