The Stendhal Syndrome

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Nevertheless, Dr. Magherini insists, certain men and women are susceptible to swooning in the presence of great art, especially when far from home.


There we were in the Arctic. Typically we were unmarried men and women between the ages of 25 and 40 who were travelling alone or in small groups. We did not leave home very often and were fairly impressionable. We were none of us Italians. Half of us had seen a therapist once, but that’s another story.

This is about Florence:

Inge was unnerved by frescoes in the Strozzi Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria Novella. Can you blame her? Panels of women with pointing fingers. They were pointing at her. Fritz stood for too long before the Fra Angelico paintings in the Museum of St. Mark. Withdrew to his hotel. Stood mute in a corner.

Lucy said she saw angels. Oh, Dr. Magherini! Had we been Japanese! Moving in large groups. Instead, you prescribed for us what’s sensible. Bottled water. Only a little bit of Caravaggio a day.

Now, in the Klondike, it’s darkness visible twenty hours a day. But in our frozen dreams bears carve gods from bone.