**On Beauty**by Dave Carley
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**Synopsis**

Two men are guarding the most famous statue in the world, from terrorists - and swooners. Sure enough, the very first visitor of the day is overcome when she comes face to face with the beauty before her, and is caught by a guard as she faints. In quick succession, the guards also find themselves overcome – but for very different reasons…

**Cast**

Fabrizio (FAB) – a guard, early 20s. Both Fab and Sandro have snappy uniforms.
Alessandro (SANDRO) – a guard, about 30
LISA – a young woman, early 20s

**Setting**

The Accademia Gallery, Florence Italy, where Michelangelo’s ‘David’ is on display. No set requirements!

**Time**

Now.

**On Beauty**

*FAB and SANDRO stand facing the audience. FAB is texting or playing a game on his phone. SANDRO grows increasingly impatient.*

SANDRO: If the director catches you -

FAB: You said he never comes around this early -

SANDRO: But if he does -

FAB: There aren’t any tourists yet.

SANDRO: He could be watching on CCTV.

FAB: When I went to the washroom he was sleeping.

SANDRO: I don’t want you to get in trouble.

FAB: Don’t worry.

SANDRO: I went out on a limb for you.

FAB: I know, I’m grateful, Sandro -

SANDRO: And what if a crazy person comes -

FAB: No one has come in so far, crazy or otherwise.

SANDRO: Doesn’t matter, it’s all about appearances. And there’ll be a busload of tourists any minute. By 10 this place will be jammed.

FAB: Funny huh, two guys guarding a chunk of marble.

SANDRO: That is no ‘chunk of marble’.

FAB: I know I know -

SANDRO: It is worth -

FAB: Millions.

SANDRO: Billions. When they say something is ‘priceless’, that is what they mean.

 *(Pause. FAB contemplates the statue.)*

FAB: Why do you think Michelangelo made his dick so small?

SANDRO: Is that small?

FAB: By my standards.

SANDRO: If it was bigger, it might not have the same aesthetic appeal. Everything about him is in perfect proportion.

FAB: It’s probably a grower.

SANDRO: Perhaps it was cold in the studio. Anyway, you’ll have plenty of chances to make comparisons. They move us from gallery to gallery and there is much – art – to be admired. Upstairs is interesting. Some of the larger canvasses. More to look at. Though we’re not here to do that.

FAB: “We are here to protect the nation’s patrimony.”

SANDRO: You heard about the guy with the hammer.

FAB: They’ve got metal detectors now. Bag and coat checks. Cameras.

SANDRO: Terrorists might see this as a target.

FAB: *(Ironic.)* They won’t stand a chance against us. With our armaments. *(They indicate they have none.)* So we’re supposed to give our lives to protect that. The statue that makes the world mock our national endowment.

SANDRO: No one’s ever mocked mine.

FAB: Nor mine.

SANDRO: Truth is, that’s not even the real statue. It’s a reproduction.

FAB: I thought the one in the square is the reproduction!

SANDRO: They both are.

FAB: Where’s the real one!?

SANDRO: I don’t know. The basement? I was here the day they switched them. It’s for safekeeping. No one knows.

FAB: So now you’re telling me I have to give up my life saving a statue that’s not even real?

SANDRO: Actually, we have a more pressing task. Catching the fainters.

FAB: How do you mean?

SANDRO: Once you’ve worked here a bit longer you’ll see. People come and look at the statues, the Art, and especially our friend here - and they faint. Bang, just like that. It’s surprisingly common. After a while you learn the warning signs. They stand and stare and then they begin to wobble a bit, maybe mutter to themselves, then wham they hit the floor. Our job is to catch them on the way down.

FAB: Are you serious?

SANDRO: It’s even got a name. Hyperkulturemia. They are awestruck by the Art.

FAB: You’re shitting me.

SANDRO: Stendhal’s Syndrome is the scientific name.

FAB: Stendhal. Sounds Swedish.

SANDRO: Actually, he was a French author. He suffered it.

 *(FAB scoffs.)*

 So keep working on your muscles, Fab, because you’re going to get a workout saving people.

*(LISA enters.)*

FAB: Finally. *(Sotto.)* And a looker.

*(LISA walks about, looking at Art. FAB follows her closely. SANDRO is clearly less interested. LISA comes to a stop, centre, between FAB and SANDRO. She gazes up at the statue.*

*Very soon, LISA begins mumbling under her breath. She pulls out a Kleenex and mops her brow. She sways a bit. She fumbles for her water bottle. Sways. Mumbles more, then sways violently and appears to be going down.*

*With a shout, FAB moves forward and catches LISA.)*

FAB: Sandro! Help!

