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SOMEWHERE IN THE  
PACIFIC

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*Neal Bell*

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Neal Bell's plays, including SPATTER PATTERN (*Edgar Award*), MONSTER, TWO SMALL BODIES, RAW YOUTH, COLD SWEAT, READY FOR THE RIVER, SLEEPING DOGS, RAGGED DICK, ON THE BUM, and SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC, have appeared at Playwrights Horizons and Classic Stage Company in New York, and at regional theaters including Berkeley Repertory, Mark Taper Forum, South Coast Rep, La Jolla Playhouse, and Actors Theater of Louisville, where his ten-minute play OUT THE WINDOW was a co-winner of the 1990 Heideman Award. Mr Bell has been a playwright-in-residence at the Yale School of Drama, and has taught playwriting at New York University, Playwrights Horizons Theater School, and the 42nd Street Collective. He is currently a member of the Theater Department faculty at Duke University. A recipient of fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment and the Guggenheim Foundation, Mr Bell was awarded an Obie Award in 1992 for sustained achievement in playwriting.



*photo by Joan Marcus. Actors: Adam Trese & Leo Marks*

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC was first performed at Playwrights Horizons on 17 May 1995. The cast and creative contributors were:

HOBIE.....	Adam Trese
CHOTKOWSKI .....	Michael Gaston
MCGUINESS.....	Silas Weir Mitchell
DUANE.....	Charlie Schiff
BILLY.....	Leo Marks
CAPTAIN ALBERS .....	Ross Bickell
LIEUTENANT DE LUCCA.....	Peter Rini
VOICE ON P A.....	Ari Fliakos
JAPANESE SOLDIERS .....	Ross Salinger, Ari Fliakos
INTERROGATORS.....	Ross Salinger, Ari Fliakos
<i>Director</i> .....	Mark Brokaw
<i>Set design consultant</i> .....	Riccardo Hernandez
<i>Costume design</i> .....	Therese Bruck
<i>Lighting design</i> .....	Anne M Padien
<i>Sound design</i> .....	Michael Clark
<i>Casting</i> .....	Janet Foster
<i>Production manager</i> .....	Jack O'Connor
<i>Production stage manager</i> .....	Michael Ritchie

## CHARACTERS & SETTING

*ALBERS, Navy Captain, forties*  
*DE LUCCA, a Navy Lieutenant, ALBERS's aide*  
*BILLY, a Navy Seaman First Class, nineteen*  
*CHOTKOWSKI, Marine, early thirties*  
*HOBIE, Marine, early twenties*  
*DUANE, Marine, early twenties*  
*MCGUINNESS, Marine, early twenties*

*A Liberty Ship, being used to transport troops.*

*Late July, 1945. Somewhere in the Pacific.*

## Scene One

*(The foredeck of a battered Liberty Ship being used to transport troops.)*

*(Open water. The Central Pacific. Night)*

*(Four Marines have come topside in their underwear, unable to sleep in the stifling heat below. The oldest — CHOTKOWSKI, thirty-one — is standing at the rail, looking out.)*

*(The others — DUANE, nineteen, and MCGUINNESS and HOBIE, both in their mid-twenties — lie on the deck in their skivvies, smoking.)*

*(HOBIE looks at CHOTKOWSKI.)*

HOBIE: Anything?

*(CHOTKOWSKI doesn't respond.)*

HOBIE: Chotkowski!

CHOTKOWSKI: Dark as an ass-hole.

MCGUINNESS: You should know — ...

DUANE: *(Of the ocean's immensity)* Lotta miles and miles...

MCGUINNESS: — spend enougha yer waking hours excavating.

DUANE: Miles and miles of miles and miles...

HOBIE: Where the *fuck* are we going? *This* time?

DUANE: The orders said Okinawa.

HOBIE: They don't need us on Okinawa.

They got the Tenth Army moppin' up.

We're going somewhere else.

CHOTKOWSKI: What else is left? The Mainland.

HOBIE: Right. They booked us into the Tokyo Hilton.

MCGUINNESS: That's the scuttlebutt.

HOBIE: That's what you heard? *I* heard my wife was faithful, still.

DUANE: You said your wife would spread for loose change.

HOBIE: So you get my drift.

DUANE: Your wife is a tramp?

HOBIE: The *other* drift.

DUANE: They *haven't* booked us into the Tokyo Hilton?

MCGUINNESS: (*To DUANE*) When your momma used to bounce you on her knee—did you land on your head?

(DUANE *gets up, joining* CHOTKOWSKI *at the rail.*)

DUANE: Miles and miles...

MCGUINNESS: (*Making the sound of a baby being bounced on its head*) "Bonk—bonk—bonk—bonk—"

DUANE: What my daddy'd always say, we'd be driving along, he sold vacuum cleaners, except no one could afford 'em, you know? "That's about all there is to this godforsaken, piss-poor state, just a lot of miles and miles of miles and miles..." My daddy thought that was funny.

