

# Hey You Down There

by Harold Rolseth

CALVIN SPENDER DRAINED his coffee cup and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He belched loudly and then filled a cornucob pipe with tobacco.

His wife Dora sat across the table, her breakfast hardly touched. She asked softly, "Are you going to dig in the well this morning, Calvin?"

Calvin looked at her with his small red-rimmed eyes and said, as if she had not spoken, "Git your chores done right away. You're going to be hauling up dirt."

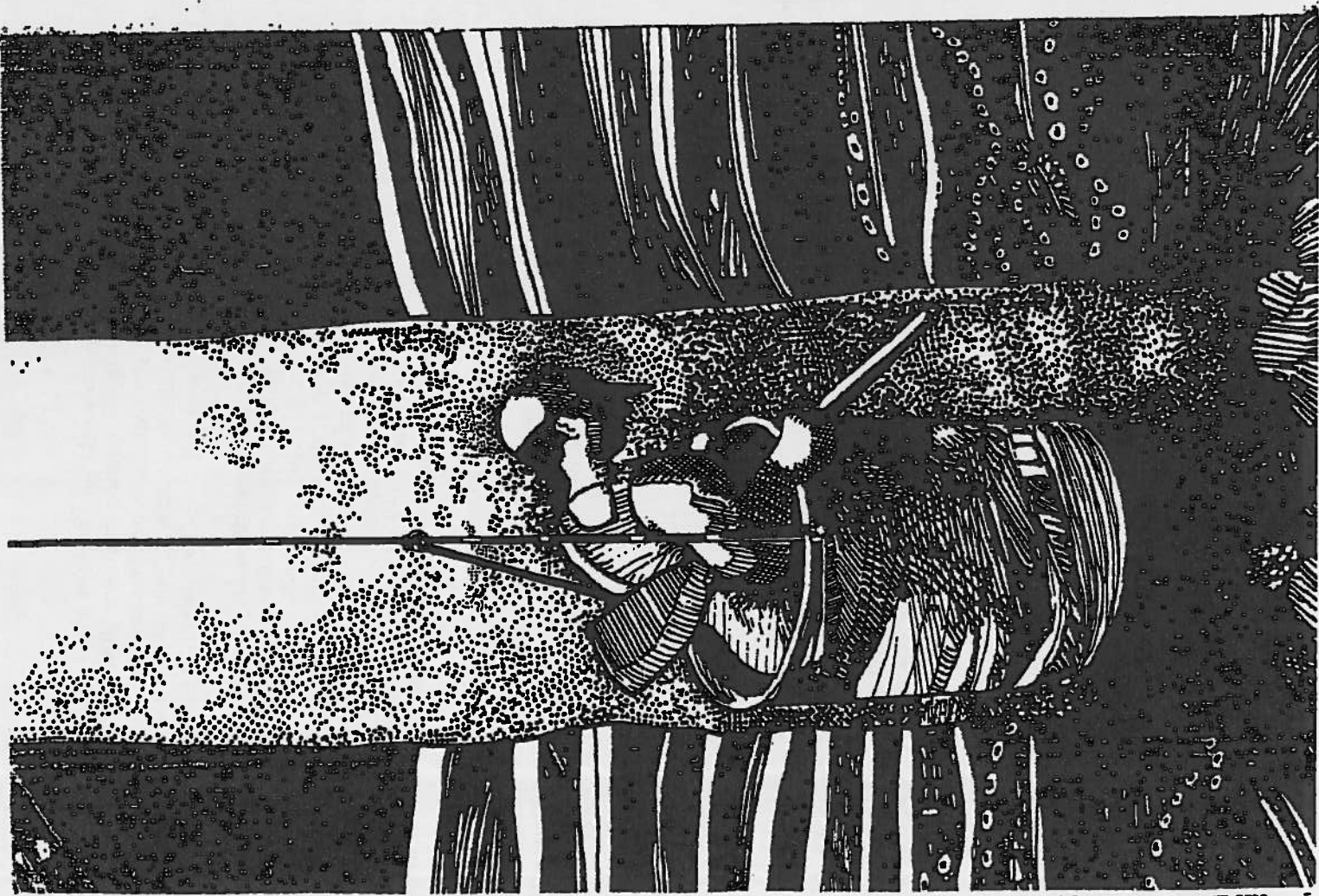
"Yes, Calvin," Dora whispered.

