

SEVEN WOMEN

J. M. Barrie

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Seven Women

Date of first publication: 1928

Author: J. M. Barrie (1860-1937)

Date first posted: July 17, 2018

Date last updated: July 17, 2018

Faded Page eBook #20180785

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

SEVEN WOMEN

J. M. Barrie



SEVEN WOMEN

J. M. Barrie

CHARACTERS

Mr. Tovey
Mrs. Tovey
Captain Rattray
Leonora

SEVEN WOMEN

Mr. and Mrs. Tovey, a pleasant couple of the agreeable age, are in their Chelsea drawing-room, the envied bit of which is the long low twisted window at the back overlooking the river. They never draw the curtains on this view when (as to-night) visitors are expected, for it is one of the fairest in London,

especially by night; but they often ask you to step on to the leads, from which every moving coal-barge with a light on it is floating magic. The Toveys, knowing themselves to be alone, are discussing to-night's dinner at their ease, when up steals the rogue of a curtain. "The audience, madam," we say, and go, as primly as if we were the parlour-maid. Perhaps they have not heard us, for the talk continues as if they were still unobserved.

TOVEY (*approvingly*). A capital little menu.

MRS. TOVEY (*though she thinks so herself*). Of course it is a short dinner, Jack, to offer to such a celebrity. (*With a sigh*) I must say it would have been rather nice of you if you could have remembered whether when Captain Rattray was a boy he liked lamb.

TOVEY. My dear, just because Rattray has had this little flutter in China waters I, who haven't seen him for twenty years, am expected to remember whether when we were inky beasts at school he liked lamb. All I do remember is that he was timid and that I punched the heads of the boys who bullied him.

MRS. TOVEY. Yes, I have noticed that is the one thing all men remember about a school friend.

TOVEY. Any further orders, madam?

MRS. TOVEY (*with gentle resignation*). Well, it would be rather sweet of you if you didn't try to be funny to-night. I am

so anxious to make this dinner a success.

TOVEY (*ever explanatory on this subject*). My own, I don't try to be funny; I am funny.

MRS. TOVEY. Yes, I know you can't help it, and I don't mind when we are alone. But in company some of your jokes—that one about the murderess, for instance——

TOVEY. Best of women; but even though you are that, do endeavour to be fair. She was amused by it herself.

MRS. TOVEY. Ah, but suppose some one present had believed it!

TOVEY (*nobly*). Very well. I'll try to be dull, dear. (*She has risen quickly.*) Whither away?

MRS. TOVEY. I thought I heard the bell.

TOVEY. Can't be anybody yet; there's half an hour to dinner time.

MRS. TOVEY. It is some one. And neither of us dressed!

(She rushes off.

The maid ushers in CAPTAIN RATTRAY, a naval officer, in levee dress.)

TOVEY. How are you, Rattray?

CAPTAIN R. How do you do, Tovey?

(For a moment only are they stiff and self-conscious.)

TOVEY. Bobbin, that was!

CAPTAIN R. Inky Paws, that used to be!

(They take candid stock of each other.)

TOVEY. A little grey at the roots.

CAPTAIN R. Chest slipped down a bit.

TOVEY. To think of old Bobbin blossoming into a nut!

CAPTAIN R. I warned you I was going on to a levee and would have to come in these.

TOVEY. We wanted you in these; in fact it was these we wanted even more than you. Remember the pillow fights, Bobbin?

CAPTAIN R. *(warmly)*. Rather! Do you remember you were a bit puny and how I used to fight the brutes who ill-used you?

TOVEY *(coldly)*. I don't remember that.

CAPTAIN R. And now I hear little Inky Paws has had the pluck to take unto him a squaw.

TOVEY. More than you have had.

CAPTAIN R. (*reproducing the face with which he went to his first dance*). They scare me as much as ever, Jack.

TOVEY. That reminds me: do you like lamb?

CAPTAIN R. I could eat lamb by the solid hour.

TOVEY. Then you'll like my wife. By the way, that explains why you come to a dinner-party half an hour before the time.

CAPTAIN R. (*giving himself up for lost*). I was asked for eight.

TOVEY. Sure?

CAPTAIN R. (*on oath*). I have your wife's letter with me.

TOVEY. Then you are forgiven. Her mistake. She is dressing wildly now, and if you will excuse me——

CAPTAIN R. Don't mind me.

(TOVEY *is going*.)

Stop, Jack. Who are the other guests?

TOVEY (*pondering*). Let me see.

