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Reader's Theatre Starter Packet #2

by MELVIN R. WHITE

1. At Wit's End

by ERMA BOMBECK

adapted for Reader's Theatre

by MELVIN R. WHITE



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Reader's Theatre Starter Packet #2

by MELVIN R. WHITE

At Wit's End
by ERMA BOMBECK

At Wit's End*

CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Three, four or five women may perform this skit, or two men may be cast in the second half of the program.

ERMA — The narrator, an effective storyteller

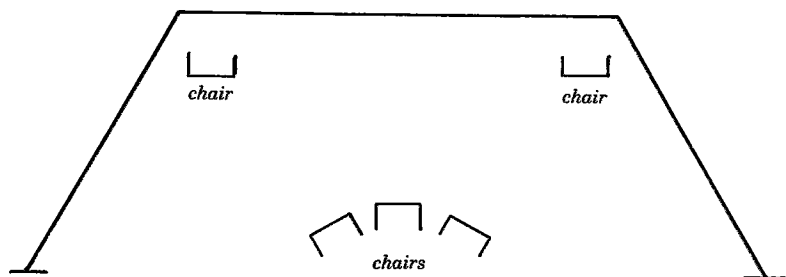
MADELYN MURK — The neighborhood gossip

MAYVA — Possibly not too bright

SOMEONE #3 and 4 — May be played by either men or women

SCENE ARRANGEMENT

Erma, the narrator, sits comfortably in a chair Downstage Center. To her Right is seated Mrs. Murk; to her Left, Mayva. If it is desirable to have the other two readers who appear in the second half of the show on stage, they may be seated in chairs, backs to the audience, Up Right and Up Left, ready to move down into the scene when needed.



*From *At Wit's End* by Erma Bombeck. © Copyright Field Enterprises, Inc. Courtesy of Field Newspaper Syndicate.

**The characters and the situations in this adaptation of two of Erma Bombeck's columns are fictive; the arrangement is somewhat that of a news documentary.

1 **ERMA:** (*Sitting comfortably Downstage Center, talking candidly*
2 *with her audience*) Have you been reading about the metric
3 system? How that soon we're all going to have to know
4 all about it? (*Laughs slightly.*) You know what they say.
5 The metric system is like termites. No sense worrying
6 about them until they get here. (*Sobering*) Well, friends,
7 they're here. Those creeping, crawling centimeters,
8 grams and liters that threaten to put me in a size 142
9 girdle and a size thirty-six sandal have taken over. The
10 other day at coffee, Madelyn Murk, the neighborhood
11 gossip, said: (*The other ladies unfreeze to listen and participate.*)
12 **MURK:** Have I got a flash for you — for all of you!
13 **ERMA:** We all sat there like a tableau — our coffee mugs in
14 mid-air, not daring to breathe lest we miss one whip of
15 her vicious tongue.
16 **MURK:** (*Warming to her gossip*) Remember Ginger, the hostess
17 at the club who wears makeup a meter thick and stands
18 around with her mouth open a kilometer? Well, she has
19 this thing for Jan's husband.
20 **ALL:** No!
21 **ERMA:** . . . we gasped in unison.
22 **MURK:** Well, you know Jan. All wool and a meter wide. She
23 wouldn't suspect anything. Takes everything with a gram
24 of salt. Played right into Ginger's hand.
25 **MAYVA:** I don't know Ginger.
26 **MURK:** You do too. She's always got the dry, wild hair that
27 looks like she's down a liter of oil. Pushy! Very pushy!
28 Give her a meter and she'll take a kilometer. Well, what
29 happened was one day at luncheon, Ardis said to Jan,
30 "Remember the old gent Ginger was after? The one with
31 one centimeter on a banana peel and one centimeter in
32 the grave? Well, she's got new action now. A married man!
33 And you know something? He's sitting a scant hectometer
34 away from us."
35 **MAYVA:** Leave it to Ardis to put her meter in her mouth.

