Hey You Down There
by Harold Rosset

Calvin Spender drained his coffee cup and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He burped loudly and then proceeded to fill a corn cob pipe with coarsely shredded tobacco. He scratched a match across the top of the table and holding it to his pipe, he sucked noisily until billows of acrid smoke poured from his mouth.

Dora Spender sat across the table from her husband, her breakfast scarcely touched. She coughed lightly, and then, as no frown appeared on Calvin’s brow, she said, ‘Are you going to dig in the well this morning, Calvin?’ Calvin fixed his small red-rimmed eyes upon her, and, as if she had not spoken, said, ‘Git going at the chores right away. You’re going to be hauling up dirt.’

‘Yes, Calvin,’ Dora whispered. Calvin cleared his throat, and the action caused his Adam’s apple to move rapidly under the loose red skin on his neck. He rose from the table and went out of the kitchen door, kicking viciously at the tawny cat which had been lying on the doorstep.

Dora gazed at him and wondered for the thousandth time what it was that Calvin reminded her of. It was not some other person—she knew that. Sometimes it seemed as though the answer was about to spring to her mind, as just now when Calvin had cleared his throat. But always it stopped just short of her consciousness. It was disturbing to know with such certainty that Calvin looked like something other than himself and yet not know what that something was. Some day, Dora knew, the answer would come to her. She rose hurriedly from the table and set about her chores.

Halfway between the house and the barn, a doughnut-shaped mound of earth surrounded a hole. Calvin went to the edge of the hole and stared down into it distrustfully. Only necessity could have forced him to tackle this task, but it was either this or digging the hauling of barrels and barrels of water each day from Nord Fisher’s farm half a mile down the road.

Calvin’s herd of scrub cattle was small, but the amount of water it drank was astonishing. For two weeks now, ever since his well had gone dry, Calvin had been hauling water, and the disagreeable chore was becoming more unpleasant because of neighbor Nord’s hints that some kind of payment for the water would only be fair.

Several feet back from the edge of the hole Calvin had driven a heavy iron stake into the ground, and to this was attached a crude rope ladder. The rope ladder had become necessary when the hole had reached a depth well beyond the length of any wooden ladder Calvin owned.

Calvin hoped desperately that he would not have to go much further. He estimated that he was now down fifty or sixty feet, a common depth for many wells in the area. His greatest fear was that he would hit a layer of rock which would bring for the services of a well-drilling outfit. Both his fortune, and his credit rating were far too low for such a team. Calvin picked up a bucket to which was attached a long rope and lowered it into the hole. It was Dora’s backbreaking task to pull the bucket hand over hand after Calvin had filled it from the bottom of the hole. With a mumbled curse, Calvin emptied his pipe and started down the rope ladder. By the time he got to the bottom of the hole and had filled the bucket, Dora should be there to haul it up. If she weren’t, she wouldn’t hear about it.

From the house, Dora saw Calvin prepare to enter the well and she worked with desperate haste to complete her chores. She reached the hole just as a muffled shout from below indicated that the bucket was full. Calvin drew it up. She emptied it and then lowered it into the hole again. While she waited for the second bucket load, she examined the contents of the first. She was disappointed to find it had only the normal moistness of underground earth. No water seeped from it.

In her own way, Dora was deeply religious and at each tenth bucket she pulled up she murmured an urgent prayer that it would contain more water in it than earth. She had settled at praying at every tenth bucket load because she did not believe it in good taste to pester God with every bucket. Also, she varied the wording of each prayer, feeling that God must become tired with the same plea repeated over and over.

On this particular morning as she lowered the bucket for its tenth loading, she prayed, ‘Please God, let something happen this time… Let something really and truly happen so I won’t have to haul up any more dirt.’ Something happened almost immediately. As the rope slackened in her hands indicating that the bucket had reached the bottom, a scream of sheer terror came up from the hole, and the rope ladder jerked violently. Whimpering sounds of mortal fear sounded faintly, and the ladder grew taut with heavy strain. Dora fell to her knees and peered down into the darkness. ‘Calvin,’ she called, ‘are you all right? What is it?’

Then with startling suddenness, Calvin appeared. At first Dora was not sure it was Calvin. The usual redness of his face was gone; now it was a yellowish green. He was trembling violently and had trouble breathing. ‘It must have been a heart attack,’ Dora thought, and tried hard to control the sobs rising up within her.

Calvin lay upon the ground, panting. Finally he gained control of himself. Under ordinary circumstances, Calvin did not converse with Dora but now he seemed eager to talk. ‘You know what happened down there?’ he said in a shaky voice.

‘You know what happened? The complete bottom dropped right out of the hole. All of a sudden it went, and there I was, standing on nothing but air. If I hadn’t grabbed a hold of the last rung of the ladder… Why, that hole must be a thousand feet the way the bottom dropped out of it!’

Calvin babbled on, but Dora didn’t listen. She was amazed at the remarkable way in which her prayer had been answered. If the hole had no more bottom, there would be no more hauling up dirt.

When Calvin had regained his strength, he crept to the edge of the hole and peered down. ‘What are you going to do, Calvin?’ Dora asked timidly.

‘Do? I’m going to find out how far down that hole goes. Get the flashlight from the kitchen.’

Calvin picked up a bucket to which was attached a long ball of binder twine he had brought from the tool shed. ‘Hey, You Down There’ he muttered, and gave the bucket to Dora. ‘Hey!’ yelled Calvin. ‘The line...it jerked!’ ‘But, Calvin,’ Dora protested. ‘Don’t Calvin me. I tell you there’s something on the end of it.’ Calvin strode to the battered truck which was standing near the barn and a minute later was rattling down the highway towards Harmony Junction.