CAPTAIN R. (*shaking him*). Never mind the men, tell me about the women; they are the fearsome ones.

TOVEY. Well, we have all kinds for you, not knowing your taste. For instance, there is one dear lady who has no sense of

humour.

CAPTAIN R. (*with certain memories*). I am sure there is.

TOVEY. If you want to know which one she is, try them with a funny story. Then there is one who has almost too much sense of humour. If there is anything ridiculous about you, Bobbin, as I dare say there is, she will spot it at once.

CAPTAIN R. Oh, help; don't put me beside that one.

TOVEY. You would prefer the politician?

CAPTAIN R. The what?

TOVEY. No platform is complete without them nowadays. If she drops her handkerchief and you pick it up for her there will be a riot. By the way, she drops her things all over the place. You will know her by that.

CAPTAIN R. Ancient friend, do dress quickly.

TOVEY. You will be all right. Stick to the Very woman. She is one of the good old-fashioned, obedient clinging kind that our fathers knew.

CAPTAIN R. (*disbelieving*). Did you say obedient, Jack?

TOVEY. Sounds like a dream, doesn't it? Speaking of fathers, there is a mother coming. You know, the sort of woman who is a mother and nothing else.

CAPTAIN R. I like those simple souls.

TOVEY. The coquette isn't what you would call a simple soul.

CAPTAIN R. A coquette, too?

TOVEY. The most audacious flirt of my acquaintance.

(CAPTAIN RATTRAY *is a little complacent.*)

Why that swagger?

CAPTAIN R. I wasn't swaggering, but I get on rather well with that kind. Once at an India station—However.

TOVEY. I think that completes the list. (*Disregarding a recent promise*) Stop, though, there is one more—a murderess.

CAPTAIN R. None of your blarney, Jack.

TOVEY. Don't think I am joking. (*Confidentially*) Fact is, since you were last on leave the order of the day for dinners has become a celebrity at any cost.

CAPTAIN R. Draw the line.

TOVEY. We don't nowadays; life is too strenuous. You will see what deference we pay her. Why, man alive, if it had not been for you the likes of us couldn't have got her. She had a much more exalted engagement, and broke it to meet you.

CAPTAIN R. Tosh!

TOVEY. But listen; the bell again! Here's another who has been asked too early.

CAPTAIN R. Let us hope it is a man.

TOVEY. I hear the swish of skirts. Bobbin, with perfect confidence, I leave you to do the honours.

CAPTAIN R. As you love me, no!

TOVEY. I must scoot.

CAPTAIN R. (*intercepting him*). You are placing me in a horrible position! No humour—too much humour—public speaker who spills her things, but I mustn't lift them up for her. A Very woman of the clinging kind—a mother and nothing else—a coquette—and a murderess who broke an engagement to meet me. How am I to know which this one is?

TOVEY (*as he glides past him*). Be a sportsman, my gallant tar, and find out.

(CAPTAIN RATTRAY *is meditating an escape on to the leads when the maid shows in* LEONORA.

LEONORA *is an unspeakable darling; and this is all the guidance that can be given to the lady playing her. She grasps the situation and bows charmingly.*

CAPTAIN RATTRAY'S *awkwardness makes a good impression on her*).

LEONORA. I suppose Mrs. Tovey hasn't yet——

CAPTAIN R. Perhaps I ought to explain——

(They have spoken simultaneously.)

CAPTAIN R. I beg your pardon.

LEONORA. You were saying?

CAPTAIN R. No, you.

LEONORA. Please—if I did not know this room——

CAPTAIN R. The fact is that Mr. Tovey——

(They are at it again; this nonsense puts them on easier terms.)

CAPTAIN R. I fancy you must be in the same predicament as myself. I have arrived to dinner half an hour too soon.

LEONORA. I was asked for eight o'clock.

CAPTAIN R. And I. But it was a mistake. Dinner is at eight-thirty.

LEONORA. Oh dear!

CAPTAIN R. Mr. Tovey has just told me. He isn't sure whether the same mistake has been made with the others or not.

LEONORA. I see. How horrid of us (*sitting that he may do so also, one of the most excellent things in woman*).

CAPTAIN R. But it isn't our fault.

LEONORA. That is true. Still, how horrid of us.

(It strikes him that she must be that inconsequential delight to memory dear, the Very woman.)

CAPTAIN R. (*enlightened*). Ha!

LEONORA (*arrested*). What?

CAPTAIN R. You know, that is just what my mother would have said in the same circumstances. Perhaps I should say that my name is Rattray.