SANDRO: I’ll get a chair!

FAB: She’s out cold!

SANDRO: *(Leaving)* I’ll get water!

FAB: She has water with her!

SANDRO: Ease her to the floor!

FAB: I can hold her up!

*(SANDRO is off getting a chair. FAB holds LISA, who is out cold. He looks at her, and is transfixed.)*

 Oh my God, what cloud did you step off, my angel? None of these artists could have painted you, there is no artist in the world, no sculptor no painter who could do you justice, your hair, your lips, oh, who are you, where did you come from, why are you here, all my life I’ve looked for a woman like you *(starts to mumble)*

*(FAB starts to wobble. His knees are buckling.)*

 Sandro? Sandro, help me?

*(FAB is about to fall to the floor. SANDRO rushes in and catches him from hitting the floor. SANDRO is holding FAB who is holding LISA. FAB and LISA are right out of it. SANDRO looks down at FAB and is transfixed.)*

SANDRO: Oh my God, my beautiful man. When they put you on my shift I couldn’t believe my luck, what torment to hear you talk about women and your endowment, and to see your muscles aching to burst out of your jacket, oh your arms I want to chew them, and to be holding you to hold you oh my God *(starts to mumble and sway)*

*(SANDRO buckles. Faints. The three of them slide to the floor, a maze of Stendhalled limbs. And there they remain for a while, until there is a sign of movement. Not clear from whom, and then it turns out it’s LISA. Her head pops up from under the men.)*

LISA: What on earth? Get off – who – why am I – hey, you, you, get off me, please, sir, move your -

*(She can’t get out but her exertions bring FAB to life.)*

FAB: Excuse me, miss.

LISA: Can you get off me please?

FAB: I can’t – I seem to be pinned underneath something – Sandro?!

LISA: What happened?

FAB: You fainted.

LISA: Why are you on top of me?

FAB: I ran over to catch you and then I don’t remember a thing –

*(SANDRO is stirring.)*

 Why are you on top of me?

SANDRO: You fainted. I ran over to catch you but then I don’t remember a thing.

FAB: Why?

SANDRO: Why what.

FAB: Why did you faint?

SANDRO: I – uh – the beauty of the statue?

LISA: You both fainted? Because of a statue?

FAB: It’s called The Stendhal Syndrome.

LISA: Sounds Swedish.

FAB: After a French writer, actually. When confronted by great beauty, it’s very common to faint dead away –

LISA: Well, for me, it was probably because I skipped breakfast. If you can move your - arms

FAB: Oh yes, of course. Sandro, your leg please -

SANDRO: Sorry.

FAB: A nutritious breakfast is very important. Sandro?

*(Various discussions of moving limbs as they disentangle themselves. All three stand. Both Sandro and Lisa wipe dust off Fab.)*

LISA: I’ve never heard of fainting in response to a sculpture.

FAB: It was my first time.

SANDRO: Me too.

LISA: And you caught me.

FAB: Yes.

LISA: I’m so grateful. I could have cracked my head.

FAB: It’s my job. You’re as light as a feather.

SANDRO:  *(to FAB.)* And then I caught you -

LISA: *(to FAB.)* You ran across the room and caught me. I – I – owe you my thanks

FAB: It was nothing, truly.

LISA: *(Has taken a look at the statue and immediately gets a bit wobbly)* Oh.

FAB: *(Takes her arm.)* You must come to the museum cafe. I will escort you, for safety. I will buy you some nourishment.

LISA: You are so kind. Are you allowed?

FAB: It’s in my job description.

LISA: I am still a bit – Stendhalish -

FAB: Me too – take my arm.

LISA: You take mine and I’ll take yours.

FAB: *(As they leave.)* The fainting is nothing to be worried about. We’re only human. We faint in the presence of beauty. No harm done.

LISA: If one is caught.

 *(LISA looks back at statue.)*

FAB: You mustn’t look!

LISA: But catching me is your job! *(Laughs)*

FAB: It’s my pleasure.

 *(They exit. SANDRO is alone.)*

SANDRO: “You mustn’t look.” “But catching me is your job tee hee.” “It’s my pleasure.” *(Makes disgusted sound. Pause. Takes long look at statue.)* Well answer me this, O tiny man. Answer this: Who - who will catch me?

*(SANDRO looks up at statue. Squints. Looks. Looks around guiltily. Does a pratfall. Picks himself up and dusts himself off. Tries a more theatrical faint. Picks himself up. More sadly, tries another faint or two, as lights dim to black.)*

**The End**