

Drinks Sampler

A Play by Patrick M Brennan
v1.6
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CHARACTERS

MAJA, female, 20s

FRANK, male, 30

ANDY, male, 40s

(The Scene: A dingy bar. FRANK and MAJA sit at one end of the bar, ANDY at the other end, all with drinks, MAJA puffing on a cigarette. FRANK is worn out at thirty. MAJA is a twenty-something knockout. ANDY looks like a successful businessman of about forty.)

FRANK:

That's right. I was in Kuwait. And, Maja -- Maja, right?

MAJA:

That's right. Maja.

FRANK:

Yeah. Maja, I saw a lot of shit out there they don't want to be in, you know, general circulation. A lot of shit.

MAJA:

Is that a fact?

FRANK:

Oh yeah. Like here's one. We were fighting mostly at night, you know? We like to say, "We own the night." And there was this -- it's really weird -- right after an Iraqi tank takes a hit from one of our Sabot* rounds, there's this, like, glowing dust in the air for a few minutes afterward. We never saw anything like it. Nobody could tell us what the hell it was, either. I mean I think nobody *knew*, you know? We'd just never seen it before. But then our CO told us what it was, after all. See, the round is made out of uranium. And when it hits, it breaks up into dust, and the energy of the impact makes it glow. Like a watch dial, you know? Cause it's still radioactive.

MAJA:

They don't make shells out of uranium.

FRANK:

Yeah, these shells they do. They make 'em out of uranium.

*Pronounced "SAY-bow".

MAJA:

Look, I'm not stupid. They make atomic bombs out of uranium, not tank shells. OK?

FRANK:

OK, OK, you're not stupid. I didn't mean to say you were stupid. (*beat*) I'm sorry.

MAJA:

All right. Apology accepted. So how come you're not still in the Army?

FRANK:

Well, once I got back home, I started getting sick. A lot. I went to a buncha doctors, but none of them could figure out what was wrong with me.

MAJA:

Oh, you mean Gulf War Syndrome?

FRANK:

Yeah. Exactly.

MAJA:

So-called Gulf War Syndrome?

FRANK:

Whattya mean, "So-called"?

MAJA:

My father says that there's no such thing.

FRANK:

Oh, is that so?

MAJA:

Oh yeah, he says that the soldiers who *claim* to have it are either hypochondriacs, or they're trying to sue the government to get them to pay for diseases they've already got. Or else they're just faking it to get the money. No offense.

FRANK:

Oh, and just who is your father, then?

MAJA:

He works for the Heritage Foundation.

FRANK:

I've heard of them. Isn't that one of those right-wing think tanks?

MAJA:

It's a non-partisan research organization.

FRANK:

Sure it is.

MAJA:

Oh hey, thanks for the drink. I really gotta go.

FRANK:

Oh yeah? Well, uh, you think maybe I could get your phone number or something?

MAJA:

I don't think so.

(*EXIT MAJA.*)

FRANK:

That's okay, she wasn't my type anyway. Hey, Bartender, hit me again.

ANDY:

You got that right. She definitely was not your type. Hey Lou, set us both up with another round, on me.

FRANK:

Thanks, mister.

ANDY:

Name's Andy.

FRANK:

Thanks, Andy. I'm Frank.

ANDY:

To your health, Frank. (*drinks.*) Now what do you think her father would think if he knew that his daughter was a hooker?

FRANK:

Her, a hooker? No way.

ANDY:

Hey, didn't you say you were in the Army? You'd think you'd be able to spot 'em.

FRANK:

Well, yeah, I guess. It's just that, I don't know, I just always figured that a hooker would be a Democrat. You know, by definition.

ANDY:

All right, never mind. I heard you say you were in the Gulf War, is that right?

FRANK:

Yeah. I was a tanker.

ANDY:

A tanker?

FRANK:

Yeah. Means I was a crewman in a tank.

ANDY:

Oh, okay.

FRANK:

And I was in Kuwait. For all the damn good it did me.

ANDY:

Oh yeah? You think they did something to you, huh?

FRANK:

I don't know what, but yeah, they did something to me, all right.

ANDY:

Yeah, but it could have been anything. I read that it could have been that the Iraqis were using germ warfare on our troops. Or it could be you're suffering the aftereffects of the oil well fires.

FRANK:

I suppose that's possible.

ANDY:

Here, let me get you another one. Hey Lou, give this man a double. Me, too. You got that? *A double.*

FRANK:

I don't know, Andy. I don't know who to trust, you know? Sure, maybe the Iraqis dropped something on us. Maybe it was that anthrax vaccine the Army gave us. You know? I hear they never tested it before. Maybe it really was those uranium shells.

ANDY:

Uranium shells. Only the Army would think of making shells out of uranium, right?

