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# Calamity Juice

## CARLOS HERNANDEZ



YOU KNOW HOW IT'S impossible to walk up to a rainbow? Like, you keep going toward it, and it keeps moving away from you?

Well, friends, I have been inside a rainbow. And I can tell you from experience that they smell like horse barf.

Gabi and I noticed it the second we started climbing the stairs to hallway 3C in Culeco Academy. "Why does it smell like horse hork?" I asked her.

"It just smells like hork to me," Gabi answered. "I haven't smelled enough hork in my life to be able to identify the species by aroma. Ugh!"

It was getting stronger the closer we got to hallway 3C. We both hid our noses in our trench coats.

Yes, trench coats. Also, hats. Gabi wore a fedora bigger than a flying saucer, and I had on this big-brimmed Italian number that I'd only ever seen on rumpled detectives from black-and-white movies. Oh, and on Papi, because there is a brand of Cuban dude who loves a fancy hat, and he's one of

them. I'd borrowed it and American Stepmom's trench coat and Humphrey Bogart's speech patterns for the skit Gabi and I had just been performing in Mrs. Waked's Intermediate Theater Workshop. The sketch was called *The Malta Falcon*. I was playing gumshoe Dón Silva (which uses all the letters in *Sal Vidón*, even the accent!) tracking down notorious thief Ria Bágel (which uses all the letters in *Gabi Real*), who had stolen the most valuable object in the whole world: the Maltese Malta Falcon.

The object was an empty bottle of malta—that sweet, thick malt beverage that so many Cubans love and I never drink, because it would mess up my blood-sugar levels faster than you can say *hyperglycemia*—with a brass falcon wine-stopper jammed into the top. It was going to be the cheese-a-rific visual-pun climax of our skit. Dón Silva was just about to crack the case wide open and catch the lousy crook when Principal Torres's voice came over the intercom and asked to see Gabi and me right away, in hallway 3C. Something in her voice told us to hurry. We left so fast, we didn't even change out of our costumes.

By the time we got to the top of the stairs and stood in front of the double doors leading to 3C, we could barely breathe. "Holy heaving pony puke," said Gabi.

"It stinks like halitosis pudding up here," I replied. From my trench coat I pulled out two N95 masks and handed one to Gabi. And then, Humphrey-Bogart-ishly, I added, "Here, dame, cover your mug with this before you take a big sleep."

"Thank you," Gabi said, as she took off her fedora—*boom* went her hairball!—and slipped her mask on over her head.

“Remind me never again to make fun of all the cacaseca you tuck into your drawers every morning.” She put one hand on each of the swinging double doors, then looked back at me. “Ready?”

I poked the brim of my hat with my index finger. “Let ’er rip, doll-face.”

In response, I got a look that said *I’m going to feminist you into next week for that comment*. But for now she ignored it and opened both doors with a mighty push. “Okay, let’s see what the fuss is all about.”

“What the fuss!” I exclaimed.

I was pretty proud of myself. See, when you find yourself staring down a hallway that looks like the inside of a rainbow and smells like the inside of a horse’s large intestine, limiting your vulgarity to *What the fuss!* is a pretty major accomplishment. Hallway 3C now looked like someone had set off a tie-dyed bomb. The walls, floor, ceiling, light fixtures, lockers, and everything else were covered—I mean *piled*—with what looked like goopy, glittery rainbow paint.

“Still wet,” I told Gabi, running my finger along the wall. The glitter goop felt thicker than the purple oatmeal Principal Torres had for lunch every day. It was heaped onto the wall like someone had machine-gunned the hallway with 50,000 paintball rounds.

“Eww-ww-ww-ww-ww!” said Gabi, smacking down my hand. “Don’t touch that stuff, Sal! You have no idea what it is!”

“Unfortunately, I do,” I said, sniffing the chromatic cud on my fingertip. Yep, still smelled terrible.