

The Gravitational Pull of Bernice Trimble was first produced by Obsidian Theatre Company and Factory Theatre at Factory Theatre, Toronto, on November 2, 2013, with the following cast and creative team:

Sarah: Lucinda Davis
Iris: Alexis Gordon
Bernice: Karen Robinson
Peter: Peyson Rock

Director: Philip Akin
Set design: Camellia Koo
Costume design: Ming Wong
Lighting design: Andrew Smith
Sound design: Richard Lee
Stage management: Nicola Benidickson

The play received a second production with Theatre Network and was presented at the Roxy Theatre, Edmonton, from November 6 to 23, 2014, with the following cast and creative team:

Peter: Jason Chinn
Iris: Clarice Eckford
Sarah: Patricia Zentilli
Bernice: Susan Gilmour

Director: Bradley Moss
Set and costume design: Cory Sincennes
Lighting design: Scott Peters
Composer/sound design: Darrin Hagen
Stage manager: Tracey Byrne

CHARACTERS

Iris
Bernice
Sarah
Peter

*A kitchen. There is a bag of groceries already on the counter.
IRIS enters carrying a block of cheese.*

IRIS *(holding up the block of cheddar and directly addressing the audience)* Voila. Cheddar cheese! The oldest and the strongest I could find. Got it! That's everything.

IRIS takes off her coat and hangs it up as BERNICE enters with a coffee, sits down at the table, and pulls a crossword puzzle and a pencil out of the pocket of her robe.

Had to go back for the cheese. Should've made a list. That's what she would've done.

BERNICE One never regrets writing things down.

IRIS Breathe, Iris, breathe. . . I know the whole breathing thing happens involuntarily, that you don't really have to tell your brain to breathe, but. . . just give me a moment.

BERNICE In with the good air.

IRIS breathes in deeply.

Out with the bad.

IRIS breathes out.

IRIS Better.

IRIS stares at the clock.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tickticktick.
Tocktocktock. Shitshitshit. Fuckfuckfuck.

IRIS covers the clock with a dishcloth.

Even better.

BERNICE Not knowing the time makes it pass faster.

IRIS stares at the covered clock.

IRIS Problem is, I need to know when the time comes.

IRIS takes out a timer and sets it. She stares at it. She takes out another dishcloth and covers the timer.

There. An alarm will sound. No need to count down the minutes.

BERNICE The busy bee has no time for sorrow.

IRIS picks up the groceries and dumps them out on the counter.

IRIS Voila. The ingredients.

She holds up a tube of lipstick that she has found amongst the groceries.

Did you know you can get lipstick in the same place you buy your milk? The world never ceases to amaze.

She gets out a bowl, a spoon, a cheese grater, a measuring cup, and other utensils while she speaks.

I'm trying like stink to keep busy. Nose to the grindstone.

BERNICE You're a workaholic.

IRIS Some days, it's best to keep busy so you don't think too much.

BERNICE Too much thinking and you'll lose your marbles.

IRIS Your mind is like anything else—you can wear it out with overuse. If you're not careful, it'll end up like casserole—goopy. . . The casserole. Now, this was a dumb idea, because it reminds me of the very thing that I'm trying not to think about, but it was the only thing I could think to do to keep myself busy, so I wouldn't think too much. See what I mean by too much thinking?

I thought about her when I took the bus back to the grocery store to get the cheese. Didn't want to take the car. My mind wanders too much when driving. The bus keeps you on your toes, and it takes longer, so I was able to use up a bit more time. Besides, I didn't want to be alone. I wanted to be amongst the masses.

BERNICE The unwashed masses.

IRIS I thought about her when I rode the bus.

BERNICE Beware of fecal matter.

IRIS It's dangerous. You get on the bus, touch the shared handrail, brush the back of a dirty seat, and hold on to a communal pole. Little did you know that every object you just touched is covered in poo particles and now your hands are. Without thinking, you rub your eye and a poo particle goes straight from your filthy finger, through your tear duct, and into your brain. Poo equals infection and infection of the brain equals death.

IRIS washes her hands.

If I've been on public transit, I make damn sure to avoid touching my eyes and mouth until I have washed my hands—

She turns off the water.

—thoroughly.

She turns the water back on and washes her hands again.

All because of her obsession with germs.

She turns off the water and stares at her hands.

My hands. There's not a lot about her and I that looks the same, but our hands are the spitting image of each others', right down to the freckle, and they move in a similar manner.

BERNICE Fidgety digits.

IRIS Look at that. Shaking. Just the left one. It's been coming and going all morning. Ha. Lucky thing I'm right-handed.

IRIS puts her hands in her pockets in an attempt to still them. She finds a Monopoly piece and takes it out.

(holds piece up) Her favourite Monopoly piece. She's always the thimble; wishful thinking, because she never sewed a thing in her life. *(playing with piece)* Gives my hands something to play with.

BERNICE Fidgety didgety digits.

IRIS I thought about her again in the grocery store when I bought the ingredients.

BERNICE Butter—full fat and salted.
Sour cream—full fat.
Cream of mushroom soup—full fat and very high in sodium.
The oldest and the strongest cheddar cheese you can find—full fat.
Hash browns and an onion. Salt and pepper to taste.
All that from memory. Sharp as a hammer!

IRIS *(emptying the hash browns into a bowl)* The entire bag of hash browns. She calls this recipe—

BERNICE Schwartie's Potatoes.

IRIS Dumb name, so I'm renaming it the Everything That Is Bad For You Casserole. Not a very appetizing title, but at least you know what you're getting yourself into.

IRIS holds up the lipstick.

I thought about her again when I saw this lipstick near the checkout.