

It'll Go Viral

You hear that? "NASA detected otters on Mars!"

My wife, Dianne, rolls her eyes. "WATER. They detected water on Mars. Either turn the TV up or put in your hearing aids."

I love our pillow talk, the first hour of our day, sipping coffee, watching the news in bed, and discussing our goals. Retirement is good.

Hmm. "Like they say, "Where there's water, there's otters."

Dianne retrieves the remote from under the blanket and raises the volume. "Shush. I want to hear this."

While the Good Morning Show prattles on about some British royalty crap, I research my idea on the phone.

She mutes the commercial break, and I talk fast before the food segment begins. "It sounds silly at first, but this one's a keeper. Listen to this..."

I share.

"I've been researching on Google, and I'm sure I can do it. My creative juices are flowing."

She slides me the side-eye. "Just keep them away from me. She tamps down the covers between us. "You need a job. Bag groceries or something."

"Wait... be right back." I slowly dismount our way-too-high bed and shuffle off for my third leak of the day. I return with my circling-dog-searching-for-a-good-spot move. *Not even a smile.*

"I can test it on Twitter."

"You mean X?"

"Yeah. No, Elon. Maybe on Tinder."

"What the hell you talking about?"

"I mean TikTok."

She flips on her side and gazes at the TV. "Hmm. Candied furry pork with milk turds."

"What are they making?" I put in my hearing aids.

"Candied curried pork with milk curds."

"Who eats this stuff? Listen, if I practice, I should have it mastered by the end of the day. You're good with the phone. Will you record me?"

A deep sigh. "If you promise to let me be. Now, can I finish watching this before I shower?"

I slide out of bed, slip on my bathrobe, and head to my makeshift basement office. It's freezing. I turn on the space heater with one hand and wake my PC with the other.

I google the term, and it's still alive in my autofill. The fifth entry down is my favorite; demoted from the fourth yesterday.

The screen lights up with a sexy cowgirl wearing too much makeup. I crank up the speaker and hit the play arrow, focusing on the shape of her lips and the nuances of her tone.

I quietly mimic as if Dianne could hear me in the shower two floors up.

It's all wrong. I take a breath and lighten up on myself. I'm an old man with no musical training. This is not for amateurs—yet I feel the calling.

I try it again. My rhythm's wrong, the pitch is off, and it's still at one-tenth the tempo.

I repeatedly play the clip, pausing every few seconds to absorb the most subtle details. Just as I'm getting it, the basement lights flicker off and on. Is she out of the shower already?

I pause the clip and struggle up the steps to breakfast.

Dianne sets the kitchen table and pours our juice. "How's it going, Mozart?"

"This is way different than classical, wise-ass."

"Honestly, I don't get it," She butters her toast, "but you do you."

"You'll see. TikTok's not just for kids anymore."

Now I'm jacked. No, psyched. I rush through breakfast, peck Dianne on the cheek, and hurry down to my curmudgeon cave, closing the door behind me.

I play the clip dozens more times, practicing with it, then alone. I sound better each time.

This could be my ticket to stardom. *America's Got Talent*? At my age, with this act, it might be a great angle.

I wonder how many TikTok plays I'll need to buy a top-shelf recording studio. Then I return to my practice.

Two hours later, I emerge from the depths, semi-victorious and hungry for lunch.

Dianne's already prepping for dinner. The kitchen stinks of curry. My stomach casts its dissenting vote. She glances up from a pan of what looks like spoiled milk with a sour smile.

Swallowing bile, I say, "I'll make our salads." Who knows what might be on her hands?

I chop the vegetables, silently rehearsing. Confidence building, I avoid the subject of my performance during lunch. She does, too.

After we eat, I push away from the table and say, "I'm getting there, but it still needs some work. It's way too slow. It'll speed up with practice. Should be perfect by dinner."

She raises her eyebrows, starts to say something, then stops.

I don't ask. "Gotta get back to work." On the way down the steps, I grumble, "Bag groceries, my ass."

I make a few more attempts with no improvement. I need a break. Like a silent fart, dinner vapors seep into the basement.

Somehow my PC visits a porn site while I'm not looking. The speakers blare a well-rehearsed, "Give it to me Daddy! Give it to me real good."

"Shit. I left the volume at 10.

Dianne bangs on the door, yelling, "I can hear that. What's wrong with you?"

"Thinking fast, I yell, "Damned candy commercials."

Oh-kay. Back to work. For some reason, I'm not feeling it. A mini power nap might do the trick. I lay my head on my folded arms only to hear loud, rapid beeping.

Get off the keyboard, dummy. Glad I'd lowered the volume, I shove the keyboard forward as if it schemed to make me look silly and lay my head down again.

The nap wasn't happening. I picture myself on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville. Dolly Parton introduces me as Willie Nelson's offspring if he banged a mountain goat. That scene doesn't help.

I tell myself, "I might not be as bad as you think. Time to run it by Dianne. She won't hold back if it sucks."

I call her down. She pulls up a chair, sits across from me, and sets up the phone recorder.

I finally realize that at my age, I can't purposely make my voice crack. It just wants to. I clear my throat. "Ready for this?"

"Shoot."

With perfect enunciation, I let 'er rip:

"Oooh...Deee...Lay...Oooh...Deee...Lay...Oooh...Deee...Lay...Deee...Hoo." The last Deee, in my best falsetto. "Like that, but four times in a row. Quite the Yodel, huh?"

She turns the recording off and stares at the ceiling for what seems like thirty-seven minutes. She slowly nods. "Keep it slow. Mess up your hair, take out your teeth, and perform it in your Jocky's.

It'll go viral."