

&gt;&gt; theatre

## In the Absence of Sunlight

**Where:** At a secret location in North Melbourne, until Sunday. Audience is restricted to one person or one couple at a time.

**Inquiries:** 9660 9666

**Reviewer:** Chris Boyd

★★★★

6 I SAW the spring come once and I won't forget it. Only once. I had been ill all the winter and I was recovering."

So begins Marjorie Barnard's small and brilliantly evocative story *The Persimmon Tree*, first published in 1943 when the writer was in her mid-40s and working in a library in Sydney.

The four-page story has been turned into a comparably small and every bit as evocative piece for the Fringe Festival, performed one-on-one (one-on-two at a pinch) by Tamara Searle.

Strictly speaking, it's an improvised sequel to Barnard's story in which a woman made frail from illness recuperates in a bare room looking out on the world beneath her window. Though it has a *Rear Window* feel to it, *The Persimmon Tree* could be anywhere, any time.

Though our unnamed



Frail: Tamara Searle.

narrator is content to be out of the action — her life stood on a shelf — she's anything but detached from it.

Her attention is drawn to an elegant and equally private neighbour who lives opposite. Which is where you come in...

Theatre gives audiences permission to

stare. It's a refined kind of voyeurism. But it's rarely intimate and rarely private. This piece allows us — requires us — to enter the world of the story.

But there's another reversal here: the woman is the voyeur, one who has become fascinated by our actions. She wants to know us.

Tamara Searle is a skilled and confident performer who effortlessly blends Barnard's words (about the thickness of the sunlight and the sensitivity of her mind) with open-ended conversation.

It's a unique experience, as private as reading and as intimate as a first date.