

# DOROTHY

## THE CASE OF THE CRUSHED PETUNIAS <sup>1</sup>

### A LYRICAL FANTASY

This play is respectfully dedicated to the talent and charm of  
Miss Helen Hayes—Key West, February, 1941

#### CHARACTERS

DOROTHY SIMPLE

POLICE OFFICER

YOUNG MAN

MRS. DULL

*SCENE: The action of the play takes place in the Simple Notion Shop, owned and operated by MISS DOROTHY SIMPLE, a New England maiden of twenty-six, who is physically very attractive but has barricaded her house and her heart behind a double row of petunias.*

*The town is Primanproper, Massachusetts, which lies within the cultural orbit of Boston.*

*The play starts in the early morning. MISS SIMPLE, very agitated for some reason, has just opened her little shop. She stands in the open door in a flood of spring sunlight, but her face expresses grief and indignation. She is calling to a POLICE OFFICER on the corner.*

DOROTHY. Officer?—Officer!

OFFICER. (Strolling up to her.) Yes, Miss Simple?

DOROTHY. I wish to report a case of deliberate and malicious sabotage!

OFFICER. Sabotage of what, Miss Simple?

DOROTHY. Of my petunias!

<sup>1</sup> Copyright, 1948, by Tennessee Williams.

OFFICER. Well, well, well. Now what do you mean by that?

DOROTHY. Exactly what I said. You can see for yourself. Last night this house was surrounded by a beautiful double row of pink and lavender petunias. Look at them now! When I got up this morning I discovered them in this condition. Every single little petunia deliberately and maliciously crushed under foot!

OFFICER. My goodness! Well, well, well!

DOROTHY. "Well, well, well" is not going to catch the culprit!

OFFICER. What do you want me to do, Miss Simple?

DOROTHY. I want you to apprehend a petuniacidal maniac with a size eleven D foot.

OFFICER. Eleven D?

DOROTHY. Yes. That is the size of the footprints that crushed my petunias. I just now had them measured by a shoe clerk.

OFFICER. That's a pretty large foot, Miss Simple, but lots of men have got large feet.

DOROTHY. Not in Primanproper, Massachusetts. Mr. Knowzit, the shoe clerk assured me that there isn't a man in town who wears a

shoe that size. Of course you realize the danger of allowing this maniac to remain at large. Any man who would crush a sweet petunia is equally capable in my opinion of striking a helpless woman or kicking an innocent child!

OFFICER. I'll do my best, Miss Simple. See yuh later.

DOROTHY. (Curtly.) Yes. Good-bye.

# DOROTHY & YOUNG MAN

DOROTHY. Gracious, please be careful. You're bumping your head against my chandelier.

YOUNG MAN. (good-bumoredly.) Sorry, Miss Simple. I guess I'd better sit down. (the delicate little chair collapses beneath him.)

DOROTHY. Heaven have mercy upon us! You seem to have a genius for destruction! You've broken that little antique chair to smithereens!

YOUNG MAN. Sorry, Miss Simple.

DOROTHY. I appreciate your sorrow, but that won't mend my chair. -Is there anything I can show you in the way of notions?

YOUNG MAN. I'd like to see that pair of wine-colored socks you have in the window.

DOROTHY. What size socks do you wear?

YOUNG MAN. I keep forgetting. But my shoes are eleven D.

DOROTHY. (Sharply.) What size did you say? Eleven? Eleven D?

YOUNG MAN. That's right, Miss Simple. Eleven D.

DOROTHY. Oh. Your shoes are rather muddy, aren't they?

YOUNG MAN. That's right, Miss Simple, I believe they are.

DOROTHY. Quite muddy. It looks like you might have stepped in a freshly watered flower-bed last night.

YOUNG MAN. Come to think of it, that's what I did.

DOROTHY. I don't suppose you've heard about that horrible case of petunia crushing which occurred last night?

YOUNG MAN. As a matter of fact, I have heard something about it.

DOROTHY. From the policeman on the corner?

YOUNG MAN. No, ma'am. Not from him.

DOROTHY. Who from, then? He's the only man who knows about it except—except—except—the man who *did* it! (Pause. The canary cheeps inquiringly.) You—you—you—are the man who *did* it!

YOUNG MAN. Yes, Miss Simple. I am the man who did it.

DOROTHY. Don't try to get away!

YOUNG MAN. I won't, Miss Simple.

DOROTHY. Stand right where you are till the officer comes!

YOUNG MAN. You're going to call the officer?

DOROTHY. Yes, I am, I certainly am.—In a minute. First I'd like to ask you why you did it? Why did you crush my petunias?

YOUNG MAN. Okay. I'll tell you why. First, because you'd barricaded your house—and also your heart—behind that silly little double row of petunias!

DOROTHY. Barricaded? My house—my heart—behind them? That's absurd. I don't know what you mean.

YOUNG MAN. I know. They're apparently such delicate, fragile creatures, these petunias, but they have a terrible resistance.

DOROTHY. Resistance to what, may I ask?

YOUNG MAN. Anything big or important that happens to come by your house. Nothing big or important can ever get by a double row of petunias! That is the reason why you are living alone with your canary and beginning to dislike it.

DOROTHY. Dislike my canary? I love it!

YOUNG MAN. Secretly, Miss Simple, you wish the bird-seed would choke it! You dislike it nearly as much as you secretly disliked your petunias.

DOROTHY. Why should I, why should you, why should anybody dislike petunias!