

LINEAGE

Written by

Alex Davies

INT. IL MUNICIPO - DAY

We're in a town hall, in Urbino, Italy. This is not the grand Renaissance building reserved for open-mouthed tourists attempting to find the cathedral, but rather an administrative building where the actual work happens. The offices within are stuffy and cluttered, filing cabinets bulging with dusty records, office chairs filled with ancient clerks.

Standing quietly in line for one of the clerks is MARIA. Plain, forties, looking uncannily suited to this type of environment - on her many visits she is often mistaken for a member of staff.

CLERK  
(in Italian, for he is)  
Avanti!!

Maria steps forward but is cut in line by a RED-FACED BUSINESSMAN who clearly hasn't even seen her. Such is her disguise. The CLERK looks at Maria to see what she will do, and Maria meekly smiles and waves Red-Face to go ahead.

EXT. STREET - OUTER URBINO - EVENING

A fine mist-like rain settles on Maria's threadbare woollen coat as she trudges along the street, coming to a stop at her building. These are not the picturesque Gothic spires of postcard Urbino, but rather a grotty tenement muddle of buildings, shuttered to the rain, grimy in the streetlamps.

INT. APARTMENT LOBBY - SAME

Shaking her wet hair in the lobby, she unbuttons her coat and pulls out a folder of files, safely dry. She checks her pigeonhole for post.

MARIA  
Nothing today. Nothing ever.

She walks up the metal staircase to her apartment.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

The apartment is sparsely furnished. What the room lacks in home comforts it makes up for in books and files - hundreds of them - crammed on shelves, stacked in messy piles around the room, every surface area covered in leather- and cloth-bound paper.

Taped to the walls are a series of charts, maps and lists. Some printed, some hand-drawn, they feature lists of names, old photos, locations circled in red pen, a few bits of string strung from one item to the next.

A crime investigation? No, a disconnected family tree.

Maria sits at her kitchen table, her supper largely untouched, poring over a ring binder crammed full of files.

DRIP.

A large fat splat of water lands on the page she is looking at.

The drip comes from the ceiling - and another and another.

Hastily gathering up the binder, Maria blots the page with a towel, tenderly drying the paper, checking the ink hasn't run. As the drip continues apace she shoves her half-eaten bowl of soup across the table to catch the water, then goes back to her files.

A moment passes - and then with a creak and a SNAP! a huge chunk of plaster smashes down on to the table, followed by a deluge of water. Maria shrieks.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Maria is on the phone to her landlord. In hesitant tones -

MARIA

Yes, I'm aware it's raining, but  
Signore...

No, I understand I can't expect you  
to come out in the... Yes, it's  
unfortunate...

No, I don't have anyone who can  
mend it...

She takes the phone away from her face, the caller having clearly hung up.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Arrivederci.

She looks around at the mess of her living room.

INT. LIBRARY - UNIVERSITY OF URBINO - DAY

Today's hauntingly beautiful setting is the huge imposing university library - stuccos on the wall, decapitated marble heads of local dignitaries on plinths. Staircases. So many staircases.

In the hallways and corridors, it's full of life, young students chattering and laughing.

In the reading room, it's all quiet.

This is Maria's domain - she's been a fixture at the library for longer than some of the marble heads. She sits at a leather-covered desk, a tiny desk lamp casting a feeble pool of light. Once again, she pores over a bunch of files, covered in neat copperplate handwriting, cross-referencing them with an online database on her computer.

Her concentration is broken by a student, wanting to check out a book. Maria takes it from her in silence, makes a record and stamps the inside cover.

She hands it back, and the student dumps the book into her bag carelessly. Maria winces.

As the student opens the door to leave, a snatch of laughter and conversation echoes around the room. The door closes and the silence resumes.

Maria stares at the door.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

In a less majestic part of the library run a row of small rooms down a narrow corridor - this is the administrative area. Maria sits alone, eating an apple.

From further down the corridor come voices, laughter and exclams of delight.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Oh, he's beautiful - he looks just  
like you.

Maria gets up from her chair and walks over to the door, staying in the shadows so she can't be seen.

Down the corridor, a colleague has brought in her new baby to show off to her friends. The women crowd around, cooing in soft motherly tones.

WOMAN (CONT'D)  
He has your eyes.

In the reflection of the door, Maria can see her own eyes. She shuts them.

Flashback:

INT. CARE HOME - DAY

A young Maria, perhaps seven or eight, sits on a rickety metal framed bed, crying. A COMFORTINGLY LARGE WOMAN with a shock of red hair for which she is named Signora Rossi puts her arm around Maria's shoulders.

SIGNORA ROSSI  
You have your mother's eyes.

YOUNG MARIA  
But you never knew my mother. Or my  
father. No one did.

SIGNORA ROSSI  
You still have them. Your father's  
hair, your grandmother's nose...  
your great-aunt's temper, and your  
great-great grandfather's hands.

She grabs Maria's hands in hers.

SIGNORA ROSSI (CONT'D)  
These hands. These are the hands of  
your family. These hands are  
identical to hands that existed  
hundreds of years ago.

MARIA  
So?

SIGNORA ROSSI  
So? So, today you are disappointed.  
Today, you did not find a new  
family. But one day, yes, Maria.  
One day you will.

Maria shrugs away, turning to the wall.

MARIA  
No one will ever want me. I don't  
belong.

SIGNORA ROSSI  
You do belong, Maria. You just  
don't know who to yet.

