



## WHEN OSCAR WENT WILD by W.C. Tuttle.

**R**EN MERTON and Sig Watson had spent the night in Piperock and of a consequence were in no shape to appreciate the beauties of the dewy morn, as their horses picked their way up the trail to the top of Overwhich ridge.

“Them Piperock fellers play poker like I sing,” stated Sig, as they pulled up their mounts for a breathing spell. “They gits their words and music so mixed that nobody knows what they’re tryin’ to do. They’re uh success, though.”

Ren removed his sombrero with an exaggerated flourish and, lifting himself in his stirrups, broke forth in a shrill falsetto:

“Nobode-e-e-e knows how dry I am.”

“Shut up!”

“Mama mine, he won’t let me sing,” wailed Ren. “I lost jist as much as he did and m’ head aches jist as hard and he won’t let m’ sing. What do yuh know about that!”

“Jist don’t sing, that’s all,” replied Sig. “You can say all th’ funny things yuh wants to to yoreself, but I’m right here to remark that singin’—yore kind uh singin’—ain’t in de-

mand a-tall. *Sabe?*”

“Always misunderstood,” mumbled Ren. “Th’ human race ain’t never understood me. Mother misunderstood me; father follered suit, and now you—Siggie, my old pal—you turns on me.”

“Misunderstood!” Sig turned in his saddle and gazed reflectively at his partner. “Ren Merton, if you was ever entered fer th’ human race you shore was scratched. Yore nose ain’t right—too long. Yuh got uh bad case uh squints in both uh yore eyes, and yore mouth, which was cut too wide in th’ first place, ain’t shrunk none a-tall. Shoulders? Say, I sometimes wonder how comes it that yore collar don’t slip down and trip yuh. Also, yore right foot is where yore left ought to be.”

“Pickled prairie-dogs, that’s right!” agreed Ren. “I reckon I shore must a been muddled this mawnin’ when I puts on m’ boots.”

“And also yore hair——”

“You stops at hair!” exploded Ren. “Mebby I’ve got red hair and mebbly she runs uh little to th’ rusty shade, but I’ll be danged if

any feller with fat eyebrows, buffalo-horn mustache and bow legs can taunt me with th' fact. Take uh look in th' glass and you'll see that you ain't no one-to-ten shot in this race yoreself, Sig."

Sig grunted and turned back. The horses seemed to start by mutual consent and plodded off down the hogback.

"I've knowed uh lot uh people," remarked Sig, "who thought they had red hair, but——"

He pulled up his horse.

"Wasn't that a voice, Ren?"

"I reckon not—not uh human one anyway. Go on and finish yore remarks about hair."

"I tell yuh I heard somebody yell!" declared Sig. "It was jist over that ridge, and I'm goin' to see who it was."

HE SPURRED his horse into a gallop and Ren followed at his heels. They crossed the ridge and swung down into an open timbered swale, interspersed with clumps of willows and jack-pines.

There they saw her. She was tied to a tree and seemed to be exerting every muscle to get loose. She was dressed in a faded calico dress and her dark-brown hair tumbled in confusion about her half-bare shoulders.

The sight of her was a shock to the punchers and they threw their broncos back on their haunches at the sight. The girl didn't see them, and after the first gasp of surprise they sat there and stared at her.

Suddenly she shrank back against the tree and screamed—

"That's not Oscar!"

Like a flash of yellow light a scared cougar had bounded out of the willow thicket near her and crouched low.

Ren acted first. While he hadn't the uncanny skill on the draw attributed to the Western gunman, he was deadly when he did "get his ol' smoke-wagon unhitched." The

cougar had barely touched his belly to the ground when Ren's .45 started to spout death and destruction.

Two of the heavy slugs tore through its neck, and the cougar tied itself in a snarling, spitting knot and rolled over dead. When the last shot was fired Ren's horse was nearly over the body of the cougar and Ren was shoving fresh shells into the gun.

The girl looked at Ren in a dazed sort of a way for a moment and then in a tired little voice remarked—

"That wasn't Oscar."

"No, ma'am," agreed Ren foolishly. "That shore wasn't Oscar."

"What happened?" asked a deep bass voice, and Ren turned in his saddle; behind him stood a florid-faced person in a green-corduroy suit and panama, and behind him a narrow-shouldered, sharp-faced man in knickerbockers.

"What happened, I asked?" repeated the florid one.

"It wasn't Oscar," stated the girl for the third time.

