

MERAKI

Written by

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INT. HOUSE OF WORSHIP, RUSSIA- NIGHT

A small group of people sit in a circle looking at each other nervously. The room, an old sanctuary of an Orthodox Christian church, is covered with canvasses and sculptures. It feels like a museum but more organic. Things have been intuitively placed around the room.

SASCHA, 15, bright eyed and dark haired with painted clothing, stands before the group.

SASCHA

Clearly, we create. They imitate.
There is no reason that we won't
win.

The small crowd murmurs and shifts in their seats. Eyes dart to where the altar should be, to a projection of various pieces of ancient art. Pablo Picasso. Salvador Dali. Kara Walker. Purvis Young. Henri Matisse.

SASCHA (CONT'D)

Look. We are great. We are better
than great. Alexi, who is a more
realistic watercolorist than you?

ALEXI, 12, mousey and dressed in clothing that is clearly too big for him, pushes his glasses up from the bridge of his nose. He shakes his head. Sascha keeps going.

SASCHA (CONT'D)

No one! Impressionists wish they
could have you counted among their
ranks, Jocelyn.

JOCELYN, 25, a classic beauty dressed simply in an old-fashioned Mennonite-styled shift dress, slumps in her chair. She blushes and hides her face.

The screen blinks red. Excited conversation fills the space. A robotic voice comes on.

VOICE (O.S.)

You have been deemed worthy.
Meraki!

The room erupts in cheers.

VOICE (CONT'D)

We are pleased. Create. May you not
be found wanting.

The screen fades to black and Sascha beams. Her crew is undefeated.

SASCHA

The Ancient have found us worthy!

The small crowd erupts into high fives and whoops. Sascha walks over and picks up a notebook. She scribbles a few things and looks up when the doors fling open.

SASCHA (CONT'D)

Bettina.

BETTINA, 15, stunning beauty that she is quite aware of and Sascha's baby sister, runs into the building wearing her sisters art. Her arms are flailing as she shoves people out of her way. When people don't move, she jumps onto and over chairs. She stops in front of Sascha.

BETTINA

(guttural noises and quick hand motions)

SASCHA

Yes! Thank you!

They hug.

EXT. HOUSE OF WORSHIP - NIGHT

The last of the group trickles out. Sascha stands in front of the doors.

SASCHA

Bye! See you tomorrow!

A MAN approaches on the moving sidewalk and stands just off to the side. His hat covers his face, but he looks to be around 25. His posture is rigid and his clothing seems to be almost too perfect. He doesn't fit in this artist's colony.

SASCHA (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

MAN

Can I help you?

SASCHA

I'm sorry. Do you need anything?

MAN

You need me.

The man lifts his gaze to Sascha's and winks. She shudders and takes a step back, towards the door. He takes one step closer to her.

SASCHA

We're closed. You can come back
when the sun is in the sky.

The man seems confused and takes one more step towards her.
He reaches into his pants pocket and pulls something out.

SASCHA (CONT'D)

Look. I don't want any trouble. I
will call the constable if you do
not step back.

The man sets down the small object on the bottom step, tips
his hat and smiles a crooked smile. He stares at Sascha for
just a moment before taking 2 awkward steps backwards and
continuing down the moving sidewalk.

Sascha watches him go a ways before she makes her way to see
what he left. The street is still. She glances around and
picks up a chip.

INT. HOUSE OF WORSHIP - NIGHT

She runs back into the building and activates the locks on
the doors and windows, creating a fortress of solitude. No
one can get in or out without disarming the system. She sits
in one of the chairs, since scattered by the crowd and places
the chip inside her hand. A projection of the man sits at eye
level.

MAN

My name is unimportant. My
occupation is also unimportant.
What I have to say is what counts.

The projection switches to a man playing the drums.

MAN (V.O.)

You have been competing with
artists all over the world. You
have been found worthy of power and
prestige. This man believes that
art is beauty and the beautiful
wield all the power.

Sascha nods.

SASCHA

We do.

