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Catherine Bush

# TRADIN' PAINT







# TRADIN' PAINT

Comedy/Drama. By Catherine Bush. Cast: 6m.,

2w. Darla Frye is fraught with deep-seated insecurities. Her mother is dead, her boyfriend is delusional, and her job stocking auto parts is going nowhere fast. Then one night, on a deserted country road, Lucky Tibbs teaches Darla how to change a flat tire—and in doing so, changes her life. Now, Darla is on a quest to find her true destiny, a journey that takes her into the world of stock car racing and includes an unexpected friendship with a gay college professor, a head-on collision with a car battery, and a heavenly visit with the late Dale Earnhardt. It is one helluva ride with a lot of "tradin' paint," but Darla discovers that it's the bump in the road that makes the trip worthwhile. Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Code: TU2.

Cover design by Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

ISBN: 978-1-58342-957-0



www.dramaticpublishing.com



Dramatic Publishing

311 Washington St. Woodstock, IL 60098 ph: 800-448-7469



Printed on recycled paper

### Tradin' Paint

By
CATHERINE BUSH



#### **Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(TRADIN' PAINT)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-957-0

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Tradin' Paint was first produced by Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Va.

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Costume Designer	
Lighting Designer	Karen Elb
Sound Designer	
Stage Manager	
Original Cast:	
Flagman	John Hedges
Halley Smoot	•
Skeeter Jett	
Tucker Forbush	
Pierce Garbarino	
Lucky Tibbs	
Coty Webb	Matt Greenbaum
Darla Frye	
Jack	
The Boss	
Football Player	John Hedges

#### Tradin' Paint

#### **CHARACTERS**

- HALLEY SMOOT: black, late 30s, a gay college professor whose love for English literature is only surpassed by his passion for stock car racing. In fact, it was the "roar of the engines" that called him home to the hills he loves ...
- DARLA FRYE: a white, 30-year-old woman with "deepseated insecurities" whose only talent consists of frying chicken for her boyfriend ... or so she thinks, until a flat tire changes her destiny.
- COTY WEBB: Darla's 30-something boyfriend and a bit of a bully. He always dreamed of being a cop but due to "emotional problems" had to settle for the next best thing—Piney Gap dogcatcher.
- LUCKY TIBBS: the pretty, 30-something crew chief for the Jett Racing Team. There's nothing broken on a car that she can't fix. She's not too bad with the human heart, either.
- SKEETER JETT: a handsome, 30-something stock car racer and Lucky's husband. A good ol' boy who loves what he does almost as much as he loves his wife.

PIERCE GARBARINO: stock car racer, 30s.

TUCKER FORBUSH: stock car racer, 30s.

- \*FLAGMAN: late 30s. If a stock car race were an orchestra, he'd be the conductor.
- \*JACK: Halley's lover. Handsome, late 30s, very "GQ."
- \*THE BOSS: early 50s, very corporate, the head of stock car racing's governing body.
- \*FOOTBALL PLAYER: left tackle for the Lebanon Badgers.

<sup>\*</sup>To be played by the same actor.

#### PRODUCTION NOTES

Since this show centers on the world of stock car racing, it was inevitable that part of the race would have to be recreated on stage. However, what I had in mind was something very stylized so that the actors playing Garbarino, Forbush and Skeeter would be able to personify not only these characters but their cars as well. The constantly changing position of the "cars" prohibits actual seating—instead, I envisioned the actors standing, perhaps holding a steering wheel, and using choreographed movements to give the impression of racing a stock car. This would also allow the actors to enter and exit quickly and easily.

Keep it simple. In the original production, Darla mimed driving a car and changing its tire. The lack of moving set pieces enabled transitions to be immediate, accomplished with a shift in lighting and sound.

When Halley speaks as God, Dale Earnhardt and Darla's father (first scene of Act II), his voice should never change. It should always be the voice of Halley Smoot.

Coty Webb is not a lost cause; he is simply lost. He is flawed—as are we all—and his cracks run deep, but he is redeemable—as are we all. He is hapless, not cruel, and any attempt to play him as a cruel monster will set a wrong tone for this piece.

#### Tradin' Paint

#### **ACTI**

SETTING: The stage is divided into many playing areas differentiated with set pieces, lighting, etc. UC, a podium resides on a platform representing a college classroom. L is the spectator section in turn two of Bristol Motor Speedway. R is the pit of the speedway. C is a common playing area. It is used as a racetrack, an old country road and a hospital room, among other things.