"Well, what was it, then?" queried the sharp-faced man.

"I kept grinding until this cowboy person butted in and spoiled it."

"Did you quit then?" roared the florid one. "By Jupiter! You lost a fine chance for some real stuff. But what happened to Oscar, and where in the world did this other lion come from?"

"Did it—I say—where did it?"

Another person had joined the crowd. He was hatless and garbed in the costume of the early settler, fringed and beaded buckskin from his toes to his chin, and his face was ashen. He walked up with an uncertain gait and his breathing gave evidence of recent exertion.

"What happened to you, Jack?" asked the florid one.

"Why, I—uh—I——"

“You met it too, did you?” grinned the thin-faced one, and the fringed one gulped an assent.

“I was—er—just coming through that clump of bushes and I met it. You see I—er—thought perhaps that if I ran I could coax it away from the rest of you.”

“Haw, haw, haw!” roared Sig. “You shore ought to git uh hero medal. Didn’t yuh know that no self-respectin’ cougar would chase uh git-up like that?”

Just then two more men came running down the hill and, seeing the crowd, one of them stopped and cupped his hands.

“Mister Norton!” he yelled. “Oscar slipped his collar and got away!”

“Just my luck!” exclaimed Norton, the florid one. “Here I bring this bunch way up here to finish that film, and that blamed cat gets away and spoils it all!”

“Oscar is uh cougar, I takes it,” opined Ren, rolling a cigarette and looking admiringly at the girl. “I reckon somebody might as well let th’ lady loose. Cougars bein’ thick, I don’t think it’s safe to tie ladies to trees anyway.”

One of the men cut the ropes which bound her, and the thin-faced man recovered his camera from the willow thicket.

“Miss, I reckon you can have that cougar skin if yuh wants it,” remarked Sig. “We ain’t got no use fer it, and if yuh wants it I’ll have Ren skin it fer yuh.”

“I am Miss Reynolds,” she replied with a smile. “And I’d love to shake hands with both of you. You gentlemen saved my life, and I haven’t words to thank you with.”

“Don’t mention it, Miss Reynolds,” replied Sig. “Little thing like that—why—”

“Slack up yore rope!” rasped Ren. “You never saved anything—not even yore salary, and now yuh tells, her that it’s uh little thing to save her life.” He leaned over an’ held out his hand. “Miss Reynolds, I’m uh heap glad to meet yuh. My name’s Ren Merton, and

if there’s anything I can do fer yuh—yuh can have that catskin to remember me by.”

She gave him a sweet smile.

“I’d love to have it, Mr. Merton. I’ll have one of the men skin it, and every time I put my foot on that rug I’ll remember you. I’ve had my life saved many times on the films, but this being the first time in real life, I just don’t know what to say.”

“I jist hope yuh won’t forget it, anyway,” laughed Ren.

“Do you think you’ll forget it?” she asked.

“Lady,” interrupted Sig, “that hombre can forget anything. I’m th’ brains of our outfit, and if yuh wants an intelligent favor done, jist ask me. *Sabe?*”

“I don’t know whether you gentlemen are in earnest or not. Do you mean everything you say to each other?”

“I do,” replied Sig, with a bow, “but Mr. Merton here never meant anything he ever said. He’s notorious fer jist talkin’. As I orates before, Miss Reynolds, if there is anything I can do fer yuh, why—”

“I do wish we could get Oscar,” she replied reflectively. “There goes poor old Nortie up the hill with a broken heart, and I know that Jack Markham is awfully put out about it too. You see we’ve simply got to have a cougar or we can’t finish the picture. I wonder if you could catch Oscar? He’s as tame as a kitten and has never been wild. The company raised him—got him from a zoo when he was a little yellow kitten. I know that Mr. Norton would be willing to pay you well if you would catch him.”

“Miss Reynolds, we ain’t mercenary thataway,” replied Sig. “I ain’t wastin’ no love on that Norton person, and I don’t rassel no cougar fer his money, but if you really wants that cat, I’m promisin’ it to yuh.”

“That’s awfully kind of you,” she cooed. “If you could catch him and bring him back here tomorrow, I could just love you

both. Then we could finish that picture. Really, he is as tame as a kitten.”

“Consider him caught,” boasted Sig. “Me and Ren will bring him to yore house tomorrow mawnin’. Uh course I could git him alone, but bein’ as Ren is with me I’ll let him help.”

“Meanin’,” drawled Ren, “that I ropes that cat and ties him up fer shipment, and Sig writes th’ address.”

