

What Are the Odds?



A ten-minute play by:

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What Are the Odds?

Place: Shore of a lake. Time: Present. Two women, GLENDA and JOLENE, both late twenties, laze on lawn chairs. They are dressed for the outdoors and brandish fishing rods. Not much is biting. A cooler sits at Glenda's side, a tackle box open beside it.

GLENDA

Having fun?

JOLENE

(unconvincing)

Yeah.

GLENDA

No you're not.

JOLENE

Yes, Glenda. I am.

GLENDA

When you have fun, you talk to the fish.

JOLENE

I don't talk to fish –

GLENDA

“Here, little fishy. Big blood worm for your supper. Doesn't that look yummy? Mmm-mmm...” What's the matter, Jolene?

JOLENE

I told you. You weren't listening.

Glenda opens the cooler, pulls out a plastic jug.

GLENDA

I'm listening. I was just trying to get my fucking line unsnagged. *(She offers Jolene the jug.)* Cider? *(Jolene shakes her head no.)* It's good and hard.

Jolene takes the jug, opens it, gulps. Then she puts it on the ground between them.

JOLENE

I said it's Roy's birthday

GLENDA

Roy's birth –

(realizing)

Oh. I'm so sorry, Jo. Really. I didn't know.

JOLENE

He would have been thirty.

GLENDA

Thirty. Wow....Who would've thought *your* best friend when you were growing up and *my* best friend when I was growing up, half a state away, would get together? I mean it's freaky. I almost died when I walked into that funeral home and saw Sweigie weeping over the casket.

JOLENE

They both sold pharmaceuticals. They went to conventions.

GLENDA

Well, yeah. Sure. But what are the odds?

JOLENE

Up until the....accident....up until then, I was sending him leftover scones from the bakery. Priority overnight. He liked the currant ones. He said my scones were "to die for." Not that they had anything to do with it.

GLENDA

You do make a mean scone....

JOLENE

I heard that coincidences – big ones – happen to us about once a month. Twelve of them a year. We just forget.

GLENDA

Not as big as Roy and Sweigie, I'll tell you. I remember those....I'm sorry, Jo.

JOLENE

He's in a better place maybe. *(She points at the lake.)* Watch there!

GLENDA

Huh?

JOLENE

You got a nibble.

Glenda plays the end of the rod a little. They fish and drink.

GLENDA

Jo, did you ever wonder how, if you'd made one different choice, even one really small one, you'd have had like a totally different life?

JOLENE

You mean like taking another job?

GLENDA

Smaller than that. Tiny. Like now, for instance. You throw your line in there, you don't get a bite. You throw it in there, one yard away, you catch a fish –

JOLENE

(starts to reel in)

Oh, should I cast over there?

GLENDA

Listen. You catch a fish. But, then, as you're taking the fish off the hook, it wriggles like crazy. You get the hook caught in your thumb. You can't get it out.

JOLENE

Youch! Can't you get the hook caught in *your* thumb?

Glenda puts down her rod, moves behind Jolene.

GLENDA

Humor me. Just this once....So you get the hook caught and I take you to the emergency. You meet a guy out in the waiting room whose brother sells sporting goods. You go to his store, on a whim. To pick up some new sinkers.

JOLENE

I could use some split shot. And a number 3 bobber.

GLENDA

The brother – I'll call him Pete – Pete talks you into trying fly fishing, sells you a fly rod and a pair of hip waders. That Saturday you go out by yourself. You forget you need a trout stamp. The fish warden catches you, writes you up a citation, and when you pay it, the check bounces –

JOLENE

Sounds like something I'd do.

GLENDA

So you go down to the fish commission to pay your fine, and the office manager there – she's really hot by the way –

JOLENE

Mmm....

GLENDA

(pacing the shoreline)

The manager mentions the Friday fish special at Big Jim's. She asks you if you want to go there for dinner. You accept, if reluctantly –

JOLENE

What about you? I'm not going to sneak around on you, am I?

GLENDA

Pretend I don't exist. You accept. Reluctantly.

JOLENE

She's hot?

GLENDA

Like a griddle of flapjacks.

JOLENE

Well, in that case, sure. I'd gladly go....

Glenda shoots her a look.

GLEENDA

Soooo you go to Big Jim's and find out this woman, Regine, is a huge bore. All she can talk about is lesbian this and lesbian that. How lesbians are doing it for themselves, and lesbians are like candles in the wind and lesbians make your brown eyes blue.

JOLENE

That would bore me.

GLEENDA

Except you're stuck, at least for the evening, right? But then this Regine gets a fish bone caught in her throat –

JOLENE

Omigod!

GLEENDA

And you end up performing the Heimlich on her, which doesn't really do any good, but the bone comes out anyway and Regine lives to tell the story to about a million people, because she's like this really big talker see.

JOLENE

I'm not too fond of big talkers. Present company excluded.