LEONORA. I was sure of it. If I may say so, we are all proud of you, Captain Rattray.

CAPTAIN R. (*rushing her off the gangway*). Oh, please don't. I did nothing. (*Smiling*) I flatter myself I know something about you also.

LEONORA (*curious*). You do? About me? What?

CAPTAIN R. (*with the modest self-satisfaction that comes to the discriminating*). I have found it out since you came into the room.

LEONORA. But how uncanny. I'm listening.

CAPTAIN R. I have found out that you are a Very woman.

LEONORA. What is that?

CAPTAIN R. (*comprehensively*). Ah!

LEONORA. Do tell me.

CAPTAIN R. (*reflecting*). I suppose it is a man's phrase.

LEONORA. That is why I want to know what it means.

CAPTAIN R. (*in deep waters*). A Very woman is—is—well, she is a clinging woman. All sailors like clinging women.

LEONORA. Do they? What do they like them to cling to?

CAPTAIN R. As to that—(*his snotties would enjoy seeing him now*)—I am afraid I seem very stupid. You see, for more than a year I have scarcely spoken to a woman.

LEONORA (*sympathetic*). Constant practice is everything in speaking. I could always speak fairly fluently in committees and so on. But in the Albert Hall——

CAPTAIN R. (*in consternation*). You don't mean—politics?

LEONORA. Oh, yes, why not? Is anything wrong?

CAPTAIN R. (*depressed*). Nothing.

(*Her handkerchief falls. He is about to pick it up when he remembers that politicians don't like this.*)

May I?

LEONORA. Not if it is too much trouble. (*She picks it up herself.*)

CAPTAIN R. I am awfully sorry. The fact is, you gave me a little shock just now.

LEONORA. I did? How? Perhaps I am not the woman you thought me after all?

CAPTAIN R. No, you are not.

(*He is so lugubrious that she laughs.*)

LEONORA. You had better give me up, Captain Rattray.

CAPTAIN R. Not I.

(*She raises her eyebrows at his audacity.*)

LEONORA (*changing the subject*). Mrs. Tovey has a dear house, don't you think?

CAPTAIN R. (*looking about him for the first time*). Yes, very. Some pretty things here.

LEONORA. Aren't there? But the real treasures, of course, are the two lovelies on the top floor of the house.

CAPTAIN R. (*mildly surprised*). Oh?

LEONORA (*explanatory*). In the room where the night-

lights are.

CAPTAIN R. (*who has forgotten domesticity*). Night-lights?

LEONORA. Haven't you been up?

CAPTAIN R. On the top floor? No.

LEONORA. I thought you were an old school friend of Mr. Tovey?

CAPTAIN R. I am.

LEONORA. And he didn't rush you to the top of the house? To the two rooms where the large fire-guards are?

CAPTAIN R. No; what are the fire-guards for?

LEONORA. To prevent them falling into the fire, of course.

CAPTAIN R. Whom? Jack and his wife?

LEONORA. Oh, I shall never understand men!

CAPTAIN R. I can't quite—what is it that Jack Tovey keeps at the top floor of the house?

LEONORA (*reproachfully*). Oh, Captain Rattray, his pretty things.

CAPTAIN R. (*dense*). Yes, I see—I didn't even know that he was a collector. But what a rum place to keep them.

(*He sees she is shocked.*)

Excuse me, I have been such a long time at sea.

LEONORA (*shocked*). Captain Rattray, were you never kept on the top floor?

CAPTAIN R. Only when I was a chicken. (*Daylight reaches him.*) You don't mean to say that Inky Paws—Jack Tovey—that he——?

LEONORA (*nodding delightedly*). Yes, two! A boy and a girl.

CAPTAIN R. A boy and a girl? (*He is in touch with her at last.*) That is the best joke I have heard since I came back.

LEONORA. Joke?

CAPTAIN R. Well, isn't it?

LEONORA (*wounded*). Mrs. Tovey's babies are a joke, are they? I can tell you another joke, Captain Rattray. (*Haughtily*) I am also a—collector.

CAPTAIN R. You?

LEONORA. It is funny, isn't it!

CAPTAIN R. (*contritely*). Do forgive me. Somehow I—didn't think of you as a mother.

LEONORA (*to whom this is still more dreadful*). You didn't think—Captain Rattray, I could forgive you a good deal, but I will never forgive you that. (*She is about to step out on to the leads.*)

CAPTAIN R. (*desperate*). I could eat my hat.

LEONORA (*freezingly*). Not before me, please.