Miss Reynolds insisted on shaking hands with both of them again, and her smile left them both unable to roll a cigarette.

“We’re living in those cabins up there in the pines,” she explained, “and probably will be there for a few days. You can bring him right up there.”

“Yes’m,” they both replied, and watched her skip up the hill in the wake of the rest of the party.

About half-way to the top she stopped and threw them a kiss, and then danced out of sight in the jack-pines.

REN rolled a fresh smoke and studied Sig’s rapt expression from under his hat brim. Suddenly he broke into song——

“And that’s what made th’ wildcat wild.”

“Meanin’ which?” demanded Sig.

“Oscar,” chuckled Ren. “Don’t yuh see, Sig? Them velvet optics made Oscar——”

“Listen,” snapped Sig. “Confine yore humor to somethin’ else. I don’t sit here inactive and hear yuh slander them eyes none whatever. *Sabe?* I’m backin’ th’ lady’s play—me.”

“Me and you both,” replied Ren seriously. “But did yuh ever stop to consider that you gits so danged conceited when uh female person speaks to yuh that yuh promises to do anything? Cougars ain’t woodchucks nor snowshoe rabbits, and I’m thinkin’ aloud that you’ve gone plumb out of yore class this

time.”

“We’ll git him,” snapped Sig. “One of th’ fellers told me that th’ last they saw of him he was lopin’ up th’ trail, and that means he’s liable to hive up in our cabin. Bein’ as he’s uh house-bred animule, it stands to reason that he’s goin’ to hunt human company soon’s he gits hungry or gits scared of th’ dark. *Sabe?*”

Ren nodded and they turned their horses and rode on up the trail to their cabin about two miles away. They unsaddled their horses at the corral and then laid down on their bunks for a much-needed rest.

It was almost dark when Ren awoke and looked around the cabin. Sig was gone. Ren got up and was lazily pulling on his boots when Sig came in with a hammer in his hand and a smile on his face.

“Th’ sleek hare sleeps while th’ sly fox schemes,” he quoted dramatically. “I reckon I’ve laid uh trap fer Oscar.”

He hung up the hammer and went out again. A few moments later he was back of the cabin fumbling with the one window. “Help me take this thing out, Ren!” he yelled.

Ren removed the nails from the inside and Sig removed the window and threw in the end of his lariat rope.

“What’s th’ idea?” asked Ren.

Sig grinned and coiled up the rope.

“Cougar trap. I got this rope fixed so’s that when th’ cougar gits inside of th’ shed, all we got to do is to pull on th’ rope and th’ door shuts. There’s uh quarter uh venison in th’ shed and I’m bettin’ that Oscar falls fer it, Ren. What do yuh think about it?”

“Sig, yore uh wonder! I’m bettin’ that you’ve already deduced how to tie him up after we gits him inside. I shore honors and respects yuh, old timer, and as uh special mark of respect I allows yuh to prepare our evenin’ meal. I’m so hungry I could eat Oscar, I reckon.”

Three hours later they sat humped up on their bunk and watched the door of the

shed, a splotch of black in the half moonlight, and prayed that the cougar would come before they lost too much sleep.

“Don’t light that cigarette here,” cautioned Ren. “Go back near th’ door. If that cat saw th’ light he’d never show up.”

Sig tiptoed to the front of the cabin and sat down on a box. Ren sat by the window for a few minutes and then joined Sig.

“Give me yore papers and I’ll roll one, too. I reckon it’s uh little too early fer Oscar to show up yet.”

They smoked in silence for a while and then sneaked back to the window. Sig took one long look at the door and then threw himself backward and heaved on the rope. The door shut with a bang and an unearthly yelp split the stillness of the night.

“Got him!” whooped Sig. “I seen his eyes and slammed that old door right in his face! Whoopee!”

“Good work!” exclaimed Ren. “I’ll bet Oscar is plumb scared to death right now.”

“Not any he ain’t. Oscar’s uh tame cougar and, while he may display uh little peevishness at first, he’ll be plumb satisfied with that hunk uh meat. Let’s go out and see what he’s doin’.”

They walked around the shed but were unable to size up their catch, as the shed had no windows. They could hear a sniffing at the cracks of the door and suddenly a heavy body was flung against it, but the heavy bar on the outside held it fast.

“Want to go inside and look him over?” queried Ren.

“Not in his present state uh mind, I don’t. That cat is shore some irritated and when they gits fussed thataway they’re plumb informal. How do yuh reckon we’re goin’ to acquire his carcass fer shipment?”

