

Once a Trouper

By Hugh
Leamy

Hal Skelly is a Big Timer now. But don't let anyone tell you he doesn't sigh for the great open booking spaces of Main Street, where little laughs had to go long ways and happiness and adventure made up for slim purses

THEY might have known they'd never make a priest out of him. They started him right, Heaven knows, but they should have taken prophetic warning from his goings-on of a Sunday when he'd race home from serving as altar-boy at the church a couple of blocks away.

He used to come away after Mass, with his pockets filled with candle stubs discarded from the various candelabra of the church. These he would arrange, lighted, along one side of the lengthy family dining table. Then he'd clamber up on it and go through a song and dance routine for the interest and occasional delight of his younger brothers and sisters.

"And if they didn't stick around till I was finished," Hal Skelly recalls, "I'd kick hell out of them."

Yes, they should have known. But it wasn't until Hal Skelly had twice run away to the show business from St. Bede's College, which prepared young men for the priesthood, that they finally abandoned—with parental sighs of resignation—the idea of the pulpit.

You see, Hal's father had been raised by the Benedictine Fathers at St. Vincent's in Pennsylvania and so great was his gratitude to those good men that he made up his mind, when he grew up, that his firstborn should become a priest. An idea of such noble origin and such long standing was not easily tossed overboard but what can you do with a son whose mind is on overtures when his voice is chanting *Aves*?

The Road to Stardom

So Hal Skelly became a ham actor. And what a ham! He played with medicine shows, with circuses, with musical tabloids and the Lord knows what all.

Once or twice he ventured from the troupers' path. When he became a fight manager or when he played substitute second baseman with the Boston Braves, for instance. But those weren't drastic detours—not enough of a deviation seriously to delay his progress along the rocky road to stardom.

Dreaming in his tent dressing-rooms in the sticks of making Broadway some day, it's extremely unlikely that Hal Skelly ever thought he'd make it wearing the same ridiculous shoes, the loud-checked pantaloons and the ruby, putty nose that were his intimate companions then. Still, that's the way it all turned out. He won wide fame last season



As Skid in *Burlesque*, Hal Skelly eyes the ominous date Friday the thirteenth on Lesty's calendar

way. It's gone to his head. It's cost him his wife, who nursed him till fame was his. But, always the trouper, he exits on one brave, glorious jazz note.

No one had to show Hal Skelly how to run through that bit. He'd done almost the same thing, somewhere in the distant past under similar but less happy circumstances.

And so with all the rest of it. Then, too, he wasn't at all handicapped by the fact that he's just as much of a trouper today as ever he was under canvas.

You can sit chatting in their dressing-rooms with players who have come all the way up from the sawdust. And you can sit in other dressing-rooms with other players whose careers have been more skyrockety.

And you'll notice the difference. There's something in the at-

mosphere and the chatter that distinguishes the trouper from the easily-arrived. The grease paint smells the same, the dressing-tables and glaring mirrors with their nude light bulbs look the same. The talk is sprinkled with the same references to "Ziggy" and "flops" and "wows" and "cues." The thumping of scenery juggled by stagehands outside the door is the same.

Airplanes Are His Hobby

But the difference is there, none the less. And never more boisterously present than in the room where Hal Skelly makes up. He must be about forty now, long, lanky, not unhandsome when he isn't masquerading in burlesque make-up. But he's still as much of a boy, as much of an engaging comic, as he was that day he scampered off from St. Bede's in Davenport, Iowa, to join a musical show in Chicago. He knows he's arrived somewhere but he's happily ignorant of (Continued on page 58)

Joseph Harold Skelly and Nancy Carroll in the talking picture *The Dance of Life*, based on the play *Burlesque*



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No News Value

By James B. Connolly

It wasn't really "news," but it was a great story all the same. Here it is, just as it happened on a Gloucester fisherman in a wild, wintry sea

THE steam trawler Pelican was leaving the southwest bank of Georges Shoals with a load of fish for the Boston market. She bounced around a bit coming off the bank, which isn't to say that it was rough weather—what a bank fisherman would call rough. She was one of the first steam trawling fleet, one of the short-legged, round-bellied models, and that model never did need much excuse to go bouncing around.

From the southwest bank the course is northeasterly until the north shoal is cleared. Then it is west-northwest and let her go for Boston Lightship.

It was raining, a cold rain, leaving the bank. Clearing the north shoal the rain gave way to snow, which was soon succeeded by hail—hail that hit a man's face like bits of flint whenever he looked to windward; all of which was nothing unusual for that time of year and so not to be complained of.