CAPTAIN R. I say, I wasn't speaking against mothers. I think there is nothing like them.

LEONORA (*perhaps a little unfairly*). You said I didn't deserve to be one.

CAPTAIN R. (*stung*). I did not.

LEONORA. You needn't bark. (*She melts easily.*) Surely you might have guessed.

CAPTAIN R. It was dense of me. I can see it now clearly enough.

LEONORA. Oh?

CAPTAIN R. It is written all over you.

LEONORA (*rather tart*). I don't think it is so obvious as that.

CAPTAIN R. No, indeed—that is, whatever you prefer. I say, do let me down softly.

LEONORA (*smiling divinely*). That was almost like Harry!

CAPTAIN R. (*grumpily*). Was it?

LEONORA (*softly*). He is my son.

CAPTAIN R. (*relieved*). A gorgeous fellow, I'll be bound.
(*Cunningly*) Tell me about him.

LEONORA (*tremulously*). You wouldn't really care to know.

CAPTAIN R. I would indeed. It may seem strange to
you——

LEONORA. Oh, no.

CAPTAIN R. How old is he?

LEONORA. Fourteen and two months.

CAPTAIN R. What a ripper.

LEONORA. He is at school.

CAPTAIN R. Well done.

LEONORA. He is in the O.T.C.

CAPTAIN R. Of course he is.

LEONORA. I had a letter from him to-day—he says——(*It is evidently in the bodice of her gown.*)

CAPTAIN R. Nothing wrong, I hope?

LEONORA (*in a flood of emotion*). He—he—he wants me to send him a razor.

CAPTAIN R. (*wildly sympathetic*). The ass—the ungrateful booby—the——

LEONORA (*flaming up*). How can you! You——Oh, you *man*.

CAPTAIN R. (*hurriedly*). It is myself I mean, not him. Besides, you were almost crying as if he had hurt you.

LEONORA. Harry hurt me! Don't you see how splendid it is?

CAPTAIN R. Rather! I say, do let me send Harry his first razor.

LEONORA (*pleased*). Oh, no.

CAPTAIN R. After all, I must know more about razors than you do. Other subjects—but razors?

LEONORA (*in Harry's interest*). That must be true, of course.

CAPTAIN R. Leave it to me.

LEONORA. Something suitable. He is five feet five and rather fair.

CAPTAIN R. I'll get that kind.

LEONORA. And—and please—rather a blunt one.

CAPTAIN R. (*admiring her*). I believe you would try it on yourself if that would be any help to Harry.

LEONORA. Of course I would.

CAPTAIN R. May I ask, how many children have you?

LEONORA (*nervously, to do her justice*). Would you think six a large number?

CAPTAIN R. Six?

(*He is a little shaken and loses favour in her eyes.*)

LEONORA (*with one look putting the dastard in his place*). Oh, you would?

CAPTAIN R. (*recklessly*). Not at all. (*Suddenly seeing which of the women this is*) Ha!

LEONORA. What is it now?

CAPTAIN R. (*the solution found*). A mother and nothing else!

LEONORA. I beg your pardon.

CAPTAIN R. It is a—a quotation. Mr. Tovey told me there is a lady dining here to-night who is a mother and nothing else.

LEONORA. What an odd way of putting it. I wonder who she can be?

CAPTAIN R. I wonder!

LEONORA. I never met a woman of whom that could be said.

CAPTAIN R. I have.

LEONORA. Nice?

CAPTAIN R. Distinctly.

(She accidentally drops her bag and he picks it up at once.)

LEONORA. Quicker than last time.

CAPTAIN R. *(who could kick himself for being so long in getting at it)*. I didn't know you then. *(He keeps the bag in his hand.)*

LEONORA. Yes, it is a nice bag.

CAPTAIN R. *(thoughtfully)*. Ha!

LEONORA. I won it last Christmas.

CAPTAIN R. Won it?

LEONORA. Yes, it was one of the prizes at a fancy-dress dance.

(He is aghast. Is she the mother and nothing else after all?)

CAPTAIN R. Were *you* in fancy dress?

LEONORA. Yes. I went as a Bacchante.

CAPTAIN R. You did!

LEONORA. I thought it would suit me. Don't you think so?

CAPTAIN R. I dare say. *(He gives her back the bag and draws his hand across his brow.)*

LEONORA *(feeling that he disapproves)*. Don't you like dancing?

CAPTAIN R. Oh, yes—but—yes, immensely.

LEONORA. I adore it. But your woman wouldn't dance?

CAPTAIN R. My woman?