AT RISE: The stage is black. We hear a man's voice say "Gentlemen, start your engines." Then the roar of 43 stock car engines coming to life. Spotlight C on FLAGMAN holding a green racing flag. He waves it down, and "the race" begins. FLAGMAN smiles as he watches. Spot fades to black, and the sound of the race diminishes. Lights up on HALLEY SMOOT at the podium. He addresses the audience.

HALLEY. Dale Earnhardt is dead. Number three. The Intimidator. Gone. He was on the final curve at Daytona when his Chevy Monte Carlo hit the wall at one hundred and eighty miles per hour. He died on impact, the base of his skull crushed. He was 49 years old.

Dale Earnhardt was born in Kannapolis, a small North Carolina town located 35 miles north of Charlotte on Interstate 85. Kannapolis is famous for two things: Cannon Mills, that maker of bed sheets and bath towels from which the town derives its name, and the aforementioned Dale Earnhardt. What most people don't know is that Kannapolis is also the birthplace of Halley Smoot, senior. Sometime farmer, some-

time factory-worker and sometime father to his son, Halley Smoot, Junior. That's me.

Wine, women and stock car racing. The three great loves of my daddy's life. Of those three, we have one in common. I love the races as much as he did ... Maybe because my earliest memories are of the track. Holding my father's hand, the hot sun beating on our faces. The smell of fuel, melting blacktop and burning rubber mixed with cheap beer and hot dogs. And the *noise* ...

(We hear the faint roar of engines. It gets louder over the following.)

HALLEY (cont'd). The noise is something you have to experience to understand, to be able to comprehend its overwhelming penetrability. The throbbing engines, getting louder and louder until you can't distinguish between the sounds of the race and your own beating heart ...

(The engines ROAR! Then diminish again until all we hear is a beating heart. A moment and then that fades, too... Beat.)

HALLEY (cont'd). I tried to leave this place once, the land of country music and stock car racing. In fact, I did leave, for I felt an educated black man, a gay college professor, had no business living here. That I would be better off north in the big city where there would be more of my kind. And so I moved to New York and I met a man named Jack, and we made a life together and I told myself I was content. But always, always, in the back of my mind, I heard it. The throbbing engines, the heartbeat of these hills, calling me home ...

(Again we hear the faint roar of the engines.)

HALLEY (cont'd). When a position opened up in the English department of a university here, a university in close prox© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois

imity to Bristol Motor Speedway, I took it. I *grabbed* it. I moved back to the land I love, the man named Jack in tow. I moved home to reclaim my heartbeat ...

(The engines roar! Lights fade on HALLEY and come up C. Three drivers, SKEETER JETT, TUCKER FORBUSH and PIERCE GARBARINO are racing at the speedway. SKEETER and FORBUSH are side by side, FORBUSH on the "inside," or left, GARBARINO is behind them. FORBUSH bumps into SKEETER. SKEETER bumps him back. They go into a turn, and all three lean hard left. GARBARINO drifts to the outside. They come out of the turn and straighten up, three in a row. SKEETER pulls in front. FLAGMAN enters and waves a yellow flag. GARBARINO and FORBUSH get behind SKEETER in single file. The engines become quieter: FLAGMAN turns to the audience.)

FLAGMAN. First of all, I'd like to apologize for what it is I'm about to do. I consider it an embarrassment, the fact that I was asked to explain this here thing to you good people who probably know it all by heart anyway. But the folks in charge, they wanna make sure and cover their bases in case there's someone out there, like a Yankee or an atheist maybe, who don't know nothin' 'bout it ... So, here we go ...

This here thing you're watchin' is a *stock car* race. I emphasize the word *stock car* because there's some people—believe it or not—what think the Indianapolis 500 is the same kind a race as the Daytona 500. They can't help it. They're ignorant. So, let me explain it real slow. There's two kinds of racecars. Stock cars, what race in the Daytona 500, and Indy cars, what race in the Indianapolis 500. There's a whole lot of difference between these vehicles, and if I tried to name 'em all, we'd be here for days. But I will tell you the two most important in my opinion. One,

the Indy car don't have no wheel coverin's or fenders like a stock car does. That means they cain't bang into each other without causin' a crash. Stock cars bang into each other all the time. It's called "tradin' paint," and it's pretty much the name of the game in stock car racin' ... The second difference is you cain't haul moonshine in an Indy car.

OK, now—there's 43 drivers in a stock car race. Today we're just focusin' on three of 'em, the latest bunch of upand-comin' hotshots on the circuit.

(FLAGMAN turns to the drivers.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). Boys, when I call your name, just give a wave, will ya, so these folks know who's who? Thanks ... (Turns back to the audience.) OK, the fella out in front there, that's Skeeter Jett ...

