

# A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE COLOSSEUM

*by Craig Sodaro*

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Simplcuss, a naive farmer from Gallia Alpina, heads to Rome to follow his dream. Does he dream of fighting in the colosseum and dying for the emperor? No way! He dreams of being the first stand-up comedian. Unfortunately, when he stumbles into General Spurius Sillius's house in search of food and water, the General and his wife Drusilla assume Simplcuss is the dreaded Terribulus, a gladiator Sillius has bought to fight in the colosseum the following day. Simplcuss thinks all the attention he garners merely means Rome is a very friendly place. But when Simplcuss's three sisters arrive to watch over their brother, they clue him in.

Not only does Simplcuss now have to figure out a way to save himself, but he's overheard Drusilla and Senator Publicus Piscius plotting to kill the emperor's daughter and the emperor himself! Matters worsen when the real Terribulus arrives, but the quick-thinking sisters slip him a Micky Finn and he ends up thinking he's the gardener.

All escape routes blocked, Simplcuss must finally enter the arena to battle the fierce female gladiator, Dominatia Violencia. But the fans have a treat in store for them. They don't know Dominatia has fallen for the gardener, Terribulus, and that she doesn't want to fight any more. So she and Simplcuss set a hysterical new standard for comic combat in the colosseum. And they end up saving the emperor's life to boot!

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(9 m, 16 w, 2 flexible, doubling possible)*

**SIMPLCUSS:** A farmer.

**JULIA:** A neighbor.

**BUBO:** Trumpeter for Divinia. (Can double as Gladiator One.)

**DIVINIA:** Daughter of the emperor.

**TULLIA:** Her servant.

**MUMMIA:** Another servant.

**AGRIPPINA:** Simplecuss's oldest sister.

**EUPHEMIA:** Another sister.

**POMPEIA:** A third sister.

**WOMAN ONE**

**WOMAN TWO**

**GENERAL SPURIUS SILLIUS**

**DRUSILLA:** His wife.

**VISTILLIA:** Their servant.

**TADIUS:** A male servant. (Can double as Gladiator Two.)

**PUBLICUS PISCIUS:** A senator.

**TERRIBULUS:** A famed gladiator.

**SUPLICA:** A female assassin.

**EMPEROR CAESAR BUSHIUS**

**DOMINATIA VIOLENCIA:** A female gladiator.

**VENDOR**

**ANNOUNCER**

**GLADIATOR ONE**

**GLADIATOR TWO**

**MITZI:** A Gladiator Girl.

**BLITZI:** Another.

**GLITZI:** A third.

## SETTING

**Act I, Scene 1:** A meadow in Gallia Alpina, what is now Switzerland. A pine tree here or there. A beautiful morning in the spring of 30 B.C.

**Act I, Scene 2:** The house of General Spurius Sillius just outside Rome. Two pillars upstage flank a mosaic. Benches and perhaps a chair here and there. Table left.

**Act II, Scene 3:** The colosseum with the emperor's box up center on platform above stage. Benches right and left for other spectators. Pillars upstage, and perhaps arches, to give the feel of old Rome. Hanging between pillars can be advertising signs for products mentioned in script.

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

### ACT I

**Scene 1:** A meadow in Gallia Alpina, one summer afternoon.

**Scene 2:** A Roman street, days later, then the interior of Sillius's house a few minutes later.

**Scene 3:** Sillius's house, that evening.

**Scene 4:** Sillius's house, the following morning.

### ACT II

**Scene 1:** Sillius's house, evening.

**Scene 2:** A Roman street, the following afternoon.

**Scene 3:** The colosseum, two hours later.

**ACT I**  
**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: A woods in Gallia Alpina. We hear the SOUND of mooing and cowbells. SIMPLCUSS enters left, watching his imaginary herd moving.)*

SIMPLCUSS: Go on, Bessilius ... keep the herd moving. The greenest grass is just on the other side of the ... no, Bessilius! Don't stop now! That's the poorest grass in all Gallia Alpina! Stupid cow! There's no talking to you!

*(JULIA enters left carrying a small basket.)*

JULIA: And there's no talking to you, Simplcuss!

SIMPLCUSS: Julia! What brings you up to this mountainside?

JULIA: I told you I'd bring you lunch.

SIMPLCUSS: Lunch? You Romans have such funny words.

JULIA: I don't consider myself a Roman any longer, Simplcuss. You know that.

SIMPLCUSS: Just because your father was thrown in prison as a traitor.

JULIA: He's not a traitor!

SIMPLCUSS: *(Sarcastically.)* No, he just poisoned the emperor, that's all!

JULIA: Not on purpose!

SIMPLCUSS: Oh, sure.

JULIA: Our cook didn't know the hummingbird tongues had gone bad. He was told they were fresh that morning!

SIMPLCUSS: Hummingbird tongues! Ha! You're humming a different menu now!

JULIA: Bread and cheese. The staffs of life, and if you want some, it's here.

SIMPLCUSS: Maybe later. I just had eggs this morning.

JULIA: Your hen must be laying again?

SIMPLCUSS: She got over whatever made her cross. Just like a woman.

JULIA: And what's that supposed to mean?  
SIMPLCUSS: There's no telling what makes them cross, but it ends just as strangely as it comes on.  
JULIA: So you're an expert on women?  
SIMPLCUSS: I haven't lived with my mother and three sisters for nothing. I know what women want.  
JULIA: What do they want?  
SIMPLCUSS: Three things. First, to be beautiful. Second, to be admired. And third, someone to blame.  
JULIA: What?! To blame for WHAT?  
SIMPLCUSS: It doesn't matter. If the cows get away, they blame me. It's my fault because I wasn't watching them closely enough. If the milk is sour, it's my fault because I didn't lead them to the sweetest grass. If it rains, it's my fault because I didn't send the clouds away!  
JULIA: Maybe you've just been around your mother and three sisters for too long. Maybe you ought to strike out on your own.  
SIMPLCUSS: *(Sighing.)* On my own! I dream about that!  
JULIA: Do you?  
SIMPLCUSS: Every day when I come up here.  
JULIA: Where do you go in your dreams?  
SIMPLCUSS: Rome, of course.  
JULIA: Why there?  
SIMPLCUSS: Because there I can do what I've always wanted to do.  
JULIA: Buy a business? Marry? Settle down and have a family?  
SIMPLCUSS: Tell jokes.  
JULIA: Tell what?  
SIMPLCUSS: Julia, more than anything else in the world, I want to make people laugh.  
JULIA: *(Laughing.)* You're kidding, Simplcuss! You want to make people laugh?!  
SIMPLCUSS: See how good I am at it?!  
JULIA: *(Angrily.)* Don't make me laugh!  
SIMPLCUSS: Why not? Don't you feel better when you're laughing?  
JULIA: No!

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