

SUNNI TRIANGLE (EXCERPT)

A Short Play

by

Trey Nichols

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Cast of Characters
(in order of appearance)

Wendy: A woman in her late 30's.

Hart: A man in his late 30's. Wendy's husband.

Miriam: A woman in her 60's. Hart's mother.

Scene

Variously: a house, a high school, a different house.

Time

The present; a Tuesday afternoon.

SETTING: A high school, near the basketball court.

AT RISE: HART enters. He's in his 40's, wearing a shirt and loosened tie, dark slacks. Slightly ruffled. He stops at center. He looks upset, disappointed, hesitant. He slowly shifts his gaze upward. And upward. Until he's looking up at someone who towers over him, just a few feet away.

HART

Hey. Hey! Stop it. Stop crying. Kid, please, God, you're a mess. Would you like a Kleenex?

(He pulls a few wads of Kleenex from pocket plus a folded pink slip of paper. HE uncrinkles a few Kleenex wads, checking their contents.)

Here, this one's not too bad...and here's one for your knee. You scraped it pretty good.

(Extends Kleenex.)

Go on, they're dry. Though as you can see, I've been using quite a few myself lately. They're much better than a sleeve. Or a bare arm streaked with snot trails as it were. Very attractive in the slanting sunlight of late afternoon. No? Suit yourself.

(He pockets the Kleenex, hangs on to the pink paper; considers it for a moment.)

Hey, see this? You know what this is? It's called a "pink slip." It's like a report card for adults. With just one grade: F. I've been carrying it around for days. I should toss it or burn I supposed, but I just can't seem to let go of it. Look--it's really pink! How do you interpret that? Is it meant to be ironic? Or just

obnoxiously straightforward. I mean, despite its clear message of total rejection and failure it also suggests, in its own unsubtle way, the wish for a rosy future as the door smacks your ass on the way out. Or maybe it's meant to symbolize the many pints of Pepto-Bismol you'll be drinking while faxing out your résumé. Or maybe I'm just reading too much into the whole thing. These are the kinds of questions you can look forward to someday after you graduate. Oh and by the way, in case you were wondering, most pink slips aren't normally pink. "Pink" slip is just an expression. This pink slip was torn from a pink message pad. By my boss. Who--did I mention?--also happens to be my brother-in-law. See, he didn't actually "fire" me per se, but when he screamed "Get the fuck out of here you fucking piece of shit I don't ever want to see you again" I got the message. But then, always thinking ahead, I asked for something official, something written, for unemployment purposes, so he gave me this:

(Reading from the pink slip.)

"You're fired you fucking piece of shit." Then he signed it. And he checked the box marked "Urgent." See? Irony. Or is that understatement? What do you want, I went to public school, too. In fact, I went here: this is my old high school. You can even see my old house from the basketball court, just over the fence to the west, by the birch trees, my parents still live there and I don't live too far away now, my wife and I bought a condo, a wedding gift from our parents, I know I'm babbling and I thank you in advance for allowing me to do so, I noticed your waterworks have eased up somewhat and I'd like to think I'm at least partly responsible for the change in precipitation.

I've been watching you for the last couple of weeks. Not just you, I mean the whole basketball team. Don't worry, I'm not some perv, I'm a happily married man. "Happily" married is subject to change of course, aforementioned pink slip having remained in my pocket for lo this past week while I've been figuring out how to tell my wife. She still thinks I've been getting up and going to work every day. She's a very understanding, thoughtful person, keeps an immaculate house, runs a little internet business on the side, so when I break the news, I hope, I think she'll, well, we'll see. Hey, maybe I can work for her. Stuff those little things she sells into padded envelopes, run to the post office for her, pick up groceries, run errands, I'm handy that way, just tell me what to do.

Maybe you've seen me sitting over there, on the benches, I generally show up around three with animal fries and a Coke. You've heard of animal-style fries? I just found out about In-N-Out's secret menu, it's not printed, you just have to know how to ask for it, it's like an oral tradition among fast food junkies. "Animal style."

My wife's nephew came back from Iraq last month with both his legs and half his head blown off, brain totally scrambled. We used to shoot hoops right over there. We don't have kids, see, that's another story, so being an uncle...it's really special, you know. Kinda like being a father without the hassles, just the good stuff, basketball, Playstation, Slurpees. His father, my boss, my former boss, apparently didn't appreciate a remark I made about Bobby's incident. I never meant to imply a political message or criticism of the war, but evidently that's what he inferred. We were sitting in the lunchroom, he was describing Bobby's accident in detail, and I put my hand on his shoulder and said, "It's a shame it happened; it didn't have to." We'd never once had a conversation about the war. He looked at me like I punched him, got up and walked away. Do they teach the difference between "infer" and "imply" in school these days? I didn't learn 'til way after high school. I gave Bobby his first thesaurus; now he can't even form a sentence.

How old are you, seventeen, eighteen? I really admire you. Not so much the way you play, though you do have your moments. More just the way you...endure. It's not...inspiring exactly, but...reassuring. Does that sound weird? I mean, you're at least two heads taller than your teammates, your jersey barely fits, you're clumsy as shit, the coach is always yelling at you, but you just keep on going. Now I saw what happened earlier, that guy tripped you deliberately, but you know what? Fuck him, he's an asshole. You need to hang in there. Keep doing what you do.

Should I apologize to my brother-in-law? Take back what I said, try to get my job back? It's a shitty job but I don't know how I'll find another one like it. I suck at most everything except reading, sleeping, and putting my foot in my mouth. I'm an okay husband; you can't put that on a résumé. I meant what I said. I love my nephew, but I meant what I said to his father. And you know what? After he gave me the boot, I was shell-shocked at first, but now I feel free. I have no prospects, no plans, I'm scared

shitless, but my body is humming with something I can't describe. Not optimism, exactly. Something like relief.

My wife was up at six this morning vacuuming. Is that normal? This has been hard for her. She was a good Aunt Wendy. She and her brother are pretty close. He probably thought I'd tell her right away. When I saw you get knocked down, I thought you'd get right up like you always do. When you ran off the court, something in me, I don't know, I was like, "Nooo!" I thought, if I can get that kid back on his feet and back on the court, I'm just going to go home right now and deal with this. It's going to be okay, right? My mother has coffee with my wife at the house Tuesday afternoons. I was going to leave them alone for awhile, watch you play 'til the end, but now I'm fired up. My name is Hart. I don't know your name; I guess I don't need to. Now get back out there and kick some ass!

(HART retreats upstage left, out of the light, but remains facing front.)

END OF EXCERPT