Calvin cleared his throat, causing his Adam's apple to move wildly under the loose red rolls of skin on his neck. He left the table and went out the kitchen door, cruelly kicking at the cat that lay on the doorstep.

Dora watched him go and wondered for the thousandth time what Calvin reminded her of. It was not another person. It was something else. When he had cleared his throat, the answer had nearly come to her. But now she could not put her finger on it.

Half way between the house and the barn, there was a doughnut-shaped hill of dirt surrounding a hole. Calvin went to the hole and stared down into it. He hated digging the well, but he had to either dig or haul barrels of water each day from Nord Fisher's farm a half mile away. He had been hauling water for his small herd of cattle for two weeks, ever since his well had gone dry.

Lately Nord had begun hinting that he should pay for the water. Not far from the hole Calvin had tied a homemade ladder of rope to a heavy stake in the ground. The rope ladder had become



necessary when the hole had become deeper than any of his ladders.

Calvin hoped that he would not have to dig much deeper. He was now down about fifty or sixty feet, which was how deep most wells in the area were. He was afraid now that he would hit a layer of rock and would need costly well-drilling equipment he could not afford.

Calvin picked up a bucket tied to a rope and lowered the bucket into the hole. He thought to himself, "Dora better be quick about getting out here, or she's going to hear about it."

From the house Dora saw Calvin enter the well, and she worked quickly to finish her chores. She reached the hole just as a muffled shout from below told her that the bucket was full. After hauling the bucket up, hand over hand, which took all her strength, she emptied it and then lowered it again. While she waited for the second bucketload, she examined the first one. She was disappointed to find that the earth was not very wet. If it had been, it would have meant that Calvin was getting near water.

When Dora lowered the bucket for the tenth time, she silently prayed, "Please, God, let something happen now . . . so I won't have to haul up any more dirt."

Something happened almost at once. A scream of terror came up from the hole, and the rope ladder jerked violently.

"Calvin," she called, "are you all right? What is it?"

Then suddenly Calvin appeared as if he had been shot out of the hole. He was shaking and having trouble breathing.

"Must be a heart attack," thought Dora, trying to hide her joy. Finally Calvin got control of himself. He usually did not talk to Dora, but now he did. "You know what happened down there?" he said in a weak voice. "The bottom dropped right out of the hole, and there I was, standing on nothing but air. If I hadn't grabbed hold of the ladder . . . Why, that hole must be a thousand feet deep the way the bottom dropped out!"

Calvin talked on, but Dora did not listen. She was amazed by the way that her prayer had been answered. If the hole no longer had a bottom, there would be no more dirt to haul up.

"What are you going to do, Calvin?" Dora asked timidly.

"I'm going to see how deep that hole is. Get the flashlight." Dora hurried off. After she returned, Calvin tied the flashlight to a huge ball of twine he had gotten from the tool shed. He

switched the flashlight on and lowered it into the hole. He kept lowering the light a hundred feet at a time, until it could no longer be seen and the twine was nearly used up.

"Almost a full thousand feet," he whispered. "And no bottom yet. Might as well pull it up." He pulled, but the line did not come up.

"Must be caught on something," Calvin muttered, and gave the line a sharp jerk. In response there was a downward jerk that almost tore the line from his hands.

"Hey," yelled Calvin. "The line . . . it jerked! There's something on the end of this line."

But, Calvin," said Dora.

"Don't Calvin me! I tell you there's something on the end of this line!" He gave another tug, and again the line was almost pulled from him. "It don't make sense," he said. "What could be underground a good thousand feet?" He gently pulled on the line again. There was no answering jerk. Rapidly he began hauling it up. When the line's end came into view, the flashlight was gone. Instead there was a small bag made of leatherlike material. Calvin opened the bag and took out a small bar of heavy yellow metal and a piece of paper. Using the blade of his jackknife, he scraped the metal. It cut into it easily.

"Gold!" said Calvin. "Must be a whole pound of it . . . and just for an old flashlight. They must be crazy down there."

