

THE IMAGINIST

WGAW #: 1391159

OVER BLACK:
ZANY RAGTIME MUSIC

SUPER: *"Vaudeville may be a kind of lunch-counter art,
but then art is so vague and lunch is so real."
-- Edwin Milton Royle*

FADE IN:

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER- JANITOR'S CLOSET - DAY (1926)

A THIN MAN sits hunched on an overturned bucket, his back to the hallway. He massages his neck with rough hands.

PIANO MUSIC (O.S.) from the stage carries into the dim hallways of the failing vaudeville theater.

TIMMY, 8, a tough little urchin in threadbare clothes, hustles down the hallway. As he blows by, he whistles to the man.

TIMMY
Miksa, ya got five!

The man stands and stretches his legs. He bends over, shaking out the kinks. He twists to each side, cracking his bones.

He stretches one last time, reaching for the ceiling. He kicks the bucket into the closet and closes the door.

Turning, the man reveals a rakish grin spread across a surprisingly boyish face.

MAN
(thick accent and
deadpan delivery)
"Five will get you ten if you know
how to work it."

MIKSA, 19, fresh-off-the-boat enthusiasm, shuffles down the hall toward the stage. In spite of a body broken by too many years of hard physical labor, he glows.

Miksa wears the bottom half of a TWO-PERSON HORSE COSTUME and a big crooked smile.

CUT TO:

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - MEZZANINE - DAY

A MAN in the audience dozes.

A COUPLE whispers to each other, sharing a cigarette.

In the sparse audience, not one person watches the stage.
A few people head toward the exit.

On stage, THE HORSE leans against a fence. The costume includes a ridiculous hat, a tie and a cigar.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - STAGE - DAY

MIKSA'S POV - INSIDE THE HORSE COSTUME

In the dark, Miksa grasps rails that support the fabric of the costume. He moves about bent-half, always facing down. Sweat drips off his nose and face.

Miksa sees only the backside of BLUE, 30s, the formidable little person working the front half of the horse.

BLUE

So then he said, "It's on me."

Deafening silence, and not smile from the audience.

Blue waits a moment longer then lets a tremendous FART RIP inside the costume.

SPARSE LAUGHTER (O.S.)

Miksa hooks his chin in his shirt and covers his nose.

BLUE

I said, "It's on me."

Blue RIPS another LOUD FART. Miksa shakes the costume rails to register his displeasure with Blue.

VOICE #1 (O.S.)

Get off the stage!

VOICE #2 (O.S.)

Where's the girls?

Miksa gags in the horrible costume. Sweat drips.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - BACKSTAGE - DAY

The crowded hall bustles with performers from various acts: jugglers, dancing poodles, etc.

Blue, "cock-of-the-walk," leans outside the women's dressing room flirting with each girl that passes. Most flirt back.

Still in costume, Miksa storms up to Blue.

MIKSA

I am not to put up with your
smell!

Blue laughs and pats Miksa's arm. Miksa jerks away.

BLUE

Guess I shouldn't a had dem beans.

MIKSA

No more! No more of the farts!

Miksa, hand to forehead, indicates the absolute limit.

MIKSA

I am at here with you!

BLUE

My way of saying, "Welcome to show
biz." Nothin' personal, kid.

MIKSA

I am here since two weeks. I am
already plenty welcome, thank you.

EMMA, late 20s, a confection in heels and not much else, scoots into the dressing room crying.

BLUE

Hey, Emma!

Classic slapstick, Miksa and Blue shove through the doorway after Emma.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Flinging herself into a chair, Emma clutches a "pink slip" (paper of termination) in her hand.

Miksa and Blue rush up to her, ignoring girls in various states of undress hanging about the dressing room.

BLUE

What gives?

Emma holds out the pink slip. Blue takes it and reads.

EMMA

They said --

(sob)

It was too --

(sob)

Too racy. An' I didn't even want to wear that stupid costume.

Leslie made me. He did, I swear.

(sob)

Then they said it's not the costume, it's the jokes.

(sob)

They said the jokes are too blue for a girl.

Miksa takes Emma's robe from a hook and offers it to her.

Emma puts the robe on over her little costume. She forces an appreciative smile through the tears. Miksa swoons.