“Might git some uh that movie outfit to come up and git him,” suggested Ren, but Sig promptly vetoed it.

“And have that beautiful lady think

that me and you were afraid of her pet, eh?”

“I’d rather be uh live coward than uh dead hero,” stated Ren. “There ain’t no honor in th’ grave fer me. I got an idea though. Mebby she’s good and mebby again she ain’t.”

“Shoot.”

“I’ll unfasten th’ door and let her open jist a little ways. *Sabe?* Th’ cat will try to come out and I’ll slam th’ door shut when he’s half-ways out an’ all you has to do is to put two ropes on him. You take one and I’ll take th’ other and Mr. Oscar is plumb helpless.”

“Uh ha,” agreed Sig. “That’s uh hy-in scheme—if you holds him.”

“Aw ———, Sig, he’s tame! I’ll hold him. All you got to do is to slip th’ two ropes on him and give me one. *Sabe?*”

SIG went to the corral and brought back two ropes. He held the nooses handy while Ren removed the bar. He opened the door an inch at a time and braced himself for the rush.

“Come on out, Oscar,” pleaded Sig. “Be uh nice li’l cat and come on——”

Oscar came, not sneakingly nor slowly but a rasping, spitting, clawing chunk of deviltry, and Ren shut the door just in time. It caught Oscar at the flank and for a few seconds the air was full of cougar cuss words.

Sig advanced cautiously and managed to get one rope over its head and pulled the noose tight. He handed that rope to Ren, who immediately proceeded to forget that he was there to keep the door tight. He grabbed the rope with both hands, braced himself for the rush and unthinkingly stepped away from the door.

There was a heave and a flash and the cougar sailed over Sig’s head and out to the end of that rope. Ren was partly braced for the shock but didn’t figure on the velocity of the animal, and when the shock came he went straight up in the air and off across the clearing.

Luckily he lit running and hung on to the rope, and he and the cougar went down the hill, over stumps and through the thickets like a spitting, yelling, yellow comet with a human tail.

They had traveled thus for about two hundred yards when the cougar went on one side of a tree and Ren on the other. They almost met on the big swing. The cat flipped upside down over a log while Ren almost completed the circle, only stopping when he threw his arms around a tree and hung on. He still held the rope and had presence of mind enough left to proceed to tie that cat up good and tight. The cougar had choked itself nearly to death trying to come up under the log and Ren had little trouble in tying its hind legs so it was helpless.

He rolled a smoke and hobbled back to the cabin. He wondered in a detached sort of way what had become of Sig and why he didn't help him hold it, but as he walked around the cabin he heard Sig's voice imploring him to:

"Hurry up, fer Gawd's sake!"

"What's th' matter?" asked Ren.

"Come over here you danged fool!" wailed Sig. "Can't yuh see I can't hold this door much longer!"

"Hold th—what—why, I'll be danged! Where did yuh git it, Sig?"

"Grab hold uh this door! How do I know where I got it? When you and Oscar paraded off down th' hill I sees uh pair uh eyes shinin' in there and I jist slams th' door in time to catch his neck. Gosh, ain't he a sassy-lookin' animule, Ren? Where's Oscar?"

"Hog-tied to uh log," mumbled Ren. "At least I got uh cougar tied to th' log—I didn't ask his name. I wonder how two of 'em got in at oncet, and which is Oscar?"

"This ain't Oscar," stated Sig with conviction. "No house variety of cougar would" have uh face and uh disposition like this one, Ren."

"Hang onto th' door, Sig, while I takes uh board off th' wall and attacks him from behind. You jist keep on squeezin' him and I'll tie him up."

Ren got the hammer and removed a board. The cougar objected at the top of its voice, but in a few minutes Ren had it trussed up and tied off to a rafter.

They went into the cabin, boiled a pot of coffee and had a smoke.

"Well, we don't know which is Oscar, but I reckon Miss Reynolds can pick him out," remarked Ren.

"Said she'd love me if I got him," grinned Sid, "and I've got him."

"Yore hearin' is on uh par with yore brains," drawled Ren. "She said 'us,' and what's more, Siggie, you ain't got him—I've got him. *Sabe?* I risked my whole danged life to git her that cougar. You can put yore location notice on that one in th' shed, but not on Oscar. He's mine, located, filed and patented."

