**On Beauty**by Dave Carley

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**Synopsis**

Two men are guarding the most famous statue in the world. They must defend it from tourists and terrorists – and also catch the swooners. Sure enough, the very first visitor of the day suffers from the Stendhal Syndrome. Overcome by the beauty before her, she faints. In quick succession, the two guards also find themselves overcome – but for very different reasons. With everyone collapsing around them, the question becomes: who will catch the catchers?

**Dave Carley**

Dave Carley’s plays have had over 450 productions across Canada and the United States. They include Fringe hits *Taking Liberties*, *Into* and *Conservatives in Love.* His drama about the death penalty, *Twelve Hours*, recently premiered in Columbus, Ohio, to critical acclaim. For more on Dave, go to www.davecarley.com

**Cast**

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

**Setting**

The Accademia Gallery, Florence Italy, where Michelangelo’s David is on display. Fab and Sandro stand facing the audience, separated by some space. A cordon could separate them from the audience.

**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 Closed Circuit.

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 for the work -

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 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 that fellow 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 look.

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: There’s always something. ISIS might see this as a target.

FAB: *(Ironic.)* ISIS 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 entire world mock the endowment of Italian men.

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 then?

SANDRO: I don’t know. The Vatican? 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 here and look at the statues, the Art, and especially with 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, that’s 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 what 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, grab a chair!

SANDRO: Ease her to the floor!

FAB: I can hold her up!

*(SANDRO is off getting a chair. FAB holds LISA. 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: 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 pushing out through your jacket, oh your arms I want to eat 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 – I seem to be pinned underneath – Sandro?!

LISA: Why are you on top of me?

FAB: You fainted.

LISA: But how did this happen –

FAB: I ran over to catch you and –

*(SANDRO is stirring.)*

 Why are you on top of me?

SANDRO: You fainted. I managed to catch you but then I must have passed out too.

FAB: Why?

SANDRO: I – uh – the beauty of the statue got to me.

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 –

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

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

SANDRO: Sorry.

FAB: 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 that response before 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 really cracked my head.

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

SANDRO:  *(to FAB.)* I did the same for 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 should come to the museum cafe. I will take you.

LISA: You are so kind. I’m still a bit – Stendhalish -

FAB: Me too – take my arm.

LISA: You take mine and I’ll take yours. Are you sure *you’re* OK.

FAB: *(As they leave.)* It’s nothing to be worried about. Occupational hazard, happens all the time. We faint.

LISA: But you caught me first.

 *(FAB looks back at statue.)*

 You mustn’t look.

FAB: You wouldn’t catch me?

LISA: I’d try.

 *(They exit. SANDRO is alone.)*

SANDRO: “You mustn’t look.” “You wouldn’t catch me?” “I’d try.” *(Makes disgusted sound. Pause. Takes long look at statue.)* But 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 a faint, as lights dim to black.)*

**The End**