

# OXFORD

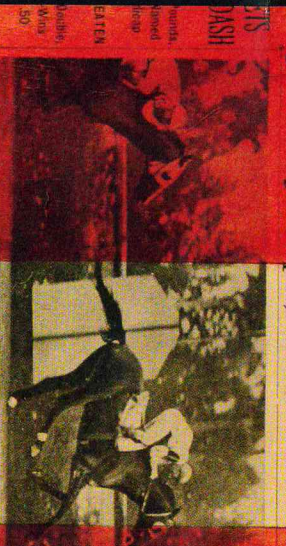
## \*\*\* AMERICAN \*\*\*

### NEW SOUTH JOURNALISM ISSUE

SPECIAL FEATURE:  
DELRAY'S NEW MOON:  
AN UNPUBLISHED MASTERPIECE  
BY CHARLES PORTIS

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF A GREAT  
AMERICAN NEWSPAPER:  
CHRIS ROSE  
ON THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

way, Derby Hope, Favored at Hialeah Park Today in 1941 Racing Del



#### FINISH UP RACE ON THE TURF COURSE AT HIALEAH PARK

...in racing today, with the 6th race on Thursday's card. The Heat, Stale, ...

#### HIALEAH PARK CHART

...of the ...

#### GOLDEN GATE GETS DEBT MORATORIUM

...Federal Court Order ...

#### SANTA ANITA OPENS ARBITRATION IS SET

...Arbitration ...

#### FERRY CHART TRIUMPHS

...Ferry ...

#### LETTERS TO THE SPORTS EDITOR

...A Job for Mr. Louden ...

#### USE OF MECHANICAL PACE

...Use of Mechanical Pacer ...

#### SPEEDING UP THE RACE

...Speeding up the race ...



Advertisement for U.S. Army Officers' Equipment, featuring various military uniforms and gear. Includes text: "U.S. Army OFFICERS' EQUIPMENT", "Model 1", "Model 2", "Model 3", "Model 4", "Model 5", "Model 6", "Model 7", "Model 8", "Model 9", "Model 10", "Model 11", "Model 12", "Model 13", "Model 14", "Model 15", "Model 16", "Model 17", "Model 18", "Model 19", "Model 20", "Model 21", "Model 22", "Model 23", "Model 24", "Model 25", "Model 26", "Model 27", "Model 28", "Model 29", "Model 30", "Model 31", "Model 32", "Model 33", "Model 34", "Model 35", "Model 36", "Model 37", "Model 38", "Model 39", "Model 40", "Model 41", "Model 42", "Model 43", "Model 44", "Model 45", "Model 46", "Model 47", "Model 48", "Model 49", "Model 50".

Barcode and pricing information: \$5.95US \$6.95CAN, 23>, 7 25274 57213 7, DISPLAY UNTIL DECEMBER 2012

# The Old Man with No Pants

BY HARRISON SCOTT KEY

*Dressed to chill.*

There is an old man who comes into the coffee shop, and he wears no pants. I see him at least once a week, and more frequently in the summer, when life for the pantless is more accommodating. He is a large man, and must be nearing eighty. His face is leathery and worn out, like the fissured leather of a European sedan purchased many years ago. His skin is purple and red, the color of a maturing bruise. It is hard to tell his race. Many years ago, I like to believe, he was a white man.

And also he is very, very tall. Unlike other old men, his legs are not the color and texture of overhead spackling, and they are not hairless. The legs are as blushing as the rest of him, and covered in red hair. It is not as disgusting as it sounds. He is not a disgusting old man. But he does resemble an aging and emaciated Sasquatch. He wears the same outfit every day: a tall blue baseball cap pulled down tight enough to touch the tops of his large square eyeglasses, brown loafers, and an ancient blue T-shirt draped over his aging skeleton, and also: his underwear. This is what I mean when I say he has “no pants.” Because he doesn’t have any on.

He also carries with him a small notebook and a pen, and he comes to the coffee shop, apparently, to write. It is a noble gesture for a man with no pants, and he is making a statement about other people like him and what they should feel free to do. So often, people with no pants are doing unwise things. I have seen people with no pants being arrested, or running down the middle of the street on their way to certain death. I have seen children in their underwear who have nothing better to do in their pants than poop in them.

