

An excerpt from

TROPICAL HEAT

a steamy comedy by Rich Orloff

Characters

MOXIE HART, a woman of easy virtue

REVEREND JAMES ROBERTSON, a straight-laced missionary

CLIFF KNOATES, a curmudgeonly hotel owner

ERIC VAN CCCHHHHH, an aspiring tormented artist

DOC, a bum

Setting

A rundown hotel on a small South Seas island. Late 1920's.

In this excerpt from the first scene of the play, CLIFF, the hotel owner, has been putting down ERIC, a painter, who complained that the continually tranquil weather on the island prevented him from becoming sufficiently tormented to paint. DOC, a bum, enters, carrying two suitcases for REVEREND JAMES ROBERTSON. A self-righteous missionary, the Reverend has the kind of fervent moral certainty that comes from being completely sexually repressed.

REVEREND

Are you sure this is the
Boingo Loingo Holiday Royale?

DOC

Yep.

Doc drops the suitcases, puts out his hand for a tip, and clears his throat. The Reverend turns to him, takes his hand and shakes it.

REVEREND

I know that inside you beats a Christian
heart, and the knowledge you've helped
your fellow man is sufficient reward.

Doc picks up the suitcases and starts for the door.

REVEREND (cont'd)

Where are you going?

DOC

I'm taking these back to the ship.

The Reverend takes a coin from his change purse.

REVEREND

All right, all right, I'll give you some money.
But only if you promise not to spend it
on liquor or women.

DOC

Okay, I promise not to spend it on women.

Doc takes the coin.

REVEREND

What is your name, boy?

DOC

They call me "Doc".

REVEREND

Is that what you used to do?

DOC

No, that's where I used to work.

REVEREND

Doc, before I leave this island, you
shall walk the path of righteousness.

DOC

Oh, yeah? You'd have to get me
pretty drunk before I'd do that.

REVEREND

You wretched soul. Don't you
realize the Lord loves you?

DOC

The Lord doesn't love me.
I don't even think the Lord likes me.

REVEREND

The Lord loves you, Doc.

DOC

If the Lord loves me, how come he makes
it impossible for me to get whoopee?

REVEREND

Lust is a carnal sin. It bringeth man
down to the level of animals and
keepeth us far from the Lord.

DOC

I'd settle for a little tongue.

REVEREND

The Lord offers something better than tongue. The Lord offers *salvation*.

DOC

You're a virgin, aren't you?

REVEREND

None of your beeswax.

CLIFF

Can I help you, Reverend?

REVEREND

Do you rent rooms by the month?

ERIC

Why would anybody want to stay here for a month?

REVEREND

And who are *you*, sir?

ERIC

My name's Eric Van Ccchhhh.

REVEREND

Of the Philadelphia Van Ccchhhh's?

ERIC

No. The Pittsburgh Van Ccchhhh's.

REVEREND

Any relation to the Poughkeepsie Van Ccchhhh's?

ERIC

Definitely, and we're proud of them. Those are the Van Ccchhhh's who invented gargling.

REVEREND

Well, Mr. Van Ccchhhh, to answer your question, my ministry has sent me here to spread the Good News to this island.

DOC

They got rid of Prohibition?

REVEREND

No, the good news about Jesus.

DOC

He got rid of Prohibition?

REVEREND

No! The good news is that the Lord will forgive these pagans for their sins.

CLIFF

None of them feel the need for forgiveness.

REVEREND

Well, we'll change that. My superiors have given me one month to convert every man, woman and child on this island to God's way.

ERIC

You might find these people awfully hard to convert, Pops. They're simple people, completely content with what they've got.

REVEREND

Those are the hardest people to convert. But I've done it before. So far, I've converted the natives on 23 Pacific islands.

DOC

Did that come with a prize?

REVEREND

I don't need a prize, you heathen. I get enough reward knowing I'm doing the Lord's work, and that when I get to Heaven, He'll owe me one.

(to Cliff:)

Now if you please, I'd like a room.

CLIFF

Sign here.

Cliff shows him the registration book. The Reverend signs.

CLIFF (cont'd)

I think I'll give you the bridal suite.

REVEREND

Why the bridal suite?

CLIFF

Because you'll bridle when you see it.

REVEREND

Do you serve food at this establishment?

DOC

Wow. He called this place an "establishment".

CLIFF

We have a limited menu featuring the native cuisine.

REVEREND

And what do the natives eat?

CLIFF

Fish. They eat fish for breakfast. They eat fish for lunch. They eat fish for dinner.

REVEREND

What do they eat when they get tired of fish?

CLIFF

More fish.

REVEREND

Are there any other items on your menu?

CLIFF

There's the blue plate special.

REVEREND

What's that?

CLIFF

A piece of fish on a blue plate.

ERIC

It's considered a delicacy.

REVEREND

Why?

CLIFF

You get to keep the plate.

DOC

I dream one day of having enough money to order the blue plate special.

REVEREND

Is that what you're saving your money for?

DOC

Oh, no. I'm saving it for the best reason in the world.

REVEREND

Security in your old age?

DOC

(a put down, not a question:)

Have you ever even *kissed* a girl?
No, *my* best reason is an hour of whoopee with Moxie Hart.

