

On Avoiding Stendhal Syndrome

A psychosomatic illness causing fainting, heart palpitations, confusion, hallucinations, amnesia or madness from sensory overload, especially in Florence museums, where about twelve cases occur every year



It's easy to omit museums
When doppios and Perugino chocolates
slide down like liquid silk
And Italian words in coffee shops caress sound waves
into a massage that starts at the tip of your toes
Where born-again feet have been converted to baby soft
by the finest leather scandals from a street stall

The clop-clop of hooves hitting
cobble streets quicken the heartbeat
Each church bell chime climbs the ladder of your spine
And the strings on a street mandolin
tie you up in ancient bondage with Botticelli
Dante and Da Vinci

It's Michelangelo though
responsible for your labored breathing
Because you've just run your hand up David's
marbled leg muscle in the piazza around the corner
And you can still feel the flush spreading
from palm to pelvis

But you can't linger in the longing
because another kind of hunger leads you
by the nose to a next-door trattoria
To crostini, filet mignon with porcini and truffle sauce
parmigiano risotto, tiramisu and two glasses of Brunello
Over which you start talking to Puccini, Verdi and Rossini

Soon you are seeing with x-ray transparency
the tight Tuscan sunned bodies brushed with olive oil
bursting their Prada, Armani, Gucci and Fendi restraints
And with weakened knees and winged head
you try to rise to return to your hotel
Or was it a hostel or a houseboat or a B & B
Maybe that remodeled convent you considered. . .

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Ellaraine Lockie is a well-published and awarded poet, nonfiction author, essayist and papermaker. She has been to Kenya on a poetry fellowship from Summer Literary Seminars, to Centrum in Port Townsend, WA, for a poetry residency, received her eleventh Pushcart Prize nomination and won the 2007 Elizabeth R. Curry Prize. She has authored five poetry chapbooks including *Blue Ribbons at the County Fair*, a collection of her first-place contest winning poems from PWJ Publishig, and several broadsides including the art/poetry production, *Mod Gods and Luggage Straps* from BrickBat Review.