MCGUINNESS: That's because I bet *his* momma dandled him badly, too. Like a family curse, *musta* been. It's sad: "bonk, bonk, bonk, bonk..."

(DUANE *points at something above the horizon.*)

DUANE: What the hell is that?

CHOTKOWSKI: (*Suddenly tenser*) Where?

DUANE: That glow out there...right over those waves... like a buncha falling stars...

CHOTKOWSKI: (*Relaxing*) Flying fish.

DUANE: Oh.

CHOTKOWSKI: You've seen 'em before.  
They always amaze you.  
Fucking flying fish.

DUANE: (*Peering out into the dark*) Are they fucking?

MCGUINNESS: "Bonk. Bonk. Bonk. Bonk."

HOBIE: (*Bitter, almost under his breath*) The Mainland?  
(*Pause*)

Why don't they just shoot us right now?  
Get it over with?

CHOTKOWSKI: Why don't you shut the fuck up? You fucking pussy.  
(*Pause*)

I heard something about Korea.  
Maybe *that's* where we're going in.

DUANE: Korea?

MCGUINNESS: That's a country, Duane. Sticks out at the Nips—like this. (*He gives*



DUANE *the bird.*)

CHOTKOWSKI: We grab up all the airfields—puts us right in Japan's backyard—

HOBIE: Nobody is going to Korea.

DUANE: The *Koreans* are.

(MCGUINNESS *makes a final "bonk".*)

(*The light changes, brighter. CHOTKOWSKI looks up.*)

CHOTKOWSKI: Break in the clouds.

DUANE: God. Look at that moon.

HOBIE: Don't that make us a target?

CHOTKOWSKI: (*Clamping down on his own nerves*) If anyone was out there.

DUANE: (*Bravado*) All I see is fucking flying fish. And this band of light like a road on the water. All the way back to the States. We're alone.

MCGUINNESS: Except, Duh-wayne, it don't work like in the cartoons. You don't see a great big slanted eye looking out of a giant periscope.

(*Pause, as HOBIE joins DUANE and CHOTKOWSKI, staring out at the night.*)

HOBIE: Shooting gallery. Moon right there and us in front of it. Picking our butts. Let the buck-tooth bastards draw a bead on us. Blam. (*He turns to yell up at the bridge.*) ZIG-ZAG, YOU SONS-OF-BITCHES! Jesus.

Fucking Navy...

(*Pause. It gets darker.*)

DUANE: It was just one sorry tear in the clouds. It's gone. See: dark as an asshole.

MCGUINNESS: You should know.

CHOTKOWSKI: And *now*, no Jap could make us out, we're starting to zig-zag. Figures.

(*A very young sailor, Seaman BILLY DUPRE, appears, taking a final bite of a banana.*)

HOBIE: Fucking Navy...

(*The Marines now notice the sailor.*)

HOBIE: No offense there, swabbie.

BILLY: You men wanta smoke? You should go below decks.

MCGUINNESS: You should suck my dick.

DUANE: It's an oven down there.

BILLY: There's a black-out, though.

MCGUINNESS: Like say there *was* a pig-boat fulla demented gooks out there, you

think they could glauam the glowing butt of this fucking Lucky?

BILLY: You aren't the only men on this ship.

CHOTKOWSKI: That's a fact. And that means...

BILLY: Maybe *you* guys don't die. But the rest of us do.

*(Pause. CHOTKOWSKI, with elaborate disdain, flicks his cigarette over the side.)*

BILLY: See, the rest of us—we forget where we are, for a second or two, we throw a candy-wrapper over the side, a banana peel— *(As he speaks, he tucks the banana-peel away in a pocket of his dungarees.)*

CHOTKOWSKI: *One cigarette butt, Seaweed.*

BILLY: Times how many men on this leaking tub?

—three hundred and fifty cigarette butts.

And how many "Dear John" letters do you nautical bell-hops get?

All of *them* in the drink.

We leave a trail. The Japs find us. Down we go.

But you guys don't die.

*(Pause. MCGUINESS stubs his cigarette out on the deck.)*

MCGUINESS: So Commodore, tell me—who do I ask for permission to take a dump? *(Satisfied with his dig, gets up and signals for DUANE to go with him.)*  
Duane.

DUANE: I already took a dump, McGuinness. Let me finish my smoke.

MCGUINESS: *(Pointing at BILLY)* O K. But some place where the air don't smell like a mackerel's heinder?

DUANE: *(Not getting it)* Don't believe I ever sniffed a mackerel up that close.