REVEREND

I assume this is a woman.

ERIC

You assume correct.

REVEREND

(to Doc:)

Is she your girlfriend?

Doc starts to hyperventilate.

ERIC

Calm down, Doc. Calm down.

DOC

It's just such a great concept.

REVEREND

I believe I'm missing something here.

CLIFF

You might say, Rev, that Moxie Hart is *everyone's* girlfriend.

REVEREND

I see. Well, the people on this island will soon learn they have no need of a woman like that.

CLIFF

But –

REVEREND

There's no room for sin on this island!

DOC

(pointing to Moxie's room:)

Yes, there is. It's that room over there.

REVEREND

I'll cast the demons out of that room.

ERIC

You're wasting your time, Pops. You'll never change Moxie. She has the strongest will of any woman I've ever met.

REVEREND

There is no will as strong as the will of the Lord.

CLIFF

You might be surprised.

REVEREND

Are you insulting the Lord Almighty?!
You know, he keeps tracks of these things.

CLIFF

I'm just saying it's no accident that the natives here call her – South Seas Moxie.

REVEREND

And how'd she get a name like that?

CLIFF

Well, you see, the weather here, it's pretty tranquil.

ERIC

It's boring!

CLIFF

It's sunny all day, and every night there's a light shower, with a soothing sound that helps the natives drift off to sleep. But one night about two years ago, there was this awful storm. There was constant lightning and thunder, and the rain came down in a torrential, life-threatening deluge.

ERIC

Boy, I wish I had been here.

CLIFF

Now the governor, he keeps his own private herd of Holsteins on his land. During the storm, lightning hit a tree, the cattle went berserk, and they broke through the fence and began to stampede into town. Nobody knew how to stop them.

REVEREND

Did anyone consider prayer?

CLIFF

It must've slipped everyone's mind in the general panic. Anyway, Moxie had arrived on the island that very same day. And as the cattle rushed into town, and everyone else hid in mortal fear, she walked into the middle of the street, put one hand out in front of her, and suddenly, as if in a trance, the lead Holstein slowed down and stopped.

REVEREND

So she got her name because she stopped *one* cow?

MOXIE HART opens her door and enters.

MOXIE

It took more than one cow to earn me the name South Seas Moxie. Hya, Cliff. Hya, Eric.

She playfully blows Eric a kiss, the force of which pushes him out the front door.

DOC

Oh, Moxie, Moxie, I ache for you in every part of my body.

MOXIE

That's nice, Doc.

DOC

Oh, Moxie, you know I love you.

MOXIE

Don't use that word, Doc. You know it gives me the heebie jeebies.

DOC

I'll give you my heart, Moxie.

MOXIE

I don't want it.

DOC

I'll give you my soul.

MOXIE

Sorry.

DOC

I'll give you my teeth.

MOXIE

Nope.

DOC

They're from Sears; they're still on warranty.

MOXIE

I'm afraid not, Doc.

DOC

You're a hard woman, Moxie Hart.

MOXIE

And if you were a hard man,
I might give you a discount.

REVEREND

(to Cliff:)

You let this brazen trollop reside
in your establishment?

CLIFF

I figure, judge not lest you be judged.

REVEREND

So you know your Bible.

CLIFF

I'm just your average religious guy.

REVEREND

Really?

CLIFF

Yeah. I've read every part of the Bible
that justifies that which I already do.

REVEREND

That's not what I con—

MOXIE

So who's the stuffed shirt with the stiff collar?

REVEREND

Mark my words, Moxie Hart. Before I leave this island in a month, I shall not only convert all of the natives, but I swear, I shall place the fear of God in you, too.

MOXIE

Oh, yeah? You and what Salvation Army?

REVEREND

You think I can't do it, but I can, and I will! Doc, take my bags to my room.

DOC

Will I get a tip?

REVEREND

Yes, yes.

DOC

A big tip?

REVEREND

Yes, a big tip.

DOC

How big a tip?

REVEREND

A very big tip.

DOC

Big by your standards or my standards?

REVEREND

Big by anyone's standards!

DOC

Big is a relative term.

MOXIE

Especially when it comes to tips.

REVEREND

Big by your standards; just do it!

(to Moxie:)

As God is my witness, Moxie Hart, one month from now, your soul will belong to the Lord!

Doc and the Reverend exit. Moxie calls after him.

MOXIE

I hear your mother deflowered Coolidge!

The Reverend returns, so furious he can barely speak.

REVEREND

She did not!

The Reverend exits again. Cliff pours Moxie a drink.

CLIFF

I think you better lie low for awhile,
Moxie. A man like him probably
has friends in high places.

MOXIE

I don't care. No man scares me.

CLIFF

Not even men of the cloth?

MOXIE

Not even men of leather.

CLIFF

Listen to me, Moxie. A zestful zealot
like him can be dangerous. So be careful.

MOXIE

That's not my style.

CLIFF

I'm only trying to look out for you.

MOXIE

I appreciate your paternal concern,
Cliff, but the way I see it, that
pompous pilgrim is begging for trouble.
And I love it when a man begs.

Moxie downs the drink and smiles confidently.

The lights fade.