(SKEETER waves.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). And the fella behind him is Tucker Forbush ...

(FORBUSH leans out, waves then leans back in.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). And the last one there is Pierce Garbarino ...

(GARBARINO leans out, waves then leans back in.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). Of the three, only Skeeter there is local. Forbush is a Kansas boy, and Garbarino's all the way down here from New Hampshire ...

I guess it was bound to happen, all these Yankees and whatnot infiltratin' what was predominantly a southern sport. There's a lot of money to be made in racin' if you're good © The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois enough at it, and you know how *them* people love money. Yes, sir, it was bound to happen ... but that don't mean we have to like it.

(Beat.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). Now then, there's just a few more things you need to know before we move on. There's an area on the infield of the track what's called the pit ...

(Lights up on the pit. LUCKY TIBBS is standing there in a jumpsuit. During the following, she mimes walking around a stock car, checking the tires.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). That's where a driver takes his car to be refueled, get the tires changed and get any other necessary adjustments made. It's important to the driver that his pit crew works fast because the quicker it gets done, the quicker he can get back into the race.

(Lights out in the pit.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). And now we come to what I consider to be the most important person in stock car racin'... Me. The flagman. The man what waves the flags. Oh, you might think it's no big deal, that any fool could do it, but let me tell you somethin'... If this race track was an orchestra, I'd be the conductor. This is how it works ...

I stand in this spot way up over the starting line where all the drivers can see me. Dependin' on what's goin' on in the race, I wave a different colored flag. A green flag means "go," a red flag means "stop," a yellow flag means "caution"—kinda like a traffic light. Right now these fellas are drivin' under a caution flag. That's why they're stayin' single file and not racin' each other. A caution flag gets waved when there's

somethin' on the track that makes drivin' conditions dangerous. In this case, that somethin' on the track is me. Soon as I get finished talkin' to you all, I'll wave the green flag again, and these fellas will take off like a bat outta hell. OK, let's see, I reckon that just leaves us with the white flag and the checkered flag. A white flag means the leader only has one lap to go. And when I wave the black and white checkered flag, that means someone's done won the race ...

Well, now, there you go. All you folks watchin' a stock car race for the first time ought to be able to follow along real well now. I appreciate you lettin' me take up so much of your time. I'm just gonna get on outta here now, so these boys can start racin' again ...

(He exits with the yellow flag. Beat. The drivers hold their position. Beat. FORBUSH leans out then looks at SKEE-TER. SKEETER shrugs. GARBARINO leans out then looks at FORBUSH and SKEETER. They both shrug. Suddenly from offstage we hear FLAGMAN.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd, offstage). Shit!

(FLAGMAN enters, carrying a green flag.)

FLAGMAN (cont'd). Sorry, boys ...

(He waves the green flag and exits. The drivers immediately start racing again. The engines roar! SKEETER, still in front, drifts right. FORBUSH moves up on the inside. GARBARINO is between them. They go into the curve, leaning hard to the left. They come out of the curve and straighten up. GARBARINO bumps into SKEETER. SKEETER bumps him back, knocking him into FORBUSH. A shoving match ensues. They lean hard into the curve. Lights fade on the track. Lights up on COTY WEBB and DARLA FRYE in turn

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two. DARLA is sitting, eating a piece of chicken from a sack at her feet. COTY is standing up.)

- COTY. Go on, you sonofamother! Move it! Move your sorry ass! (He watches for a moment then throws his hands up in disgust.) Oh ... Jesus! Did you see that, Darla? Son of a ... Did you see that? Give me a chicken bone, girl.
- DARLA. There ain't no more. You threw 'em all already.
- COTY. *Damn it*! Well, hurry up and finish that one you're chewin' on. I gotta have somethin' to throw at that stupid mother ...

(COTY continues to watch the race. DARLA addresses the audience.)

DARLA. This fella's my boyfriend, Coty Webb. He likes to come to the races here at the speedway so he can scream and curse and throw chicken bones on the track. He ain't the only one neither. All the folks what sit up here in turn two do the same thing. Whenever somethin' happens they don't like ... Boom! Boom! There goes the chicken bones. Most of 'em come in packin' a bucket or two of the colonel's recipe. But not Coty ...

(COTY slowly turns and watches her. DARLA is oblivious.)

DARLA *(cont'd)*. Coty says he don't trust the colonel or his recipe. He says you cain't never be sure what kind of chemicals that *gee-dee sissy* puts in his chicken. He calls the colonel a sissy because he wears one of them string ties. Anyway, the only chicken Coty'll eat is what I fry up for him. If there's one thing I can do, it's fry up chicken, which is kind of ironic because that's my last name. Frye. Darla Frye. That's me.

