

SFX: We come in on Joy up in the International Space Station, doing space things along with all the prerequisite beeps and boops.

JOY: [hums 'Auld Lang Syne' as they work]

SFX: Joy's radio crackles to life beside them, and through it, we hear the sounds of drink glasses and bottles clinking together and liquids being poured from one vessel to another as Dorothy attempts to mix some drinks.

DOROTHY: [muttering to himself] Okay, so that's the rum in there, that's the sparkling fruity whatchamacallit, so next, I need some...what?

JOY: Oh! Ahoy! Is someone there?

DOROTHY: [unbothered by the random call-in] Ahoy, ahoy there, stranger. Hey - riddle me this. Do you know what an aril is?

JOY: A what? An arrow?

DOROTHY: Aril. Air-ill. A-r-i-l. As in, 'one ounce of rum, four ounces of fizzy drink, and a tablespoon of pomegranate arils' to make this drink.

JOY: Hmmm...yeah, I don't think I've ever heard of arils before, but in that context, I would think it means the pomegranate seeds?

DOROTHY: Right, I was thinking that too. But if they meant seeds, why wouldn't they just say seeds?

JOY: Maybe because they wanted to make sure you used the fruit part and not just the seed bit? Do you want me to look that up for you to make sure? I'm afraid my internet isn't the fastest up here, but -

DOROTHY: Nah, nah, nah, don't worry yourself. I just realized the recipe calls for coconut milk too. Dang Pinteresque recipe looked so pretty, but do they really expect me to have *coconut milk* out on the high seas? Oh well - suppose we'll have to survive on sparkling rum and arils alone!

SFX: Dorothy begins to collect all the glasses and bottles up onto a drink cart.

JOY: Wait, are you on a ship right now?

DOROTHY: Sure am - our faithful vessel, the Gay Old Time, somewhere off the coast of Florida. At least, I hope it's still Florida. I

never claimed to be any better a navigator than a bartender. And whereabouts are you, my dear?

JOY: I'm actually in space right now!

DOROTHY: Space, huh? Wow. I've gotten a few random calls on the ship's radio over the years, but that's a new one, even for me. Tell me, how'd you find yourself so far above our chimney tops? Follow that yellow brick road a little too far, did you?

JOY: I'm on the International Space Station right now. My coms have been picking up some random stations lately too. Oh, and I'm Joy, by the way.

DOROTHY: That's real interesting, to be sure. Joy, you can just call me Dorothy, and once I finish loading up this radio onto my drink cart, I can be your guide into our own little Wonderland out here.

JOY: [playfully] Wasn't it *Alice* who went to Wonderland?

DOROTHY: Are you, an astronaut, really going to question Dorothy Gayle herself on where she's taking you?

JOY: [laughing] I guess not! Lead the way, Dorothy!

SFX: The drink cart begins to rattle as Dorothy pushes it through the ship cabin and towards the door leading to the deck.

JOY: So, can I ask what you're doing on a boat mixing drinks - especially at this time of year? Are you working with a cruise company, or doing a trip with family or something?

DOROTHY: Oh, little of Column A, little of Column B. It's the tradition of my chosen family, you see, just a bunch of old gays coming out for this Gay Old Time. We've all been through the ringer in life, one way or another, but managed to come out on the other side still smiling - and with enough cash in our pockets to afford a little fun. So, once a year, we all get together, charter a big ol' boat, and spend the longest, darkest nights of the year sailing through the wild blue yonder and bringing back some light to the world with friends, music, food -

JOY: And drinks?

DOROTHY: Well, naturally. You can't be a proper pirate without some good rum. And, y'know, it really did start with a much tighter circle of friends and on a much smaller boat. But over the years, friends want to start bringing other friends, and then friends of

friends, then the significant others du jour, and then whichever pitiable young folks we feel the need to elbow into having a little fun.

JOY: So, how big is your little boat party nowadays?

DOROTHY: Well, uh...let me give you some idea.

SFX: Dorothy pushes the door to the deck open - and outside, we hear bumping, electronic music, a crowd of dozens partying, and more distantly, the sounds of the ocean lapping at the hull of the boat.

DOROTHY: [calling out an announcement] Hey everyone, say hi to my new friend Joy! They're calling in from SPACE!

SFX: A cheer rises up from the crowd.

DOROTHY: Yeah, and they sent you these drinks all the way from the stars, so you better not complain about them!

SFX: Laughter and more cheers rise up from the crowd and Dorothy begins wheeling his cart out.

JOY: Wow, that sounds like a lot of people. Do all these people come out for this every year?

DOROTHY: Mmmm, more or less. Me and the other founding members are here every year, and there's a solid group that do the same, and then there's a fair few more that flit in and out depending on the year, or who try it and decide it's not for them. And if that's a not a half-decent metaphor for the whole queer experience, I don't know what is.

SFX: Dorothy stops his cart to hand out a drink.

DOROTHY: Here, Leo, drink this down, it's good for you.

LEO: Are you sure, Dorothy? I'm feeling a little queasy right now.

DOROTHY: You've been coming on these cruises for 15 years already despite being chronically seasick - one little drink won't hurt.

LEO: Alright, if you say so...

SFX: Dorothy starts wheeling the cart again.

JOY: So, it's specifically a queer cruise?

DOROTHY: It generally shakes out that way, yes. Obviously, we're not screening people at the dock to show us their gay card before we

disembark, but that is kinda how we started out, and how our reputation spread out among queer circles. See, a lot of the people who come on this cruise, they do it because the families they were born with don't want them around at this time of year, or try to make it miserable for them, and they come here to get away from that. So, rather than a home away from home, think of this as a little...holiday away from the holidays!