LEONORA. The one who is a mother and nothing else.

CAPTAIN R. I had forgotten her. No, not as a Bacchante, she—and for a moment I thought that you——*(As he looks at her a not entirely welcome idea strikes him.)* Would you mind my telling you a funny story?

LEONORA *(surprised)*. I should love it.

CAPTAIN R. *(placing a chair for her in the manner of the*

conjurer). I ought to explain first that I am telling it to you with a purpose.

LEONORA. How odd, a funny story with a purpose!

CAPTAIN R. (*with foreboding*). The fact is, the way you take it will tell me something about you.

LEONORA (*astounded*). It will?

CAPTAIN R. If you would rather I didn't——

LEONORA. Do go on.

CAPTAIN R. Well, it was at a dinner-party the other night. Perhaps you know the story.

LEONORA. I don't recognise it so far.

CAPTAIN R. A lady dining there had talked mostly to the man who took her in; she had scarcely looked at the man on her other side, who was quite young but extremely bald. Toward the end of dinner, however, he stooped to pick up his napkin——

LEONORA. The bald man?

CAPTAIN R. Yes.

LEONORA (*excitedly*). I feel sure we are coming to the thing that is to tell you so much about me.

CAPTAIN R. (*a little excited himself*). Well, we are.

LEONORA. How you are watching me!

CAPTAIN R. I can't help it. She turned as he stooped, and seeing nothing but his bald head—it was rather yellow, too—she thought it was fruit being handed round by a servant, and she said: 'No, no melon, thank you.'

(*He looks anxiously at her.*)

LEONORA. And didn't she?

CAPTAIN R. Didn't she what?

LEONORA. Didn't she have any melon?

CAPTAIN R. (*heavily*). I don't know. I believe not.

LEONORA. Well?

CAPTAIN R. That's all.

LEONORA. Oh! (*Politely*) What a good story. (*Suddenly suspicious*) But it can't tell you anything about me?

CAPTAIN R. Indeed it does.

LEONORA. Tell me.

CAPTAIN R. Never. But I'll tell you something else now. Before Mr. Tovey hurried away to dress he told me something about each of the ladies who is coming to dinner, but not their

names, and all this time I have been trying to find out which of them you are.

LEONORA. The creature! And which one am I?

CAPTAIN R. I have just found out. I went wrong several times.

LEONORA. Do tell me.

CAPTAIN R. Not I.

LEONORA. At least tell me who the others are. I may know them.

CAPTAIN R. I won't tell you the ones I mistook for you, but I'll tell you the ones I knew from the first you couldn't be.

LEONORA. Yes, do.

CAPTAIN R. One is a lady with too much sense of humour.

LEONORA. Let me think.

CAPTAIN R. I'm glad you're not that one.

LEONORA. I wonder if I am?

CAPTAIN R. (*with conviction*). No, I know you are not.

LEONORA. It is that horrid melon that has put you against me.

CAPTAIN R. I am not at all against you. Then there is another lady who is a coquette.

LEONORA (*with considerable interest*). Tell me every word the man said about her.

CAPTAIN R. He said: 'She is the most audacious flirt of my acquaintance.' Can you place her?

LEONORA. No. Are there any more?

CAPTAIN R. That was all. Ah, well, he mentioned one other, but that was only his fun.

LEONORA. Still, tell me.

CAPTAIN R. He said there was a murderess coming.

(She remembers a certain story of Master Jack's.)

LEONORA. Oh?

CAPTAIN R. Absurd!

LEONORA. I don't see why it should be so absurd.

CAPTAIN R. You don't tell me you would come here if you knew a murderess had been invited?

LEONORA. I did know she had been invited.

CAPTAIN R. Ah, of course there is some explanation.

LEONORA (*brightly*). Yes, it is really all right. I thought at first that you were to be fussy about it.

CAPTAIN R. Fussy! Would you mind telling me about this woman?

LEONORA. She was in a railway carriage with her little girl. A man came into the carriage, and he put down the window. She was quite polite. She said, 'Would you mind keeping the window up, because my little girl has a cold?' He said, 'I'm sorry, but I feel stifled unless I have a window open.' (*She looks to see if Captain Rattray is taking in the enormity of this man's behaviour.*)

CAPTAIN R. (*attentively*). Yes?

LEONORA. She was splendidly patient. She said, 'But my little girl has a cold. Please to shut the window.' He refused. Then there was nothing else for her to do, was there?

CAPTAIN R. (*rather breathless*). What did she do?

LEONORA. She opened the door and pushed him out.

