

STORY OF THE YEAR
(Originally published January 1963)

Although the story about the surprise party in Birmingham for the babysitting, engaged couple was retold several times with great success, the anecdote of the year, as far as the regular listeners in the lounge are concerned, was Wheeler Gunnels' vivid tale of his friend from Opp, Alabama, who got into difficulties at Panama City during the summer. This story, which also enjoyed many successful retellings, illustrates that ribald humor nearly always contains a strong element of cruelty and suffering, and the adventures of the unfortunate victim in this case would bear this out.

Coming from a swim at the beach, on a main avenue and with his wife driving their tent-covered pick-up truck, the gentleman jumped out of the front seat while they were stopped for a traffic light and got into the back of the truck in order to change from bathing trunks to more comfortable clothing. Just as the trunks came off, the light changed and the wife, an inexperienced clutch pedaler, started off with a lurch that catapulted the unclad husband over the tailgate onto the street.

Wheeler's friend took off after the truck at full speed and reached the tailgate as the wife slowed down for the next traffic light. In typical Harold Lloyd fashion, just as he was scrambling up to cover, off spurted the truck again, this time leaving him sprawled and breathless on the hot asphalt.

In panic, the frantic nude darted for the curb and into a car parked in an alleyway nearby. Unfortunately, the car contained an elderly gentleman who, certain he was about to be attacked by a depraved exhibitionist, wielded a handy Coke bottle in furious self-defense, and battered the poor, winded and speechless husband into a sobbing collapse.

The saga ended in the hospital emergency room with the victim guarded by half of the Panama City police force. His hospital admission diagnosis of "contusions and lacerations" hardly told the story. Whether he ever made it back to Opp again, we don't know.