BLUE

Tell 'em you'll do a Boston show.

EMMA

No room on the bill. They added another picture show.

(sob)

I'm done. It's over.

Blue hands the pink slip back to Emma.

BLUE

Christ.

Emma slams the "pink slip" down on the dressing table.

EMMA

(big sob)

I'm gonna halfta do burlesque!

She completely breaks down, hysterical.

Fists clenched at his side, Miksa steps forward.

MIKSA

(yelling)

No tassels! No!

Emma and Blue jump, startled by his passionate rage.

Miksa gestures to the costumes of the girls in the room.

MIKSA

This is bad enough. No tassels!

Miksa takes Emma's hand, leading her out of the room.

MIKSA

Don't cry. You come. Don't worry.

BLUE

What the hell!

Blue chases after Miksa.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - HALLWAY

Miksa charges down the hall, Emma in tow. Blue follows, hot on their heels.

BLUE

(to Miksa)

For cryin' out loud, don't cast a kitten! What are you up to?

Miksa stops outside a door marked OFFICE.

BLUE

No. No, kid. Please, don't.

Miksa KNOCKS. Blue hangs his head, defeated.

BLUE

(to himself)

Damn.

LESLIE (O.S.)

Yeah. What is it?

Miksa opens the door and peeks into the room.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - LESLIE'S OFFICE

LESLIE, 50s, author of his own chaos, slumps at a desk in the cramped office. Piles of paper threaten to avalanche.

Without looking up, the slovenly and suspended, Leslie waves Miksa into the room.

LESLIE

Yeah. What?

Miksa enters and removes his hat. He stands in front of the desk. Emma and Blue huddle in the doorway.

MIKSA

Mister Leslie, is a mistake. Emma must stay.

LESLIE

Blue, get in here. What the hell is this? I don't speak Ruskie.

MIKSA

I am from Hungary.

Blue charges in and clambers up into a chair. He stands on the seat, peering over the piles of paper.

Blue glares at Leslie for a moment, trying to muster an explanation. He gives up and sits down.

BLUE

I got nothin', Les.

Blue points to Miksa.

BLUE

You got to ask him.

LESLIE

(to Miksa)

You're lucky I hired you.

MIKSA

And, I thank you. See, Emma has big talent. She is very funny --

LESLIE

(to Blue)

Take him and her, and get the hell outta my office.

Miksa stands firm.

MIKSA

No. You listen. Emma will join our act.

LESLIE

Whatever. You get paid the same.

MIKSA

Thank you, Mister Leslie.

Miksa smiles. Blue jumps down from the chair, furious.

BLUE

Hold on a --

(to Leslie)

Who's the head of the horse here?

MIKSA

I share my pay with her.

EMMA

You don't have enough as it is.

MIKSA

I make do.

Miksa exits. Emma follows him smiling.

LESLIE

(to Blue)

You two are already playin' to the haircuts. During a matinee, no less. Make it work, or all three of you go.

Leslie lights a cigarette and returns to his work.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - BACKSTAGE

Steaming, Blue charges down the hallway, catching up to Miksa and Emma.

BLUE

(to Miksa)

You stupid sonofabitch.

Emma and Miksa stop short, colliding into each other.

EMMA

I'm sorry. I didn't mean for --

Blue turns sharply on her.

BLUE

Times are tough all around, toots. I got my own neck to worry about.

(to Miksa)

What are we gonna do with her? We already have an act. I tell the jokes. You work the costume.

MIKSA

We in the horse costume. Same. She dressed like a fancy lady. Rich.

Emma perks up. Blue frowns.

BLUE

And?

MIKSA

We, the horse, are straight man.
She does the jokes. They don't
like your jokes. People don't like
you, Blue. I am sorry for that.
But, she? People like.

Emma gives Miksa a huge excited hug. She bounces.

EMMA

It'll be the berries!

Blue throws his hands up, mocking.

BLUE

Oh, the berries!
(to Emma)
Hey, Queen of Sheba. What's in it
for me?

Emma starts for the dressing room. Blue grabs her before she can get away.

EMMA

I gotta change.

BLUE

(lewdly to Emma)
Fine, but hurry back. We gotta
work the material.

Emma dances out of his grasp and hustles off to change.