1 **ERMA:** Don't I know? She was never one to hide her
2 ignorance under a hectoliter basket! Go on! What
3 happened? What did she do?
4 **MURK:** Jan turned to Ardis and said, "Judge no one until
5 you've walked a kilometer in his mocassins."
6 **MAYVA:** That's beautiful. What does it mean?
7 **MURK:** That means you can go all over God's green hectare
8 and you'll never find anyone with an avoirdupois of
9 human kindness to equal that of Jan's.
10 **MAYVA:** Believe me, if it were me, I'd demand my kilogram
11 of flesh.
12 **ERMA:** What's that in English measurement?
13 **MURK:** A pound.
14 **ERMA:** What the heck. Put me down for a pound, too. Anyone
15 know how to double a kilogram?
16 *(All but ERMA stand, walk slightly Upstage to positions slightly*
17 *above and behind ERMA, and freeze, facing away from the*
18 *audience. After a brief transition pause, ERMA again talks with*
19 *the audience.)*
20 **ERMA:** It's not just my inability to completely comprehend
21 the metric system that has me at my wit's end. It's the
22 fact that every paper I read tells me that if I eat this or
23 do that, I'm going to regret it. And yet, even with research
24 rats running interference for me, I don't know exactly
25 when I'm going to die. Oh, I do know how! I'm going to
26 die of boredom. You know what I mean. If they aren't
27 discovering that kissing causes chipped fingernails and
28 peanut butter brings on embarrassing itching, they're
29 putting a curse on my pizza and the volume on my car
30 radio. I can't enjoy anything anymore. In fact, I'm
31 downright paranoid. You know what I mean? I go around
32 feeling cans to see if they're bent, spitting on my fingers
33 to lick stamps, holding my breath until I turn blue around
34 smokers, boiling my water, and avoiding X-ray machines
35 at the airport (my luggage doesn't look too good — even I'm

1 suspicious). Lord knows I've tried to please everyone. A
 2 few years ago when they put the finger on cigarettes, I
 3 quit smoking and turned to music for entertainment.
 4 **Someone said:** *(Two readers, male or female, join the two*
 5 *already on stage, and the four make a semicircle above ERMA,*
 6 *taking turns being SOMEONE.)*
 7 **SOMEONE #1:** Cooped up in here all day listening to all those
 8 decibels will make you deaf.
 9 **ERMA:** I went to the beach. **Someone said:**
 10 **SOMEONE #2:** The water is polluted and the sun will cause
 11 skin cancer.
 12 **ERMA:** I decided to stay indoors and eat. **Someone said:**
 13 **SOMEONE #3:** Tuna, dried foods, sugar, cereal products,
 14 meat and eggs are bad for you. You should have a checkup.
 15 **ERMA:** I went to the hospital for a checkup. **Someone said:**
 16 **SOMEONE #4:** X-rays are bad for you and so is some of the
 17 medicine they're giving you.
 18 **ERMA:** I decided to drink. **Someone said:**
 19 **SOMEONE #1:** That will destroy your liver.
 20 **ERMA:** So, I switched to coffee. **Someone said:**
 21 **SOMEONE #2:** That is bad for you.
 22 **ERMA:** I went to soft drinks.
 23 **SOMEONE #3:** The sugar is really harmful to your body.
 24 **ERMA:** ... someone said: I only drink drinks that are
 25 artificially flavored.
 26 **SOMEONE #4:** That's bad for you.
 27 **ERMA:** ... someone said. I'll eat snow.
 28 **SOMEONES #1, 2, 3, 4:** And drop dead?! *(The four turn their*
 29 *backs to audience and freeze.)*
 30 **ERMA:** *(May remain seated, or stand and cross a bit Down Right.*
 31 *To audience)* A friend of mine had a great idea for
 32 longevity. She bought a research rat and followed it
 33 around day and night. Everything it ate and survived,
 34 she tried. Everything it endured without damage, she
 35 went for. *(SOMEONE #1 pantomimes talking in the phone.)*

1 **Two days ago she called me and said the rat died.** (*ERMA*
2 *picks up her imaginary phone.*) **What happened?**
3 **SOMEONE #1:** **Got hit by a mousetrap a block from home.**
4 **ERMA:** **Tell me, was it wearing lipstick? I have to know.**
5 (*ERMA and SOMEONE #1 put down their phones. ERMA*
6 *throws her hands up into the air as she says:*) **I'm at my wit's**
7 **end.** (*Speaks to audience and then exits. The SOMEONES file*
8 *out, perhaps throwing their hands up in despair also.*)
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28 *NOTE: The numerals running vertically along the left margin*
29 *of each page of dialogue are for the convenience of the director.*
30 *With these, he/she may easily draw attention to a specific passage.*
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35

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