"Is that so!" exploded Sig. "I'm here to orate that it was my scheme which caught it! All you did was to hang on to th' rope and, not bein' overly strong nor active, you permits that li'l cat to haul yuh around, regardless. And now yuh opines that yuh owns Oscar. Not any yuh don't!"

"I don't care if yuh did tear yore pants," he continued. "If yuh can't take care of yoreself don't blame me. I've shore treated yuh white, Ren Merton, and now yuh turns and bites th' hand which feeds yuh!"

"Bites yore hand!" snorted Ren, shaking his forefinger under Sig's nose. "Listen: any time I starts bitin' you won't confine yore diagnosis to hands, old timer. I orates openly that as soon as daylight comes I'm goin' down and make uh crate and prepare Oscar fer shipment. *Sabe?* I ain't concern-in' myself about that cat in th' shed and hereby waives all rights to him, but I duly informs all present company that I'm uh close

corporation when it comes to li'l' Oscar. Let's go to bed."

"Not with you!" snarled Sig. "I'll take uh blanket and go out in th' woods or sleep in th' shed with th' cougar. I hereby refuses to share yore bed and I does it without malice in m' heart. You grieves me deeply, Mr. Merton, and I'm sore at heart and meek-feelin'."

"Hop to it!" grunted Ren, as he rolled into the bunk and stretched wearily. "Don't go near Oscar 'cause I reckon he's fond uh meek things."

Sig took a blanket and went out, closing the door softly. As the door closed, Ren slid out of his bunk and peered out of the window. He chuckled as he saw Sig wander off into the trees, and he sat up and rolled a smoke and seemed to ponder deeply. Suddenly he slapped his leg and pinched out the light of his cigarette.

"By golly!" he chuckled, "won't Sig go high, wide and handsome?"

THE first tinge of morning showed in the east when Ren slipped out of the cabin and approached the shed. Ten minutes later a tawny figure glided out of the open shed and bounded off into the underbrush. Five minutes later an apparition in rags stumbled out of the shed and leaned uncertainly against the wall.

"Mama mine!" it mumbled. "I must be uh sight. Them danged things won't go away when yuh gives 'em uh chance. I shore am scratched some artistic."

He staggered into the cabin and painfully removed his torn clothing. He tore up some of the shirt for bandages, but there was too much space to cover and he was awfully tired. He sat on the bunk as naked as the day he was born and fumbled for a cigarette, in the pockets he didn't have on.

"Well, I'll be teetotally —— !" exclaimed Sig's voice from the doorway but Ren never looked up. "Come on and help me, Sig. I reckon I'm all cut to shoestrings."

"You ain't alone, Ren."

Ren lifted his head and looked at Sig.

"Pickled prairie-dogs!" he groaned. "What happened to you? Did you—huh—turn Oscar loose?"

"After seven years uh hard fightin' and hardships I manages to break his holt," declared Sig dismally. "I'm jist uh walkin' hunk uh Hamburger steak, Ren, and I feels that when I removes my clothes I'll be no more. That cat jist simply prospected every piece uh meat on my frame. In my war-sack under th' bunk there's uh roll uh stickin' plaster. You wrap me up and I'll do th' same fer you, Ren. I've done played my last joke—absolutely. I suppose th' shed is empty?"

"Uh ha," nodded Ren. "I'm apologizin', Sig."

"Aw, Ren, I reckon misery likes company."

"Well," drawled Ren, "she's got it."

Half an hour later, with adhesive plaster covering most of their bodies they laid down on the bunk and rolled more cigarettes. "I wonder which one was Oscar?" mused Sig aloud, but Ren was deep in thought and made no answer.

Finally Ren drew a deep breath and turned to Sig.

"Them movie people take big chances, don't they? Jist think about uh girl playin' with Oscar. Tame? Say, I shore hope I never meets uh wild cougar, Sig. That animule shore put his trade-mark on me."

Just then there came a clatter of horse's hoofs outside and Sig limped over to the closed door.

"Hello!" yelled a voice, which they both recognized as that of Norton, the movie director.

"Hello, yoreself!" retorted Sig. "We're takin' our mornin' bath and can't come out."

"That's all right," laughed Norton. "I just came up here to deliver a message to you from Miss Reynolds."

"What was it?" asked Sig quickly.

“She said for you boys not to worry about Oscar because he came back right after you left.”

“Must be sore about something,”

reflected Norton as his horse picked it’s way down the narrow trail. “Either they are sore or mighty ungentlemanly, because they never even said ‘thank you.’”