*(MCGUINESS, sighing, shakes his head and exits.)*

*(With that heckler gone, BILLY tries to explain himself.)*

BILLY: A buddy of mine, he was on a ship...and they think it's because *they* were leaving a wake of crap, like a giant floating arrow: "Japs! Hit this!" ...

CHOTKOWSKI: Did your buddy make it? *(Pointing up)* Or is he up there?

HOBIE: "Hey you—with the wings and the harp! Put out that butt!"

BILLY: My buddy, I think, was dessert. For some well-fed shark.

*(Pause)*

CHOTKOWSKI: *You* seen any fighting?

BILLY: Not yet. Does that mean I can't have an opinion?

*(CHOTKOWSKI stares at BILLY a moment, then starts to exit.)*

CHOTKOWSKI: Pogies. Christ. *(He is gone.)*

DUANE: (*In a reverie*) Three hundred and fifty cigarette butts...

HOBIE: (*To BILLY, answering his question*) It means you don't know enough shit to concoct an opinion.

Fucking pogie...

(*He grinds his cigarette out and exits.*)

(*DUANE and BILLY, left alone, look out at the dark.*)

DUANE: I know you weren't talking 'bout all at once. But it *coulda* been all at once...shooting out in the dark, what a sight that'd be...three hundred and fifty falling stars...like a *school* of fucking flying fish.

BILLY: They *are* fucking, ya know.

(*DUANE looks at BILLY, surprised.*)

BILLY: How do you think they get up there? They start to hump way down, is what I heard. And they buck and they thrash all the way to the top, and their wings are pumping, faster and faster, and when they come—they come so hard—they go up. In the air. They just—take off...and it's like they were back in the ocean again—that dark, and deep—'till they fall back into the sky below 'em, ker-splunk, ker-splunk, ker-splunk, ker-splunk: "What the *hell* was that?" But they can't figure it out. So they shrug and they keep on fugging.

(*Pause. DUANE—who's never had someone share one of his reveries—is unsettled.*)

DUANE: You been at sea too long, Jack Tar. You're going Asiatic.

BILLY: Maybe I am.

DUANE: (*Moving away from BILLY*) Well I need me another smoke. So I'm headin' below. Like you said.

BILLY: It's an oven. *You* said. (*Pause*) I won't tell. If you want to stay topside.

DUANE: Some other time.

BILLY: You bet. We can shoot the breeze...

(*DUANE shrugs, embarrassed, and exits. Hungry for contact, BILLY watches him go.*)

BILLY: We can shoot a few Nips.

We can shoot ourselves.

Fuck. *Fuck*. FUCK.

(*BILLY starts to exit, when HOBIE re-enters, from the opposite side.*)

HOBIE: Hey sailor.

(*BILLY stops.*)

HOBIE: What's your name?

BILLY: Billy.

HOBIE: Come here.

BILLY: What for?

*(But BILLY, before he can get an answer, approaches.)*

HOBIE: I haven't seen my wife in a year and a half. She don't write, anymore. She useta...

BILLY: Why did she stop?

HOBIE: Something told her I was expendable.

*(Pause)*

*(HOBIE suddenly grabs the sailor, kissing him hard on the mouth.)*

*(BILLY pulls away, firm but not fighting. He stares at HOBIE.)*

BILLY: But you aren't. Marines are immortal. Right?

*(Now BILLY kisses HOBIE—first tenderly, and then more and more ferociously.)*

*(The lights fade.)*

## Scene Two

*(On the bridge. A few moments earlier. CAPTAIN ALBERS looks out at the night, through a pair of binoculars. LIEUTENANT DE LUCCA eyes him with concern. Both men are wearing life-jackets.)*

DE LUCCA: Calm tonight.

ALBERS: *(Lowering the binoculars)* It's always calm.

DE LUCCA: Are you tight, sir?

*(Pause. ALBERS taps his chest.)*

ALBERS: Calm in here. Where I know things. *(Pause)* Am I *what*?

DE LUCCA: I heard about your son.

ALBERS: My son.

DE LUCCA: I'm sorry, sir.

ALBERS: Did you two ever meet?

DE LUCCA: At the Officers' Club, one time. At Pearl. I was tight. I thought he was you.

ALBERS: I wish he was. I wish *he* was standing here...

*(The light gets brighter.)*

DE LUCCA: Sir?

ALBERS: Right here. Looking out at the night...feeling the breeze...

DE LUCCA: The moon's come out.

ALBERS: Smelling the air...

DE LUCCA: Do you think we should make a course-correction?

ALBERS: Rotten coconut-smell...what a terrible stink... Must be a raggedy-ass little island out there. One pathetic palm tree. One dead Jap underneath it. Big buck-teeth in a grin... *(He takes a much-read letter out of his pocket, unfolds it.)*

DE LUCCA: *Sir?* You did give us a standing order: if the weather changed—while you were asleep—

ALBERS: Am I sleeping?