CAPTAIN R. You don't mean he was killed?

LEONORA. Yes, he fell on the line and killed himself.

CAPTAIN R. Before her eyes?

LEONORA. The train was going rather fast, but she had just time to see him go bump.

CAPTAIN R. What a dreadful——And then?

LEONORA (*finishing her story*). Then she put up the window. Nothing so very dreadful, you see.

CAPTAIN R. (*dazed*). Is this England?

LEONORA (*huffily*). Oh, if you are to take it in that way.

CAPTAIN R. This man——

LEONORA. Of course you take the man's side.

CAPTAIN R. (*exasperated*). You talk as if you didn't blame her.

LEONORA (*patiently*). Haven't I told you that her little girl had a cold?

CAPTAIN R. Damn her little girl!

LEONORA (*imperious*). Leave me. Go and dine somewhere else. Eat your hat.

CAPTAIN R. But I—but——

LEONORA (*again making for the leads*). And I came here specially to meet you. I broke another engagement to meet you.

CAPTAIN R. (*doddering*). What? I was told she did that. Don't tell me you are this woman.

LEONORA. Yes, I am the woman—and I wish you had been the man! (*She sinks down by the window, but whether she is sobbing or laughing it would need a woman to say, such as MRS. TOVEY, who now returns in evening dress.*)

MRS. TOVEY (*finding herself plunged in drama*). Dearest, whatever is the matter?

(LEONORA *still hides her countenance.*)

Captain Rattray? I am so delighted. But I don't understand.

LEONORA (*through her fingers*). He has been calling me the most awful names.

MRS. TOVEY. Do you know each other?

CAPTAIN R. (*sternly*). I wish we didn't, Mrs. Tovey.

LEONORA (*shrinking*). He wants to masthead me!

MRS. TOVEY. Really, Captain Rattray. (*But she suspects those heaving shoulders of LEONORA.*)

(MR. TOVEY *comes.*)

TOVEY. So sorry to be late, Leonora. Well, what do you think of the great man, Laura? Doesn't come up to expectation, does he? But they never do. Hullo, anything wrong?

LEONORA (*appealing*). Jack, he says I pushed a man out of a railway carriage.

CAPTAIN R. *I said it!*

LEONORA. There he goes again!

TOVEY. But how did you get to know about that, Rattray?

CAPTAIN R. You told me of the woman, and she has admitted that it was she.

TOVEY. I'm lost!

MRS. TOVEY. Jack, you are incorrigible!

LEONORA. Tell him, Jack.

TOVEY. Bobbin, it's all right. Leonora never actually did it. It's just the sort of thing that we often say of her she would do. So silly about her brats, you know.

(The Captain is unspeakably relieved.)

LEONORA (*reproachfully*). How could you think such a thing of me?

CAPTAIN R. (*with equal justice*). Why did you deceive me?

LEONORA (*sweetly*). To pay you back for the melon.

CAPTAIN R. (*as it becomes clearer*). I'm glad. But, I say, I am so sorry I made you cry.

MRS. TOVEY (*merciless to the real delinquent*). You didn't make her cry, Captain Rattray.

LEONORA. At any rate my eyes are red—oh dear, and so many people coming.

MRS. TOVEY. Many people? Whatever makes you think that?

LEONORA. Captain Rattray said so.

CAPTAIN R. You told me of seven ladies, Jack.

(MRS. TOVEY *bestows on her husband the sad look of wives.*)

MRS. TOVEY. Jack, why doesn't the law let me give you up!

TOVEY. The fact is, Bobbin—you see, Leonora—I—ah—the fact is——

(*The dinner announcement comes opportunely.*)

LEONORA (*only half enlightened*). But—but—the others. Aren't we to wait for them?

CAPTAIN R. (*still entirely benighted*). Yes, the other guests—all those ladies?

TOVEY. You thick-headed sailor-man, give my wife your arm and come in to dinner. There are no other ladies. This lady—is all those ladies.

LEONORA (*as she goes in to dinner with him*). You wretch,

Jack!

CAPTAIN R. (*who needs a moment longer to grasp it*). All the seven? But how can—I see it, I see it. Mrs. Tovey, she is all the seven!

MRS. TOVEY. She is indeed—and some more. (*She takes his arm.*)

CAPTAIN R. Just one other word; is she a widow?

MRS. TOVEY. Yes.

CAPTAIN R. Good!



Source:

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

And Other One-Act Plays

Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.

London

n.d.

[The end of *Seven Women* by J. M. Barrie]