

**Synopsis: *Next Train to Moscow***

**A comedy by George Taylor**

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*Well. There's one way I'm not like Masha. Chains and oak trees be damned. The next train I see heading for Moscow...I'm on it. (Pause) Everything changes. Isn't that what they say? Changes or dies? I'm almost certain that's a scientific principle.*

**Lacey** has decided that her life is too much like that of a Chekhov character — one or both of the Mashas. She's unhappily married, unfulfilled, and 45 years old. Her elderly parents have health issues, and her husband hates paella. And so she's taken to dressing in black, mourning her life until she can think what to do with it. Her brother **Lionel** also seems to be drifting; Meeting Grounds, his homey coffee shop, faces stiff competition from Starbucks, but he seems unable or unwilling to stand up and fight. Of course their friend **CB** is adrift too, but he's always sort of been that way, even before the break up of the long-ago marriage that nobody talks about.

Now comes word that a ball field of sainted childhood memory is to be torn out to make way for an Olive Garden. That gives Lacey a cause to embrace. It's not a cherry orchard, but it's what she has. Even more promising, Lacey's long-lost love **Stephen** is coming back to town for the first time in 25 years as replacement for an ailing pianist in a series of recitals. At the same time, Lacey's husband is due to be at an out-of-town medical convention. Hmmm.

Meanwhile, CB's sister **Sammi**, consigned to a wheelchair by a sniper's bullet outside Fallujah, is trying to pull her life together. This consists partly in keeping Iraq in a lockbox, bringing it out only to share with her therapy group, and trying to keep on with her dancing ("anything Astaire can do, but backwards and in a wheelchair"). She would also like Lionel to hire **Joey**, a sweet and streetwise young skateboarder. This would not only help Lionel in the shop, it might keep Joey, who has no home, no family, and no prospects, from enlisting. If he's sleeping outside anyway, he reasons, he might as well do it where it's warm. And maybe get a signing bonus too.

When Olive Garden switches its sights from the old ball field and threatens a target closer to home, Lacey, Lionel, CB, and Sammi realize that they stand at the crossroads of Fate and Free Will. They can follow the path of the three Prozorov sisters and the cherry orchard-owning Ranevskys and continue to let life roll over them. Or they can face up to the scary changes in their lives required to save the coffee shop and, in effect, themselves.

Like Chekhov, *Next Train to Moscow* is an ensemble work that finds humor and heart in the ordinariness of everyday life. Major events happen largely offstage. Characters wrestle with the mysteries of change and the calculus of regret. They hope for lasting happiness and perhaps someone compatible to love. Unlike Chekhovian characters, however, they have before them the lessons Chekhov offers. Lacey especially, with her fixation on Masha, is committed to shaking off the kind of ennui and resistance to change that binds the Russians to their Fate. Gifted with a forceful personality and a glimpse of a better future, she urges the others to join her on the next train to Moscow:

**Lacey:** *Oh good grief. Let me tell you something, CB. We're all flies stuck in aspic. Wait. Is that right? CB: Amber. Lacey: Right. It's not about a coffee shop, it's about us. I mean, look at us -- complaisant, comfortable, feckless. We're feckless, CB. We need something to shake us up, get us out of our comfort zone. We need to grow up, for God's sake.*