BLUE

(to Miksa)
Get to work on a set. A farm.
We'll practice tomorrow, early.

Blue heads to the door.

BLUE

See you in the mornin', kid.

MIKSA

No. We all work together.

Miksa stands at the door, not sure what happened, but certain he doesn't like it whatever it is.

MONTAGE

Miksa builds a set.

Miksa cleans.

Miksa sleeps sitting on a bench, mop in hand.

Miksa rises with the sun.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - DRESSING ROOM - NEXT DAY

CLOSE ON EMMA'S REFLECTION in the vanity mirror.

Too ashamed to look at her reflection, Emma covers her eyes with her hands as she dries tears with a hankie.

Miksa arrives at the open door, carrying two teacups. He stops and watches Emma for a moment.

Miksa clears his throat to get her attention.

Emma looks up. She sees Miksa in the mirror's reflection.

MIKSA

I have tea.

Emma blushes. She turns to face Miksa.

EMMA

Blue isn't here. Isn't here yet, I mean.

Miksa shrugs, raises the cup, showing her the tea.

MIKSA

For you.

Emma motions for him to come in and sit.

EMMA

Come on, silly. Everybody else just barges in.

Miksa hands her a cup and sits at a respectful distance.

EMMA

(almost mocking)
So gallant!

MIKSA

Sorry, what is "gallant?"

EMMA

Never mind, geez.

She blows on the too hot tea.

EMMA

So. What's your act?

Miksa stares at her.

EMMA

You didn't dream of being the horse's patootie your whole life. Where do you come from anyway?

MIKSA

Budapest.

She nods vacantly, sipping her tea.

EMMA

Well, what's your act?

MIKSA

I am Imaginist.

Emma raises an eyebrow, curious.

MIKSA

You call it different. Uh... You say, a mummer? A mime? Yes? Mime?

Emma nods and takes a sip.

EMMA

Yeah, yeah, sure. A mime. We got lots of those around here.

Miksa jumps up. Taking the teacup from Emma, he sets it on the vanity. He pulls her up out of the chair.

MIKSA

Not just mime. No. More, too.
(grandly)
Imaginist!

He IMAGINES a BUTTERFLY flutter between them.

He reacts to the butterfly in such a convincing manner a BUTTERFLY (B & W) appears. Emma gasps.

Tracking the butterfly, Emma and Miksa move closer and closer together until...

The butterfly lands in Emma's hair.

Miksa reaches up, extending his hand.

The BUTTERFLY (B & W) flits, landing on his finger.

Miksa brings it down between them, the wings flutter slowly opening and closing. Though only B & W, it glows.

Emma looks into Miksa's eyes --

THE BUTTERFLY DISAPPEARS.

Miksa kisses Emma passionately.

Emma falls into his arms. They kiss and kiss.

BLUE (O.S.)
 Goddamnit, where are you? I been
 waitin'. I hate waitin' --

Blue stops short as he catches a glimpse of the couple.

Miksa throws Emma upright. They separate quickly.

A grumpy, hung-over, and disheveled Blue enters.

BLUE
 Miksa, let's go. You ain't gonna
 make the big time playing around
 back here.

Embarrassed, Miksa scrambles away.

Blue sneers at Emma.

BLUE
 Didn't seem so keen last night.
 Holding out on me were ya?

She storms out.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - STAGE - WINGS

SUPER: "FOUR WEEKS LATER"

Leslie peeks around the curtain at the audience. Blue and Miksa trot by in the HORSE COSTUME.

Emma, wearing a shiny new confidence, suggestively brushes by Leslie and taps him on the shoulder.

EMMA
(imitating Mae West)
Wouldn't worry 'bout your box
office, sugar.

Emma winks then takes the stage to a packed theater.
APPLAUSE erupts from a standing room only crowd.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - STAGE - LATER

In the middle of a bit, AUDIENCE LAUGHTER (O.S.) drowns
out the lines.

A large backdrop painted with trees, crops, and a barn. A
rough fence and bales of hay complete the country scene.

Emma stands, parasol in hand, holding for laughter.

The HORSE leans on a fence next to Emma.

BLUE
Come here often?

EMMA
Nah. But, it sure is pretty.

Horse gestures with his hoof.