He put the gold bar into his pocket and looked at the paper. He could not read the strange writing, so he threw it on the ground.

"Foreigners," he said. "No wonder they ain't got any sense. But it's plain they need flashlights."

"But, Calvin," said Dora. "How could they get down there? There ain't any mines in this part of the country."

"Ain't you ever heard of them secret government projects?" asked Calvin coldly. "This must be one of them. Now I'm going to town and get me a load of flashlights. They must need them bad. You watch that hole good. Don't let no one go near it." Calvin walked to the old pickup, got in, and a minute later was driving down the highway toward Harmony Junction.

Dora picked up the paper that Calvin had thrown away. She could make nothing of it. It was all very strange. She wondered if the people down below knew that there were English-speaking people up above. She hurried into the house and wrote them a

note at the kitchen table. It was a series of questions. Why were they down there? Who were they? Why did they pay so much for an old flashlight?

Thinking that the people down there might be hungry, she wrapped a loaf of bread and some ham in a clean dish towel. Then because she thought they were probably foreigners and did not know much about English, she put a small dictionary in with the food.

She went back to the well, lowered the bucket, and waited a few minutes before she tugged the line gently. The line held firm below, so Dora seated herself on the pile of soil to wait.

It was pleasant to sit in the warm sunlight and to do nothing. Usually Calvin gave her chores to do whenever he went to town. She had no fear that Calvin would return soon. She knew that nothing could keep him from visiting the taverns once he was in town. Dora did not expect him until morning.

After half an hour Dora gave the line another tug, but it did not come up. She waited another half hour, and this time there was a sharp answering jerk. Dora began hauling the bucket upward. It seemed very heavy. When it reached the top, she saw why.

"My goodness," she said softly, looking at the dozen yellow bars in the bucket. "They must be real hungry down there."

There was also a sheet of paper, but this time it was in English. It was written in letters just like those in the dictionary.

She read the note slowly, shaping each word with her lips.

*Your language is not as advanced as ours, but the code book that you sent down made it easier to find out what your note said. We wonder about you too. How do you live in the deadly light? Our legends tell of people living on the surface, but until now we did not believe them.*

*The poorly made death ray that you sent us shows that your scientific development has not been very fast. It has no real value*

to us. We sent the gold only because we thought we ought to send something in return.

*The food you call bread is not good for us, but the ham is. We know that it is the flesh of some creature, and we will send up a double weight of gold for all you send us. Send more immediately.*

*Glar, the Master*

"Land sakes," said Dora. "Real bossy they are. I've a good mind not to send them anything. I don't dare send them any more ham. Calvin would notice if any more was gone."

As Dora was burying the gold bars in her flower bed beside the house, she heard a car speeding down the highway. As it passed the house, wild hen squawking sounded above the motor's roar. She hurried around to the front of the house and sadly saw that four of her hens lay dead in the road. When Calvin got home, he would beat her for her carelessness.

Trying to think of a way to get rid of the chickens so that maybe Calvin would think that the foxes had gotten them, she remembered the hole. An hour later she sent the cleaned and cut-up raw chickens down the hole.

Once again, she sat and waited. When she finally picked up the line, there was a fast answer from below. The bucket was even heavier this time, and she was afraid the line would break. This time there were several dozen gold bars in it and a brief note.

*Our scientists say that the flesh you sent down is from a creature you call a chicken. It was delicious. To show our thanks we are sending you an extra payment. Your code book tells us there is a larger creature*

*like 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 would I get a turkey?" Then she buried the gold bars in another part of her flower bed.

Calvin's eyes were bloodshot when he returned home about ten o'clock the next morning. The loose skin on his neck hung lower than usual, and more than ever he reminded Dora of something.

Calvin stepped down from the pickup. Dora moved back in fear, but he seemed too busy to bother with her. He looked at the hole, got back into the truck, and backed it to the edge of the hole. On the back of the truck was a winch with a spool of steel wire cable. He attached a large empty oil drum to the end of the wire cable and hung the cable over a heavy steel rod which he had placed across the top of the hole. Stakes which he had driven into the ground on each side held the rod in place.