*(DE LUCCA, hearing ALBERS's tone, looks away.)*

ALBERS: What's our speed?

DE LUCCA: About seventeen knots—

ALBERS: —which is fast enough to out-run a sub, don't you think?

If a sub should spot us. If there *is* a sub out there.

If we start to zig-zag, won't that slow us down?

DE LUCCA: Yes sir.

ALBERS: Do you want to slow down?

DE LUCCA: If the moon stays out—

ALBERS: I see one rip in the clouds. And it's mending.... Look.

DE LUCCA: I'm looking, sir. We're a target.

*(Pause)*

ALBERS: My son would have broken, I think.

DE LUCCA: No sir.

*(ALBERS reads from the letter:)*

ALBERS: "I'm afraid of the men." This is what he was writing—just before he died. "My own men. McGuiness thinks it's funny, whenever he finds a dead Jap, to stand over the wretched creature and piss in its mouth."

DE LUCCA: That got by the censors?

ALBERS: Didn't go through the mail. It was found on his body. *(He points at a stain on the letter.)* This is his blood.

*(Pause)*

DE LUCCA: We *are* a target, sir.

ALBERS: I know. *(To himself)* Good. *(Pause)* Good.

DE LUCCA: No sir.

ALBERS: The moonlight's almost gone.

(DE LUCCA *stares at ALBERS, refusing to flinch.*)

ALBERS: All right. Give the order to zig-zag.

DE LUCCA: Thank you, sir.

ALBERS: And fuck *you*, Mister De Lucca. (*He crumples the letter up.*) Now tell me not to throw this over the side.

(DE LUCCA *meets ALBERS's stare.*)

(ALBERS *holds onto the crumpled-up letter.*)

DE LUCCA: I don't think your boy would have broken, sir.

ALBERS: You thought he was me? At that club? My son was *handsome*, goddammit to hell. My son was at least a head taller. And he was young...

DE LUCCA: The light was bad. It was darker than this—

ALBERS: Give the order, Mister De Lucca.

DE LUCCA: Aye aye, sir.

(DE LUCCA *exits. The light changes, darker. ALBERS looks again through his binoculars.*)

(*Through the P A system, ALBERS hears the voice of his son.*)

VOICE ON THE P A: "I'm afraid of the men. My own men."

(ALBERS *looks around, startled.*)

VOICE ON THE P A: "McGuinness thinks it's funny, whenever he finds a dead Jap, to stand over the wretched creature and piss in its mouth. I was horrified, at first, and then ashamed. And now I'm not. I'm not anything. Now I just watch. Now it just seems like war. I'm afraid of *myself*."

ALBERS: David? (*He looks again through his binoculars, frantically searching the dark.*)

VOICE ON THE P A: "Last night it rained till the water in the foxhole I was in was up to my knees, and one side of the trench gave way, and uncovered a young Jap soldier in the muck, who hadn't started to rot completely away, except for this hole in his skull where the brains had been..."

ALBERS: David, where are you?

VOICE ON THE P A: "...The hole filled up with water too, all the night we were there, pinned down by artillery fire...and I started to plunk little pieces of coral rock in the hole in his Nipponese head. I don't know why. To hear the sound: 'splish-splish-splish-splish...'"

(*The voice fades out. The Captain suddenly stops, his binoculars trained on something.*)

ALBERS: What in the name of God is that?

(DE LUCCA *re-enters, on edge.*)

DE LUCCA: Something out there?

ALBERS: (*Pointing*) Against the moon. Two men. Can you see them?

Floating in mid-air.

Like fairies...

Holding onto each other...

(*More concerned than ever, DE LUCCA watches ALBERS.*)

DE LUCCA: You should try and get some rest, sir. I've squared away the watch.

ALBERS: The boy on radar say anything was around?

DE LUCCA: We're alone. All we have to do now is stay on course. Which I think even I can manage. (*Trying to make the captain smile*) Unless you agree with my father, sir—he used to say, "Kiddo, if brains were dynamite, you couldn't blow your nose."

(ALBERS *does smile.*)

ALBERS: All right. I don't think I can sleep, but all right. I'll pull a little blanket-duty. Call me any time—

DE LUCCA: Aye aye.

(ALBERS *starts to walk off, pauses.*)

ALBERS: I want you to understand, De Lucca.

DE LUCCA: Sir?

ALBERS: I'm glad my boy is dead. He's safe. I was always afraid...

(DE LUCCA *waits for ALBERS to finish.*)

(ALBERS *only stands there, looking out.*)

DE LUCCA: (*Prompting*) Yes sir?

ALBERS: I was always afraid.

(ALBERS *exits. DE LUCCA watches him go.*)

(*The lights fade.*)