Of course, at some point or another in the course of a day, all of us are without pants, but only in private, and almost never while wearing nothing but loafers. Which is to say, it can be quite

frightening to walk around, even behind the impenetrable sanctity of your own four walls, wearing a top, but no bottom. If you do not understand me, I suggest you try it right now. Go home and dress yourself: shirt, socks, shoes, briefs, perhaps a sport coat to dignify the exercise—but leave out the pants. Now walk around. It is quite possible that your body will find this state of affairs enjoyable. It will want to leave the house. Your heart will be telling you, “It’s okay to leave. This feels good. This feels right.” But your faculties will interrupt: “Something is missing.”

This is why we invented mirrors. To keep people from being too comfortable when leaving the house. The most comfortable costume I could imagine wearing right now would be nothing at all. Perhaps a quilt, with a belt to keep it from dragging. I love being naked, not because I am proud of my body, but because I feel like it needs to be aired out on a regular basis, the way you do with tents. It is a humane act—brave, even—to let myself be naked on occasion, an act of gratitude to my body for being willing to be a part of my life.

But I am also grateful to society, which is why I wear pants when I go outside. I am not calling the old man with no pants an ingrate. I am only saying that perhaps he has no mirror.

A month or two ago, I found myself walking around the house in a shirt. And that was all. It felt quite natural, I must say. Like when you have a picnic and you ask your lover, “Why don’t we do this more often?” That’s what it was like, my nakedness. My three young offspring darted hither and yon. The three-year-old stopped, looked me up and down, and ran away screaming.

“Your condition is upsetting the children,” the wife said.

She refuses to say the word “nakedness.” It’s like Jews and Yahweh. She fears the power of my

nudity, believes that she must hide herself in the cleft of the rock as my glory passes before her.

I sat in a chair, still wearing only the T-shirt. Usually, the pantless are in a hurry to find clothing, but in the sanctity of my estate, I felt the desire to read. My five-year-old walked up and pointed a finger-gun at my vitals. “Put some pants on, cowboy,” she said.

These nude moments go unremembered as I sit in the coffee shop and judge the old man for wearing no pants. I know not whether he buys coffee or tea, but I am sure that he has no place to put his money. Still, he walks in, walks up to the counter, walks away with a small paper cup. Maybe it’s just tap water, I reasoned, but then I saw it steaming. Steam costs money. Perhaps he is a magician, with the ability to conjure coinage out of thin air, or a thin column of steam.

These underwear, they’re navy blue. Some days, maroon. They are knit briefs of the thinnest cotton material, as weightless as tissue paper, hanging limply over his octogenarian groin. The last time I saw someone wear underwear in public, those someones were girls, and I was in college, and I found their decision courageous, progressive, riveting. These coeds had cleverly sewn the flies shut and wore the napkin-thin garments as shorts.

“You go, girl,” I said to them. And they did.

But the old man is not a coed, and his purplish legs are utterly twig-like, and where his backside should be, there is simply nothing. It is concave, as if his bottom had been removed during emergency surgery in the war, or accidentally left at the house, like one forgets a hat.

I try not to stare. But I do. And do you know what it looks like? It looks like he’s hiding a little kitten in there. It is a horrible notion, so early in the morning. It puts one’s own nakedness into perspective.



Put some pants on, cowboy!

Also: He wears a thin gold chain, the coup de grâce in my attempt to categorize him in any Aristotelian sense. I cannot understand the desire of a man to wear a gold necklace unless he sells narcotics or works in a kiosk. I try to imagine him doing both and cannot, although I suppose he would be perfectly suited to standing behind a kiosk, which would shield the world from his kitten.

After buying his coffee, he takes both newspapers from the rack, the *Savannah Morning News* and the *Times*. He reads the front pages and puts them back rather neatly and gingerly on the rack,

so he doesn't have to pay, and then he writes. He sometimes sits outside, sometimes inside, and always in his underwear. Nobody says a word.

I wanted to dislike him, frankly. It was quaint at first, those many months ago, when I considered that in this Modern Age, a man can leave the house with no pants and his only concern out in the world is where to sit. But now, nearly a year later, I wanted the world to rise up with me and confront him. We needed to help him. We needed to come together, do something, give him a bathrobe or a quilt. I believed him to be insane.