FRANK:

Yeah, and you know, my uncle was in the Army when they were testin' those A-bombs in the desert, in the fifties? And he was in a couple of those tests. And when I was in Kuwait, well, that's when he up and dies from cancer. Cancer of the balls, can you believe that?

ANDY:

Jesus! Ow!

FRANK:

Yeah, and you know, they told my uncle the same shit they told me. You're not sick. It's all in your head. You were never exposed to anything harmful. Nothing we did could have possibly hurt you. Now shut up. Don't talk about it. And no, we won't pay your medical bills.

ANDY:

That's the government for you.

FRANK:

Yeah. My uncle was just a guinea pig for them. And you remember Tuskegee? All those black guys they infected with syphilis, just to see what would happen to 'em. I don't think the government has any scruples when it comes to this shit. And it scares me, you know?

ANDY:

Oh yeah, I can see how it would.

FRANK:

That's why I stopped going to the VA doctors. You know? I don't know what they're doing to me.

ANDY:

Sure.

FRANK:

I mean, if they'd just come right out and shoot me, it wouldn't be so bad. But when you've got no idea what they did, it's scary. It's scary to think you could be infected with something, and you won't have any idea till you die some horrible painful death years later. Maybe not even then.

ANDY:

Jesus. Well here's to not being infected.

FRANK:

I'll drink to that.

(ANDY and FRANK drink.)

FRANK:

You know, I wouldn't take it so personal, except they were the only people who wanted the damn war in the first place! And now they don't wanna pay my bills. And for what? Cheap oil, that's all. That fucking war, it was all about cheap oil.

ANDY:

Well, it was about a lot of things.

FRANK:

Yeah, keep telling yourself that. Cheap oil, my friend.

ANDY:

Well, I don't know. You figure the government's gotta do some testing. I mean, they have to figure out what all this shit'll do so they can protect against it, don't you think? And abuses like Tuskegee, well, they can't happen anymore.

FRANK:

I don't think so. You know what I think? Back in the Tuskegee days, the government didn't even try to cover it up. After all, the voters were all white, right? So who cared? But now, they've gotten much better at keeping it a secret. They've had years of practice. And the test subjects, they don't care about the test subjects, they're just like me. We're just little people. So who cares?

ANDY:

Maybe. But you know, all those countries out there are trying as hard as they can to get biological weapons these days. And we, I mean, you know, the government, unless we know what these weapons can do, there's no hope of defending against them. Then we're all vulnerable. Better to do *some* experiments than to be totally vulnerable, don't you think?

FRANK:

I don't know. I can't really think right now.

(FRANK drinks. Suddenly, FRANK recoils from his glass, holds his lip in his hands.

FRANK:

Ow! Fuck!

ANDY:

What? What's the matter?

FRANK:

I think I cut myself on this glass. Oh yeah, I'm bleeding all over the place.

ANDY:

Hey, Lou, what kind of a place you running here? C'mon, give him another glass. And a towel.. You gonna be OK?

FRANK:

Yeah, I'll be fine. It's turning out to be a great day, all right. Hey listen, I'm really bleeding all over the place. I'd better go to the men's and clean this up. Thanks for the drink.

(EXIT FRANK.)

ANDY:

Hey Lou, can I have that glass? Thanks.

(ANDY takes a plastic bag out of his pocket, and places the glass into the bag as MAJA enters.)

ANDY:

What the hell are you doing back here?

MAJA:

I forgot my purse. Is that a crime?

ANDY:

Fine. As long as you're here, you might as well take this back with you. *(He hands her the bagged glass.)* You could have saved me the trouble of doing it this way in the first place.

MAJA:

What, by taking him home? And getting exposed myself? I'm not getting paid enough to do that, forget it.

ANDY:

You won't be getting paid at all if he comes back out and sees us.

MAJA:

I'll bring this back, and then I'm quitting. This time for sure.

ANDY:

You're not quitting. You can't quit. What would Daddy say if he found out about you? So just forget about it and do your job.

MAJA:

Enjoy your drink. Hope you choke on it, you shit.

(EXIT MAJA.)

ANDY:

Tanker and hooker. It would've been perfect. But no, I've gotta improvise cause she doesn't like his looks. Risk of infection? Please.

(ANDY finishes his drink.)

ANDY:

Hey, Lou. Give him another one. On me. And another, and another, and another.

(EXIT ANDY, whistling the theme from "The X-Files".)

BLACKOUT.

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Drinks Sampler (v1.4) had its first public performance on July 19-21, 2001, at the Hovey Players' Summer Shorts Festival in Waltham MA.

Director: Joe DeGuglielmo

MAJA: Gina Colombo

FRANK: Kent Miller

ANDY: Bill Spera