SFX: Dorothy stops his cart to hand out a drink.

DOROTHY: That one's for you, Tinsley.

TINSLEY: Y'know, this doesn't exactly look like it did in that recipe card.

DOROTHY: Yes, I *had* noticed actually, but it turns out Pinteresque recipes don't always give you the most honest picture, mmkay?

TINSLEY: People just *lie* about this stuff?

DOROTHY: I know, abhorrent, isn't it?

SFX: Dorothy starts wheeling the cart again.

JOY: That sounds amazing, to be honest. So, what do you do on the cruise? Do you still try to make it kind of holiday-y?

DOROTHY: There's some token efforts here and there. Some people really do miss that at-home holiday charm, even if they don't miss the people they associate it with. So, we got carols sometimes, we got a gift exchange for those who want to participate, we got me trying to make some picture-perfect Pinteresque drinks and decorations and such.

SFX: Dorothy stops his cart to hand out a drink.

DOROTHY: Crow, this one's for you.

CROW: Thank you kindly, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: Of course, dear. Say, you wouldn't happen to know what an aril is, would you?

CROW: An arrow? Think I've heard of those once or twice before.

DOROTHY: No, not an *arrow*, an *aril*, like - y'know what, nevermind. Merry Christmas, dear!

SFX: Dorothy starts wheeling the cart again.

DOROTHY: But, y'know, there's also people who come here because they want to get away from the holiday trappings, so there's also plenty of secular boozing, schmoozing, and cruising to these tunes-ins.

JOY: How about you then? What do you like about the cruise?

DOROTHY: Me? Well, I know this is probably the most basic, people-pleaser personality type answer, but I just like making other people smile. After my own parents decided they didn't want me at their holiday party anymore, I figured the best revenge I could have was throwing my own party where everyone sings and dances and drinks and eats their fill, and no one has to feel bad about who they are! I mean, that and spoiling my nieces rotten when I get back to the mainland for Second-Christmas at my brother's place.

JOY: I can't imagine a better way to do it. I love that you found a way to make the holidays work for you, and a lot of others too, it sounds like.

DOROTHY: What can I say? I'm just happy to make others happy. Although, right now, I think I'd be happy for others to come and get their own dang drinks.

SFX: The drink cart comes to a stop and Dorothy take a seat against the railing, now closer to the ocean than to the stereos.

DOROTHY: So, what about you, my space-bound friend? How do you usually make the holidays work for you?

JOY: Well, there hasn't been too much to do for this year, what with being in space and all, but in past years, I usually had a quiet morning in, exchanging gifts with friends or with family if I could make it home, and then cook a big dinner with everyone for the evening.

DOROTHY: And that worked for you?

JOY: Sorry?

DOROTHY: I mean, is that the way you wanted to spend the holidays, or was it just what you did because you were used to doing it?

JOY: I...I'm not sure. I guess it's a lot like what I used to do as a kid, and I haven't had a lot of room for anything else in recent years. Your cruise does sound fun and all, but the path to the International Space Station isn't paved with a lot of boat parties, from what I've seen.

DOROTHY: Nah, nah, nah, I'm not saying you need to choose a big party over a morning in as some sort of weird dichotomy. I'm just saying, so many people - fully autonomous adult people - get caught in these routines of, "Well, this is how I celebrated in the past, so it's just what I'll do forever," and they do it without interrogating their actions or asking if it actually makes them happy! So, if a quiet morning exchanging presents by a tree with all the trimmings while a ham cooks in the oven feels good, then more power to you! Keep it up! But if it's just what you're doing out of habit, then you can make some choices that'll make it a meaningful again. Make yourself a cocktail at 9 a.m. Drive three states away and wake up on Christmas morning somewhere new. Instead of decorating a tree, get a cardboard cut-out of your favorite weird actor and decorate that instead. Just - just don't forget that you can decide what makes the holidays happy for you.

SFX: There's a moment of silence as Joy contemplates his words.

DOROTHY: Ahoy? You still with me, Joy?

JOY: Yeah, I'm just...thinking. And I think that when I do get back home, I am going to want a big Christmas with all the friends and family and trimmings and hams I can get my hands on, because honestly, that's something I'm missing most up here right now. Just...familiarity. Just whatever home used to feel like. But the year after that...who knows? Maybe I will try something new!

DOROTHY: Yeeeeees.

JOY: Maybe I'll turn my Christmas into the dinosaur-themed party I always wanted to have as a kid! Just fill my apartment with dollar store dinosaur party favors and invite my friends over for some prehistoric nature documentaries!

DOROTHY: Yes, go for it! You find who and what makes you happy! And hey, the year after that, if you're feeling up to it, you've got an open invite to the Gay Old Time.

JOY: Aww, thank you! Should I be able to find you if I try to look up your boat's name?

DOROTHY: Sorry, what? You're cutting out, hon.

JOY: Oh, I think I'm going out of range! But it was nice meeting you! Hope the rest of your cruise is a blast!

DOROTHY: Sounds like someone's clicking their ruby slippers up there. Hey everyone, say good-bye to Joy!

SFX: A final cheer rises up from the crowd before the transmission cuts out, leaving Joy alone again in the stillness and relative quiet of their station.

JOY: [thoughtfully, to themselves] Find my own happiness, huh...?

This episode was written by Claudia Elvidge with dialogue editing by Nathan Comstock and sound design by Claudia Elvidge. Dorothy was played by Caroline Mincks. Leo was played by C. S. V. Tinsley was played by Mason Amadeus. Crow was played by Nathan Comstock. Joy was played by Tal Minear.