Last week, the old man leaned down in front

of me and said, "Excuse me?"

I expected his voice would be as cracked and broken as the skin stretched across his face. Mean and crazy old men tend to have mean and crazy voices. But his voice was as light and airy as he must have felt in his outfit.

"Pardon?" I said. He stood over me. I looked up at him.

"Would you happen to know when the Home Depot opens?" he asked, quite politely, a real gentleman, his voice a buttery tenor. No, not buttery. Lighter. Frothy. If I had closed my eyes, I might have thought it was a turtlenecked Robert

Wagner asking.

I looked at my watch. It was 5:45 A.M., and his kitten was at eye level. "They open at six, in a few minutes," I said.

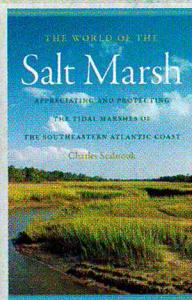
"Thank you," he said, as gently as one can hope for in a world like this, and he folded his jacket over his arm. He was carrying a windbreaker. It was a cool morning, and it heartened me to see he owned a jacket. It gave me hope that he would tie it around his waist. And then he left, maybe to go buy a new shovel or some lumber or a box of nails. I imagined him wearing a tool belt. The image lodged itself in a corner of my brain, where it remains.

I wanted to ask him, "Why are you wearing no pants?" But I'm glad I didn't. I no longer want to know. My brief conversation with him was civil, the kind of exchange on which one might construct a whole society. And that's enough for me. In the end, men remain hidden from one another, no matter how little they're wearing. Perhaps he will tell us his story one day. Perhaps that's the purpose of the little notebook. Perhaps he'll get to it, after a visit to the Home Depot. And then to Penney's. They really do have some great sales. 🐾

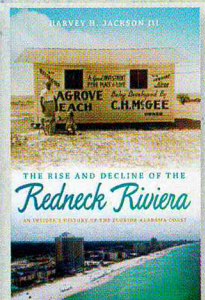
# NEW FROM GEORGIA



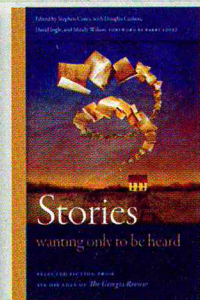
**Cornbread Nation 6**  
The Best of Southern Food Writing  
Edited by Brett Anderson  
General Editor John T. Edge



**The World of the Salt Marsh**  
Appreciating and Protecting the Tidal Marshes of the Southeastern Atlantic Coast  
Charles Seabrook



**The Rise and Decline of the Redneck Riviera**  
An Insider's History of the Florida-Alabama Coast  
Harvey H. Jackson III  
How a southern coastline became an iconic tourist attraction

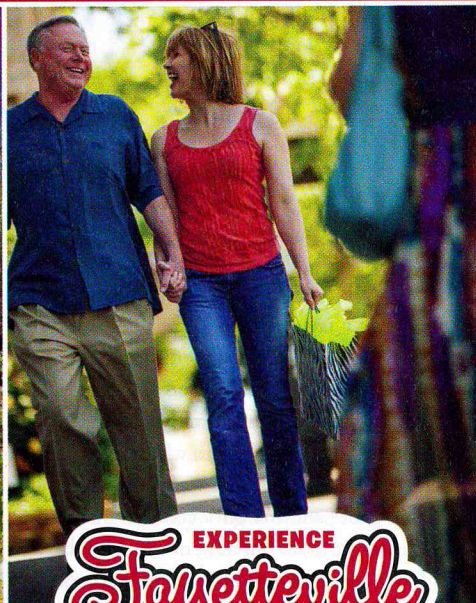


**Stories Wanting Only to Be Heard**  
Selected Fiction from Six Decades of The Georgia Review  
Edited by Stephen Corey, with Douglas Carlson, David Ingle, and Mindy Wilson  
Foreword by Barry Lopez  
Outstanding short fiction from one of the nation's best literary magazines

WWW.UGAPRESS.ORG

## PAST, PRESENTS AND FUCHSIA.

Find it all in one place.



experiencefayetteville.com  
800-766-4626



Fayetteville, AR  
 ExpFayetteville