Then from the cab of the pickup, he took a number of boxes and put them into the drum. "A whole hundred of them," he chuckled. "Fifty-nine cents apiece. Peanuts! One bar will buy thousands."

He plugged in the motor that ran the winch, switched the winch on, and watched as the wire cable unwound, lowering the drum of flashlights. He stopped the motor when the cable hung loose and said to Dora, "Fix me some breakfast. I'll eat while they load up the gold."

Calvin ate while Dora did her housework. Dora was practically in a state of shock, worrying about what would happen when the flashlights came back up probably with an insulting note in English. Calvin might learn about the gold she had received, and then he would probably kill her.

Finally Calvin glanced at the wall clock and went out to the hole. In spite of her fear, Dora followed him outside.

In a few seconds the drum was up. Calvin grinned as he dragged the drum to the edge of the hole. He stopped grinning when he looked into the drum. His Adam's apple moved quickly, and once again he reminded Dora of something.

He dumped the drum's contents on the ground. The flashlights had been bent and the glasses broken. With an angry kick he sent flashlights flying in all directions. One, with a note tied to it landed at Dora's feet. Calvin was too upset to notice it.

"You down there," he screamed into the hole. "I'll fix you. I'll make you sorry you double-crossed me. I'll . . ."

He dashed for the house, and Dora picked up the note. She read:

*You are even more stupid than we thought. Your death rays are useless to us. We told you that before. We want turkey. Send us turkey immediately.*

*Glar, the Master*

She hid the note as Calvin came from the house with his double-barreled shotgun. For a moment Dora thought that he knew everything and was about to kill her.

"Please, Calvin," she said.

"Shut up," he said. "You saw me work the winch. Can you do it?"

"Why, yes, but what . . . ?"

"Listen, stupid. I'm going down and fix those dirty foreigners. You send me down and bring me up in an hour." He grabbed her by the shoulder. "And if you mess things, I'll fix you too."

Calvin put the gun in the drum. Then, hanging on the cable, he carefully lowered himself into the drum.

Dora threw the switch and the oil drum went down. When the cable grew loose, she stopped the winch. She spent most of the hour praying that Calvin would not murder the people down below.

Exactly an hour later Dora started the drum upward. The motor had to work hard, and the cable seemed ready to snap apart.

She gasped as the drum came into view. Calvin was not in it. Instead there were a large number of gold bars and on top of them was a piece of the familiar white paper.

She picked up the note and read in her slow careful way:

The live turkey you sent down was even better than the delicious chicken. We must confess that we believed turkey to be something quite different, but that is not important. The turkey was so tasty that we are again sending you an extra payment. We beg you to send us more turkey immediately.

Glar, the Master

Dora reread the note to make sure that she really understood it. "Well, I declare," she said in great wonder. "I declare."

THE END

After you have read "Hey You Down There" . . .

1. The story tells you that Dora . . . wondered for the thousandth time what Calvin reminded her of. It was not another person. It was something else." What do you think it was? Write your guess on the blank below.

11. Words in this story show how both Calvin and Dora feel about different things and about each other. Below are five incomplete sentences about their feelings. Circle the ending that best finishes each sentence. The completed sentences should show how Calvin or Dora really felt.

1. When Dora asks Calvin a question at the breakfast table, he  
A. seems not to care about her.  
B. seems interested in her ideas, but too busy to talk.  
C. seems to enjoy talking to her at any time.
2. When Calvin stares into the well before starting to dig, he  
A. feels proud that he can do this tough job.  
B. feels hatred for the job.  
C. seems ready to hire someone to do it for him.
3. When Calvin comes up out of the hole, looking as if he is having a heart attack, Dora feels  
A. frightened for her husband.  
B. sad that he might have to go to the hospital.  
C. secretly happy.
4. When Calvin goes off to town, Dora  
A. worries that he'll get drunk and hurt himself.  
B. knows that he will be right back.  
C. is happy, because he won't be back until morning.
5. When four of her chickens are run over, Dora  
A. feels miserable, because she loves the chickens.  
B. is afraid of what Calvin will do to her.  
C. is so frightened she can't decide what to do.

111. Here is a sentence for you to finish by yourself. in any way you like:

When Calvin was exchanged for some gold bars, Dora