BLUE
Scenic.

Emma looks about the stage. Audience laughs.

EMMA
Where? I don't see him.

BLUE
See who?

EMMA
How do you know him?

BLUE
Who?

EMMA
Whaddya mean who? You're the one
who seen him.

BLUE
Who?

EMMA
Nick.

BLUE
Who?

EMMA
Nick, silly.

BLUE
Look, I don't know any Nick.

EMMA
Well, why'd you say "See Nick," if
you don't know him in the first
place?

Emma gives the audience a big wink, and they erupt. The
applause continues as Emma and Horse leave the stage.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - BACKSTAGE

Blue and Miksa immediately separate, quickly removing the
costume. Both sweat profusely. Blue spits angrily.

BLUE
Finally top bill, and this is the
shit they like?

Emma floats down the stairs.

EMMA
It's the new sophistication. The
audience likes things a new way.
They like us and that's what --

Timmy runs up to Emma, and points.

PRODUCER, 40s, tan and flashy, waits near Emma's dressing
room. He exudes success, wealth, and dreams come true. An
eager ASSISTANT stands behind.

TIMMY
He told me, ta tell you, he wants
ta talk to ya.

Emma walks off. Timmy follows.

Blue calls after her.

BLUE
Sophistication, my eye.

Emma smiles coyly at the producer. He leans down and whispers to her. She nods enthusiastically.

Emma sends Timmy back to Miksa.

TIMMY

They're goin' ta The Magnolia and
Emma says that you should go, too.

Timmy runs off. Blue pats Miksa's arm.

BLUE

She's only going to break your
heart, kid. They don't want us.
They only want her.

MIKSA

She wants me.

Miksa jerks his arm away and exits.

INT. THE MAGNOLIA JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

WILD JAZZ MUSIC from a BAND crashes around the tiny club. Emma, the Producer, his assistant and Leslie, drink liquor from coffee cups in the gaudy speakeasy.

Miksa enters. He removes his hat and looks around. Miksa spots Emma in the tiny booth. He walks over.

MIKSA

(over the din)

Emma!

She looks up and smiles. The Producer ignores Miksa.

Miksa looks for a seat. Producer shrugs his shoulders.

EMMA

(to Producer)

This is Miksa. He's the one I told
you about. He's...

The Producer smiles up at Miksa.

EMMA

An Imaginist!

PRODUCER

A what?

EMMA

Kind of like a mime, but more.

PRODUCER

Oh, sure. A mime.

A waitress arrives with a champagne bucket.

PRODUCER

Here we are!

The Producer grabs the bottle and pops the cork. He passes around beautiful champagne flutes.

The Producer pours champagne for everyone, but runs out when he gets to Miksa. The Producer shrugs at Miksa.

Miksa shrugs right back at the producer.

Miksa IMAGINES a CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE (B &W). He pours imaginary CHAMPAGNE (B & W) into his empty glass.

He smells it. Rubs his nose as if the bubbles tickle. He takes a drink.

Emma sees the CHAMPAGNE (B & W). It GLOWS with light.

EMMA

(to Producer)

See! Look, look. He's doing it!

The Producer looks over at Miksa.

NOTHING.

The glass is empty.

The Producer turns back to the table, raising his glass.

PRODUCER

To our "Chloe," screen goddess.

Leslie quickly raises his glass.

LESLIE

(pointedly)

Once our "Emma" finishes her run at the Bijoux.

Emma raises her glass.

EMMA

I'll drink to that!

They all clink glasses and drink, ignoring Miksa.

Miksa sulks off to the exit.

EXT. MAGNOLIA JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Miksa storms out of the club. He paces the sidewalk.

INT. MAGNOLIA JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Miksa charges back into the club and makes for the table.

Mustering all his bravado, he grabs Emma's hand.

MIKSA

We talk. Now.

EMMA

Miksa! Ow!

She slaps him.

The Producer jumps up, but Emma waves him off.

EMMA

Stop! Stop. It's okay.

Emma scoots out of the booth and follows Miksa outside.

EXT. MAGNOLIA JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Emma and Miksa exit the club. Miksa turns on her.

MIKSA

Who is that man? Who is Chloe?

EMMA

You can't grab me! It's not okay.

Miksa looks at his feet.