A smile spreads across her face. The projection changes to
her sister, creating a sculpture.

MAN (V.O.)

He is correct. Beauty is reckless
and doesn't care who creates it.
Beauty tells the truth. Beauty
sees. Beauty transcends.

The projection changes again to multiple artists working on a singular project. Sascha tilts her head.

MAN (V.O.)

Beauty is fleeting. Trends shift.
Tastes change. You are alone. What
if you weren't? What if you were
created to create with other
creators?

The projection sits on a singular shot of Sascha standing outside of her building. Her face looks confused and annoyed.

MAN (V.O.)

For such a time as this? Do you
find The Ancient wanting?

Next a countdown starts on the projection and Sascha drops it onto the wooden flooring where it leaves a scorch mark. She rubs her hand where the chip was.

SASCHA

What the...?!

There is commotion outside. Sascha slinks around the edges of the room as she makes her way to the door. There are TWO WOMEN peering in through the large window beside the front door. Sascha can hear muffled conversation.

WOMAN 1

She should be inside.

WOMAN 2

I don't see her.

WOMAN 1

We are (muffled words)...
Assassinate... Ancient...

Sascha inches closer to the window to hear better. The Women stop speaking. It goes black. The door is rattling. The locks are releasing. Sascha stands behind a large canvas.

WOMAN 2

Where the hell is she? Curfew was
hours ago.

Sascha sees lights through the canvas, moving towards the front of the room. Her breath is shallow and she pinches herself to keep from passing out.

WOMAN 1

How am I supposed to know? You said she would be here.

WOMAN 2

I've been watching her for weeks.

The floor creaks in Sascha's direction.

WOMAN 1

What are we supposed to tell The Ancient? That she just disappeared?

WOMAN 2

I don't know. I guess.

WOMAN 1

You guess? You're an idiot.

The lights stop in front of the canvas that is concealing Sascha.

WOMAN 2

Should we leave her a note?

WOMAN 1

Sure. A note. What should it say?
Hey. Hope you're well. We came by to neutralize you because you're a threat to the survival of our society as we know it? You're definitely an idiot. We can't go back until we have something to give them.

WOMAN 2

I'm hungry. Let's go eat and sit on the place. She's going to have to come back.

WOMAN 1

Fine.

The footsteps move away from the canvas. Sascha lets out a big sigh as soon as the door shuts. She hits the floor and crawls along the perimeter of the room until she gets to a door. She reaches up and slowly turns the knob. It opens easily and she makes her way inside.

INT. SASCHA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sascha lights the chandelier candles and quickly moves about her room. She stuffs a sweater under the door to keep any light from escaping and covers her door with an old quilt.

She heads straight for her closet, grabbing art supplies as she goes. She pulls a knapsack from her closet and stuffs her treasure inside it. She pulls a scarf, underwear and long pants and drops them into the bag.

Making her way over to the bed, she pulls a small stuffed animal off. She pauses at her night stand and picks up a small frame with a picture of 2 small girls with 2 adults. She kisses the picture and drops it into the bag with the animal.

All of a sudden the floor boards start to move. Sascha stifles a scream and slides under her bed. She comes face to face with someone or something. The fear causes her vision to blur.

SASCHA

Bettina?

Bettina reaches her hand out to Sascha and starts to pull. Sascha looks around her room, grabs her bag and slides into the floor with her sister.

Bettina smiles and motions for her sister to hold her hand.

INT. SOMEWHERE UNDER THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP - NIGHT

Someone grabs Sascha's waist and pulls her through the tunnel. She can't breathe but she can't scream either. Blinded by the bright room, Sascha looks around and sees several people looking just as frightened. Bettina grabs her hand and she realizes that she's somewhere under the church.

SASCHA

Where... am... I?

Just then the man who left the chip stands up on a chair in the middle of the crowd.

STEPHEN

My name is Stephen and I am here
because you are in danger.

The room goes silent and everyone leans in to hear.

FADE TO BLACK.