Dora picked up the bit of parchment which Calvin had thrown away. She could make nothing of the writing, for it was a small piece of parchment. One side was closely covered with a fine writing. Calvin had thrown away. She could make nothing of the writing, for it was a small piece of parchment. One side was closely covered with a fine writing. Calvin had thrown away. She added a PS to her note apologizing for the fact that she had not been able to write her letter before morning. She doubted that he would return before morning. She knew that nothing on earth - or under it - could keep Calvin from visiting a number of bars during his absence, coupling each order with a threat of what awaited her should his instructions not be carried out.

Dora waited another half hour before tugging at the line again. This time there was a sharp answering jerk, and Dora began hauling the bucket upward. It seemed much heavier now, and twice she had to pause for a rest. When the bucket reached the surface, she saw why it was heavier.
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By Harold Rosenth

My goodness,’ she murmured as she viewed the dozen or so yellow metal bars in the bucket. They must be real hungry down there! A sheet of the strange writing was on the bucket and Dora picked it out expecting to see the strange writing of the first note.

‘Well, I declare,’ she said when she saw that the note was in English. It was in the same print as the dictionary, and each letter had been made with meticulous care. She read the note slowly, shaping each word with her lips as she read.

Our scientists are of the opinion that the flesh you sent down is that of a creature you call chicken. This is the supreme food. Never have we eaten anything so delicious. To show our appreciation we are sending you a bonus payment. Your code book indicates that there is a larger creature similar to chicken called turkey. Send us turkey immediately. I repeat, send us turkey immediately.

Glar, THE MASTER

‘Land sakes,’ gasped Dora. ‘They must have eaten that chicken raw. Now where in tamolation would I get a turkey?’ She buried the gold bars in another part of her petunia bed.

Calvin returned about ten o’clock the next morning. His mind the terrible thing which was soon to happen. Finally the crude code book you sent down made it easy for our scholars to decipher it. We, too, wonder about you. How have you... Also send a concise history of your race and arrange for your best scientists, such as they are, to communicate with us.

Dora took the gold bars to her petunia bed beside the house and buried them in the loose black soil. She paid no heed to the sound of a car coming down the highway at high speed. She heard the honk and a wild squawking sounded above the roar of the motor. She hurried around to the front of the house, knowing already what had happened. She stared in dismay at the four chickens which lay dead in the road.

She sat down again to enjoy the luxury of nothing. When, an hour later, she picked up the line, there was an immediate response from below. The bucket was exceedingly heavy for this strange and she was fearful that the line might break. She was dizzy with fatigue when she finally hauled the bucket over to the edge of the hole. This time there were several dozen bars of gold in it and a brief note in the same precise lettering as before.

You are even more stupid than we thought. Your clumsy death rays are useless to us. We informed you of this. We want turkey. Send us turkey immediately.

Glor, THE MASTER

Dora hurried into the house and began preparing ham and eggs. Each moment she expected Calvin to come in and demand to know, with a few blow, what was holding up his meal. But Calvin seemed very busy in the vicinity of the hole.

Dora hurried into the house and began preparing ham and eggs. Each moment she expected Calvin to come in and demand to know, with a few blow, what was holding up his meal. But Calvin seemed very busy in the vicinity of the hole. When Dora went out to call him to eat, she found he had done a surprising amount of work. He had attached an oil drum to the steel cable. This hung over a heavy steel rod which rested across the hole. Stakes driven into the ground on each side of the hole held the rod in place.

‘Your breakfast is ready, Calvin,’ said Dora.

‘Shut up,’ Calvin answered.

The winch was driven by an electric motor, and Calvin ran a cable from the motor to an electric outlet on the yard light post. From the cab he took a number of boxes and placed them in the oil drum.

A whole hundred of them, he chuckled, more to himself than to Dora. ‘Fifty-nine cents a piece. Peanuts... one bar of gold will buy thousands.’

Calvin threw the switch which controlled the winch, and with sickening force Dora realized the terrible thing that would soon happen. The creatures down below had no use or regard for flashlights.

Dora put his gun in the oil drum and pushed it to the center of the hole. Then, hanging on to the cable, he carefully lowered himself into the drum.

‘Give me just one hour to run those dirty rats down, then bring me back up,’ he said. Dora threw the switch and the oil drum went down. When the cable slackened, she stopped the winch. She spent most of the next hour praying that Calvin would not find the people down there and become a murderer.

Exactly an hour later, Dora started the oil drum upward. The motor labored mightily as though under a tremendous strain, and the cable seemed stretched almost to breaking point.

Dora gasped when the oil drum came into view. Calvin was not in it! She shut off the motor and hastened to the drum, half expecting to find Calvin crouching down inside. But Calvin was not there. Instead there were scores of gold bars and on top of them a sheet of the familiar white parchment.

‘Land sakes,’ Dora said, as she took in a full view of the drum’s contents. She had no idea of the value of the treasure upon which she gazed. She only knew it must be immense. Carefully, she reached down and picked out the note, which she read in her slow, precise way.

Not even the exquisite flavor of the chicken compares to the incomparable goodness of the live turkey you sent down to us. We must confess that we thought turkey would be rather different from this, but this does not matter. So delicious was the turkey that we are again sending you a bonus payment. We beg you to send us more turkey immediately.

Glar, THE MASTER

Dora read the note a second time to make sure she understood it fully.

‘Well, I declare,’ she said in considerable wonder. ‘I do declare.’