MIKSA

I am sorry, Emma. So sorry.

Emma touches Miksa's arm. Miksa stands taller. Tougher.

MIKSA

Who is he?

EMMA

He's from California. You know the moving pictures? He's tha one that makes 'em. He says he's gonna put me in a picture. He says I'm gonna be famous. And, he says Chloe's a better name for a movie star.

MIKSA

He says a lot of things.

EMMA

Emma's okay for vaudeville, but for the picture shows, Chloe's absolutely it. Anyhow, vaudeville's over. D-e-a-d. Good night. I hafta go, Miksa. Hafta.

Miksa stares at her, fighting to hide his pain.

EMMA

(brightly)

We still have two more shows. And, I'll talk to him about your act. I'll explain it to him better this time. You could come with us to California. It's sunny all the time. It's the berries. Really. You'll see.

Miksa turns and walks off down the street.

INT. BIJOUX PALACE THEATER - STAGE - NIGHT

MIKSA'S POV - INSIDE THE HORSE COSTUME

Miksa sweats profusely, hunched over in the costume.

BACK TO SCENE

Emma stands seductively next to the HORSE.

EMMA

You are a very nice horse, but...

The Horse straightens an his tie.

EMMA

A girl's gotta have standards.

The Audience laughs.

MIKSA'S POV - INSIDE THE HORSE COSTUME

Blue looks back at Miksa.

BLUE

Standards, my eye.

MIKSA

Shut up, Blue.

BACK TO SCENE

EMMA

But, I'd be happy to take you for
a ride.

Emma holds for the Audience's continuing laughter.

The rear of the Horse moves oddly about.

MIKSA'S POV - INSIDE THE HORSE COSTUME

Blue turns back, grinning at Miksa.

BLUE

(needling)

She'll ain't exactly a choosy
jockey. First me then you. Now,
the producer. Giddyap.

BACK TO SCENE

Emma looks on as the rear of the Horse whips the front of
the horse about frantically. The audience LAUGHS harder.

Emma tries to play off the commotion.

EMMA

Woah! Easy, boy!

The audience cackles.

The Horse costume rips apart exposing Miksa.

Miksa pounces on the HORSE HEAD. Blue's little legs kick.

The audience laughs to tears.

Blue rips off the Horse head to get his bearings.

MIKSA PUNCHES BLUE OUT.

Leslie and Timmy run on stage to help Blue. Emma gives
Miksa a sad, disappointed look.

MIKSA

(to Leslie)

No more horse's patootie! I go do
my act!

Miksa scrambles to his feet. He looks out at the now
confused audience. Stunned, he stares then runs off.

THE AUDIENCE ERUPTS.

INT. BLUE SKY DINER - DAY

Miksa mops the floor of the "Hopperesque" diner.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

The Producer breezes along the sidewalk talking at his assistant who jots the missives into a note-pad.

PRODUCER

We need to get her screen tested
when we get back. Set it up for...

They continue walking toward the diner.

INT. BLUE SKY DINER

Miksa stares intensely at a mop in his hand. His motion morphs into more of a SWABBING as he imagines the diner to be a GREAT SHIP.

EXT. BLUE SKY DINER

The Producer stops dead in front of the diner. The Assistant crashes into him.

In the window of the diner, Miksa SWABS THE DECK (B & W).

The Producer and Assistant watch Miksa perform. Miksa, involved in his act, doesn't notice them watching.

SOUNDS OF SEABIRDS (O.S.)

Miksa chases the mop bucket that slides around on the listing diner floor. He dances on the rocking deck.

SOUNDS OF WAVES CRASHING (O.S.)

The Producer SEES THE GREAT SHIP Miksa swabs.

The whole diner ROCKS AND SWAYS.

The Producer grabs the Assistant's arm to steady himself.

POV - THROUGH THE WINDOW

Miksa looks up, making eye-contact with the producer.

POOF

The spell breaks and the great ship disappears.

COLOR returns to the diner.

Not missing a beat, the Producer turns to the Assistant.

PRODUCER

Call the studio. The contracts
need to be in place before we
bring her out. See if you can get
a hold of...

They walk off down the street.

In the window of the diner, Miksa mops the floor.

FADE OUT.

THE END