COTY. Darla.

DARLA. Huh?

COTY. What're you doin'?

DARLA. Explainin' about the chicken bones ...

COTY. How 'bout I do the explainin', and you shut the hell up and eat that chicken like I told you?

(Beat. DARLA continues to eat the chicken. COTY addresses the audience.)

COTY (cont'd). You'll have to excuse her. Darla's kinda ignorant. She don't know much about the ways of the world. It's on account of her daddy walkin' out on the family when she was little. At least I think that's what happened. She told me about it once, but I was tryin' to watch the Daytona 500 on TV, so I ain't real sure I caught it all. But it's somethin' like that. And now Darla is what I call "fraught with deep-seated insecurities." I like that expression. I read it in a book somewhere. Or maybe it was Playboy. Somethin' like that ... (Suddenly drawn back to the race.) Move it. Move it. Damn it to hell! Move it! (Turns to DARLA.) You done yet?

(She shakes her head, a drumstick in her mouth.)

COTY (cont'd). Well, hurry up. (Turns back to the audience.) I ain't real sure how this whole throwin' chicken bones thing got started but I do know this ... it's a tradition. And every track on the circuit has one. Stock car racin' is full of tradition—or it was, anyway, until Dale Earnhardt died. Now it's pretty much gone to hell. Here's what I mean ... you see that pit over there? The one for Skeeter Jett's crew? See it ...?

(Lights up on the pit area and LUCKY. She is watching the race and communicating on her headset. DARLA, still working on that piece of chicken, turns to watch.)

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COTY (cont'd). Now take a look at what's in there. That's a gee-dee woman! That's right. A woman is Skeeter Jett's crew chief. Now I'm gonna tell you somethin', and this is the God's honest truth. A woman don't have no business bein' in the pit, let alone bein' crew chief. Stock car racin' is a man's world and the fact Skeeter Jett let that bitch in just proves once and for all that he's a big homo-sissified-sexual!

DARLA. What's her name?

COTY. What?

DARLA. That woman in the pit. What's her name?

COTY. What the hell do you care?

LUCKY (to the audience). Lucky Tibbs is my name. Stock car racin' is my game.

(Lights out on turn two.)

LUCKY (cont'd). As Skeeter Jett's crew chief, I'm responsible for the overall performance of his car during a race. It's a tough job, and I'm damn good at it.

(Beat.)

LUCKY (cont'd). A lot of folks wonder if "Lucky" is some sort of nickname. Well, if the truth be told ... no. Fact is, my mama wanted to name me "Edna Ruth," after her grandmother, but my daddy put his foot down and said "Hell no! No daughter of mine's goin' 'round with some 'old lady' name." So instead, he picked out "Lucky." He said the day I was born was one of the luckiest days of his life, second only to the day he met my mama. Well ... how could any woman argue with that? So "Lucky" I was christened, and "Lucky" I've been ever since. In more ways than one. Oh, I don't mean to say that you should ask me to pick your lottery numbers or anythin'. No, the kind of luck I'm talkin' 'bout is more subtle. More blessed, if you will. I have my health. I

have friends and family who love me. I have a job I'm passionate about ... How much more lucky could a person be? *(Gets back on the headset.)* Skeeter, how do them tires feel? You look like you're draggin' a bit on the right ...

(Lights out in the pit. Lights up on turn two.)

DARLA. I like her name. Lucky Tibbs. I wonder if she's nice.

COTY. She's a *bitch* is what she is ... *go!* Move it, move it ...! *MOVE IT!* 

(DARLA turns to the audience as COTY continues to watch the race.)

DARLA. Coty's right. I am fraught with deep-seated insecurities on account of my daddy's leavin'. I ain't never finished high school. I ain't never been married. Sometimes, I wonder what Coty loves more—me or the fried chicken ...

COTY (still watching the race). Damn it!

(He sticks his hand back. DARLA hands him her now-finished drumstick. He throws it onto the track.)

COTY (cont'd). Stupid sonofa ...!

DARLA. I reckon it's a toss up. But for all his talk, I every once in a while get the feelin' that maybe Coty ain't all that secure with his own self.

COTY (to DARLA). What the hell is that s'posed to mean?

DARLA. It means that maybe you and me got a lot in common. That maybe we're both insecure ...

COTY. I ain't insecure. You hear me?! I ain't insecure one bit! Y'know why? Because I know for a fact, girl—for a fact—that I ain't responsible for the bad things happenin' in my life. No, ma'am! It ain't my fault! I am a victim of circumstance, that's what I am! A victim of circumstance!