GLEENDA

She tells everyone and her sister. The Greenfield Grapevine picks it up and runs a front-page story, with a picture of you in front of the bakery, and all of a sudden you're selling more scones than Victoria's Secret sells lacy panties.

Jolene points at herself in surprise. She sits up proudly in her chair.

GLEENDA

(cont.)

It's through the roof, Jo. You can't even keep up. You hire six new assistants and open a second shop, but you still can't keep up. You start franchising, and pretty soon a fair likeness of you is on shop signs and take-out bags in Minot, South Dakota, and Bisbee, Arizona. *Jolene's Scones.*

Jolene sees her name in lights.

GLEENDA

(cont.)

You're rich and famous. You're bigger than Ellen and Oprah and Rosie put together.

JOLENE

That's big.

GLEENDA

All because you cast your line there *(points)* instead of there. One yard. That's the only difference.

Glenda sits. Jolene puts down her rod, stands and ambles over to the cooler.

JOLENE

So what's that like *mean*.

GLEENDA

What's it mean?

JOLENE

Yeah. That life's all just random? That no matter how much we try to control things, the choices we make don't really count?

GLEENDA

They count. Sure. I mean, you follow a particular recipe, you get a certain result, right? The brioche turns out like brioche.

JOLENE

Unless you're like at a high altitude and the yeast gets all whacked out.

GLEENDA

Okay, but within reason. You do something, you know what's going to happen. It's just that we do so many things without really thinking about them. Intuition. That's what really counts. I mean, do you always put exactly the same number of currants in every scone?

JOLENE

To tell you the truth –

GLEENDA

No. You'd be crazy if you did. You take a scoop of them. Maybe it's a level scoop, maybe it's a little shy. You dump the currants, mix it all up –

JOLENE

Fold. Not mix. You get muffins if you mix.

GLEENDA

You *fold* in the currants, roll out the dough, cut the scones –

JOLENE

No!

GLEENDA

What?!

JOLENE

You never roll. You mold. You shape. But you never roll.

GLEENDA

Okay, you *cut* the scones. Some have over a dozen currants in them –

JOLENE

Oh, they all have at least eighteen –

GLEENDA

Some have less. See, we do most things without a lot of accuracy or logic.

Jolene sits on the cooler.

JOLENE

Or feeling.

GLEENDA

If we thought through every single action, it'd take us all day just to brush our teeth. We'd be spitting at noon, flossing when the sun went down and gargling when Conan comes on. We'd never get out of the bathroom.

JOLENE

Actually, sometimes you –

Glenda kneels beside Jolene.

GLENDA

I mean, who knows why things happen? We make our beds, we lie in them. We live, we learn. We bask in the sun of our good choices, whether we know we've made them or not. We do a little fishing, we have a couple drinks. (*teasingly*) We make a little love....

JOLENE

So... You think Roy just gave up? Intuitively, I mean.

GLENDA

I think his soul was so heavy it couldn't bear the weight of living anymore. That's all. And then the means to do it was right there.

Jolene picks up the tackle box.

JOLENE

Pharmaceuticals. Glen, did you ever wonder how those guys don't all become druggies? I mean it's like you've got this personal suicide sales kit....

(*picks up a lure*)

Chock full of tablets and capsules... caplets, gel caps, liqui-caps... needles. Tempting you, luring you....

Jolene looks like she might put a lure in her mouth.

GLENDA

Jo.

JOLENE

Just luring you... on....

GLENDA

Jo, put the lure down.

Jolene throws the lure in the tackle box, snaps the box shut, drops it on the ground.

GLEENDA

(cont.)

Well...maybe you're right. Though you have to admit that Sweigie had the means to do it and he never did....Look, the beauty of it was they had each other for all those years. That's what counts.

JOLENE

You think?

GLEENDA

I do.

JOLENE

I heard your odds of drowning in the bathtub are better than your odds of dying in a natural disaster.

GLEENDA

Yeah?

JOLENE

I heard every year donkeys kill more people than plane crashes. That you're more likely to be attacked by a cow than a shark.

Glenda returns to her lawn chair.

GLEENDA

Sounds like the farm animals are out to get us.

Jolene wends her way back to her seat.

JOLENE

I heard more people are killed by vending machines toppling on them than from poisonous snake bites. That you're more likely to die falling out of bed than falling off a building. That the odds of croaking from flesh-eating bacteria are eighteen times better than your odds of winning the lottery.

GLEENDA

Really? Flesh-eating bacteria. Huh! That's something.

JOLENE

That's what I heard....

Glenda picks up the jug of cider, opens it, swigs.

GLEENDA

I guess it's probably true then. Huh!...Jo, what do you think the odds are that we'll finish all this cider before we catch a fish?

JOLENE

Pretty good, I'd say. Pretty *darn* good.

Jolene plays the end of her line.

JOLENE

(cont.)

Here, little trout...Here, trouty wouty...your take-out's ready for pick-up. Come and get it...*ding, ding, ding, ding, ding...*

Lights out.