INT. LIBRARY - PRESENT

Maria closes the door, shutting out the voices.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

Maria gathers up her things, ready to go home. She looks  
tired, it's been a long day. About to switch the light off in  
her office, she is accosted by the LIBRARY DIRECTOR, a  
nervous-looking man, clutching a fountain pen.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR  
Maria - may I have a word?

Maria nods her head in affirmation. She's like that.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Shall we sit down?

Maria watches wordlessly as he takes the only seat in the room. Realising -

LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Oh, er - do you want to sit down?

Maria shakes her head. He squirms on the seat, Maria now hovering above him, which is hard to do when you're five foot five.

The director looks at the papers strewn across her desk - a mess of birth certificates, death certificates, hospital records and the like.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Ah, of course, our esperta in  
genealogy!

Maria smiles shyly, straightening the papers.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Have you made much progress?  
Discovered any famous relatives?

MARIA  
No, Sir.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR  
My wife looked into ours - we can trace our families back to the Renaissance. We are distantly related to Caravaggio, they tell me.

Maria politely looks at her watch.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Right, well, unfortunately I have some news that might be somewhat upsetting... Times are tough, as I'm sure you know, and the university has to make some cutbacks. It's not quite the Renaissance anymore - haha - not so many wealthy patrons... fewer international students - less money. You understand?

Maria nods her head slowly.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
Well, er, what this means is that we have to reduce our budget... see where we can make some savings.

(MORE)

LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
And that means letting go of  
some... unnecessary staff.

MARIA  
I'll be sorry to see you go,  
Direttore.

She smiles. She made a joke. The director stands up.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR  
Now, Maria, I know you've been here  
a long time... but sometimes one  
has to make difficult decisions.

MARIA  
Of course.

The director starts to edge towards the door.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR  
There will be a consultation. Human  
Resources will be in touch to  
explain all the details...

MARIA  
Thank you.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR  
Of course, you will be fairly  
recompensed for your long service,  
I recognise you are one of our  
longest-serving members of staff.

MARIA  
Yes, Sir. Twenty years.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR  
Indeed. Well I must go. Buonasera,  
Maria.

He leaves the room.

INT. CORRIDOR - SAME

The library director stands outside Maria's office, sweating.  
Exhaling deeply, he's about to leave when he realises he's  
left his pen.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR  
Merda.

He turns back to the door. Is it worth it?

He's about to knock when the door opens and Maria hands him  
his pen, wordlessly.

## LIBRARY DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Grazie.

She shuts the door.

## EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

It's still raining as Maria makes her way home. Water falls in dirty sheets from gutters, flooding drains and swirling in eddies down the road.

The windows of the shops and cafes are steamed up and the few pedestrians hurry past, heads bent against the weather.

Maria gets to the subway, which is closed due to flooding. She turns and looks to the road for a taxi, but there are none. The bus stop has a queue - dozens of people in the same situation.

She decides to walk.

## EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The rain has eased off slightly, but it's still a filthy night. Maria's shoes are by now sodden. She takes them off, stuffs them in her bag and keeps going.

Walking barefoot along the dark road, Maria trudges along, feet squelching in the grass. As she gets to an overflowing drain, a bedraggled family of geese flap past, seeking shelter down the verge. The last - the smallest - is stuck in the grate, where the storm water is rapidly flooding. Its squawks are pitiful and barely audible over the gushing water, and its mother is not looking back.

Maria attempts to get near but the bird's frantic thrashing forces her out on to the road, where she kneels down in the huge puddle, her clothes now soaked through, trying to calm the animal and free its foot from the grating.

It gets darker by the second. With one swift movement Maria manages to free the bird from its watery prison where it hops away, staggering across the grass to the verge. The mother and goslings are off in the distance - the little one can't keep up.

MARIA

Come back here!! Don't abandon your  
baby!!

Maria steps into the road, waving her arms in protest. A truck roars its horn as it swerves to avoid her now directly in the path of traffic.

Its slipstream forces her off the road, where she tumbles down the embankment, her bag skittering off her shoulder.



She tumbles roughly down the verge, coming to a crumpled halt at the bottom of the ditch, her head thudding against a stone where she lands. Darkness.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - DAY

Inside the intensive care unit of a busy hospital, doctors and nurses bustle around hurriedly. In the background we hear the various beeps of life-saving machinery, whilst gurneys clatter past, some empty, some full.

A blue curtain snaps open and TWO DOCTORS exit a cubicle, deep in conversation, shaking their heads.

Inside the cubicle, Maria lies on a hospital bed attached to a drip. Her head is bandaged and there is bruising around her eyes. She looks confused and scared.

A NURSE comes in with a tray of bandages. She sits herself down on the bed and smiles brightly at her patient.

NURSE  
(in Italian)  
How are you today?

Maria tries to smile, but just opening her mouth to speak is obviously painful.

MARIA  
Good morning, Sister. I feel  
quite... strange. But otherwise,  
fine, thank you.

Maria is no longer talking Italian. Instead, she speaks English, in a reserved, cultured, aristocratic accent.

The nurse frowns.

NURSE  
Cara. Why do you still talk like  
that?

Maria closes her eyes.

MARIA  
I've told you. I've told all the  
doctors. This is just how I speak.  
I don't understand it.

The nurse gets up from where she sits on the gurney and begins to change her dressings.

NURSE  
No one will help you if you  
continue to be obstinate.