The wind hauled into the northwest, making as it hauled, until by and by it was blowing perhaps fifty miles an hour, which is wind enough when it's a cold winter day and coming fair out of the northwest. The good thing was that it brought clear weather, no thick o' fog or snow that doesn't let the watch see another vessel till she's on top of a man, nor the beacon lights of the shore till a vessel's into the surf or onto the rocks somewhere.

STEAM trawlers carry a mate as well as a skipper; and on the Pelican the two always stood watch and watch for the passage home. With the skipper or mate on watch there would be a man to the wheel in the pilot house, and a lookout man who might be in the bows of her peering out for ship or shore lights; or making himself useful around deck on a clear night like this one.

The mate of the Pelican was Andie Wholley. He was from the old sailing fleet. Most of the skippers and mates of steam fishermen are old sailing fleet men, but Andie dated further back than most of them. Forty winters he had traveled on Georges Shoals before shifting his bag to a fishing steamer; and forty winters on Georges, as any child on the streets in Gloucester can tell you, makes a man a tough old sea gull—an old sea bird who's lucky to be still alive.

Andie was one of the kind that grow thinner and more wiry as they grow old. He might have weighed 150 pounds in his lusty youth, no more. Men who only knew him as a steam fisherman would gaze upon his spare frame and wonder how he ever maneuvered to haul the heavy trawls of his old dory days. But he hauled them. At sixty-five years of age, he could still pick up an eighty-pound cod on his pitch fork and toss it into its proper pen as well, aboard the Pelican no one could see where the huskiest of them were doing it with any less fuss.

At ten o'clock of the night after clearing the north shoal, Andie took over the watch from the skipper. Steve Whitten was lookout man and in the wheelhouse was Tom Boyle. The seas were running with the wind, which meant,

they being northwest and the ship's course west-northwest, that they were boarding her by way of her starboard bow. Tom Boyle at the wheel was holding her to her course, the instructions being to get her along home, which didn't mean that he wasn't to ease her into the worst of the high rolling ones when he saw them coming. He saw most of them coming in time, but sometimes one would get by him, and then the white water would come rolling aboard and fill half her waist and sometimes the whole after starboard gangway between the engine-room house and the quarter rail. How she would roll down them!

ANDIE and Steve, being out on the open deck, could sometimes hear a sea coming when Tom in the closed wheelhouse could not. One high white-shouldered fellow—they knew he was high and white-shouldered by the noise he made coming—came roaring along and they climbed into the after weather rigging; and from there almost comfortably looked down upon white water,

rolling across her waist and filling the length of her after gangway solid, and so over her stern rail.

Tom Boyle, at the wheel, felt a bit worried about that one getting by him. Holding one hand on a wheel spoke, he reached out with the other, threw open an airport that looked out upon the deck from the after side of the wheelhouse. He peered out anxiously, caught sight of the two figures outlined against the sky in the rigging. They were safe; but to relieve his feeling, he thrust a megaphone through the airport and yelled down the deck: "I missed that one, Andie! Thought the old girl was goin' to be hove down for a minute. Y'all right, Andie—you and Steve?"

"All right!" shouted Andie. Against the gale of wind that was blowing, his voice did not carry beyond the end of his nose and he knew it, but it sort of nourished friendly feelings to be answering back.

The Pelican swung a boat from davits on her starboard quarter. Andie brought his head down to Steve's and yelled in Steve's ear: "I'm 'fraid that

quarter boat'll go adrift. Let's see."

They climbed down from the rigging, made their careful way along the deck. They had to be careful, the deck being all iced up, and the wind strong enough almost to pick them up and blow them overboard when they didn't have a good hold on something.

THEY reached the boat. "Thought so," yelled Andie to Steve. "Bow falls loose. Who d' y' s'pose hitched them so they wouldn't stay hitched? D' y' know what I think about most o' these steamer crews? They're the half of 'em shore bums. Can y' imagine a man aboard an old trawler from the sailin' fleet half hitchin' a boat's falls so they wouldn't stay half hitched? The crew'd take him some dark night an' heave him over the lee rail."

He caught up the loose bight of the falls, half hitched them anew. "So long's we're here," he shouted in Steve's ear, "I think I'll run a line over and under her, and lash her bow and stern so no sea'll carry her loose from the davits." (Continued on page 22)



Illustrated by
W. J. Aylward

Oh, if the sea would only stay quiet for a while. But it was now up and now down, and he had to keep an eye out for the whirling screw