



The Red Devil from Blue Wells

By J. R. JOHNSTON

Three shadows crept along the side of the jail-house! A cloud of black dust swept down from the barn! A troop of hell-dancin' coyotes flashed into the square! And the Red Devil cut loose.

CHAPTER I THE RED STAR OF JUSTICE

SHERIFF JIM TOLLIVER raised himself on one elbow and searched the faces of the rangemen with faded blue eyes. His night-shirt fell open, revealing the crimson-stained bandages on his chest, where the bullet of an assassin had pierced it two days before.

"Well, how about it, boys?" he queried anxiously. "Did they vote for or against me?"

Red Jarvis, manager of the sheriff's Blue Lake ranch and his staunchest friend, closed the door and came slowly to the bedside. His right hand gripped Tolliver's. The rest of the men leaned against the walls and fidgeted nervously.

"They voted against you, Jim," Jarvis told him grimly. "Stinson was there, of course. It's ten to one he bought off every one of the county commissioners before they came to the meetin'. Anyhow, they declared you unfit to perform yore duties in yore present state, and they appointed Sam Barker sheriff to fill the vacancy. Barker is

Stinson's man, you know. This means that Stinson will be able to run the county just like he's wanted to for years. There's no tellin' what crooked stuff he'll pull, either."

Tolliver sank back wearily upon his pillow. "I—I guess that finishes me, Red," he said brokenly. "And I guess it finishes the county, too."

Jarvis, tall and lean, was only twenty-six years old, but he possessed a lot of plain "horse-savvy." It was for that reason that Jim Tolliver had chosen him to manage the big Blue Wells ranch; and Jarvis had proven his worth in short order, putting it on a paying basis at a time when the market was bad and everything was against the cattlemen.

Possibly the most noteworthy feature of his appearance was his shock of brilliant red hair. Frequent combings failed to curb its tendencies, so that it stuck out in all directions. Under that shock of red was a clear-cut, rugged face with lips that were usually smiling.

"Let's not give up yet, boss," he said

seriously. "As I see it, there's one more hand to be played in this game, if you want to play it. There's no use tryin' to beat Stinson by appealin' to the commissioners. The only thing we can do is beat him at his own game."

Tolliver looked up, hope leaping into his faded eyes.

"Red, if you can straighten this thing out, you can have anythin' I've got. It means a lot to me, keepin' this job. No Tolliver has ever been fired because he couldn't handle anythin' he was put at. Besides that, I can't let that dirty coyote get the best of me, even if I am flat on my back. I've just got to beat him, Red!"

"Well, I've got a plan that might work," Jarvis said gruffly to conceal his own emotion. "It'll mean a lot of killin', most likely, but I think we can count on the boys and yore friends here in town to back us up. Stinson's got to keep Barker in office or his plan's no good, see? Supposin' you refused to accept the action of the commissioners, and supposin' you appointed me deputy sheriff with power to act for you in everythin' till yo're well again?"

Tolliver's eyes brightened.

"Yeah, we'll suppose that. What then?"

"Then I'll take some of the boys down to the jail, throw Barker in one of his own cells, and keep him prisoner. That'll mean a fight on our hands with Stinson that'll probably involve the whole county, but I figure if we can hold Osage City and Barker, we'll beat him! What do you say?"

Tolliver's eyes glowed. The ten cowboys who had been leaning disconsolately against the wall crowded eagerly around the bed.

"Hold up yore right hand, Red!" the sheriff instructed. "You swear on yore honor to do yore duty to this county and to—er—to dispose of all its enemies insofar as you are able?"

"I do!" answered Jarvis.

"Fine. Go to it, Red. Take my star. I dunno where there's any deputy badges, but Barker's probably got all those that were in my office. I'm leavin' everythin' to you, and I sure hope you succeed!"

IT WAS SHORTLY before dawn the next morning when three shadowy forms crept along the side of the jail-house and paused at the front

door. After an interval of whispering, one of them tried the door, found it unlocked, and slowly pushed it open.

Suddenly it squeaked loudly.

"Who's that!" demanded a scared voice from the right corner. "Q-quick, or I'll shoot!"

"Shut up!" commanded Jarvis, stepping hurriedly inside. "Lay still Barker, and you won't get hurt. I'm Red Jarvis! Sheriff Tolliver sent me to take charge here, and yo're my prisoner!"

Crash! A gun roared from the opposite corner. The bullet thudded into the wall close to Jarvis' head. Before he could return the fire there was a hurried rush of feet and the man who had shot scurried down a hallway toward the rear of the building.

"Walters!" Barker shrieked after him. "Get Stinson! Get Stinson!"

Jarvis leaped forward into the darkness, smothering the cry just as the back door slammed. Barker fought frantically, but relaxed when Jarvis threatened to hammer him over the head with a gun barrel. The two Blue Wells cowboys came running in to report that Walters had gotten away.

"Let him go," Jarvis directed when one of them had lighted a lamp on the sheriff's desk. "One of you beat it out to the ranch and get the rest of the boys. Tom, while I lock Barker in a cell, you go wake up Sleepy Jones and the others and bring them here. Stinson will be on the warpath before long, and we want to be ready for him."

By eight o'clock Jarvis' forces were in position. Under the board sidewalk on the west side of the jail were ten cowboys headed by Sleepy Jones, range foreman of Blue Wells. In the jail itself were ten other men, including Jarvis. All of them were armed with Winchesters and .45s.

"They're comin', Red," said a bowlegged rider named "Yuma" Carter, squinting out of a window of the jail. "Looks like about forty of 'em."

"Yeah," Jarvis agreed, looking into the plaza where he pointed. "There's Stinson leadin' 'em, too. Well, we're ready."

He opened the door just as Stinson, a huge man on a black horse, called his name.

"What do you want?" he demanded, halting just outside the door.

"Barker's the legal sheriff of this county, and

I want you to turn him loose!”

Jarvis shook his head decisively.

“You’re not foolin’ me a bit, Stinson. I know you bribed the county commissioners to appoint your man, Barker, and I know that you’ve got some crooked scheme up your sleeve you want to work, too. I’d be willin’ to swear that you had Tolliver shot, but I can’t prove it yet.

“No, I won’t turn Barker loose. Jim Tolliver has appointed me deputy sheriff of this county, with full authority to do as I see fit. So Barker is goin’ to languish until I get good and ready to let him go!”

“Then we’ll come and get him!” swore Stinson savagely.

“Come right ahead,” Jarvis grinned invitingly. “We’ve got a reception committee all ready to receive you. Maybe you’ll change your mind when—”

A hand reached out of the doorway behind him, hooked itself swiftly in his collar and yanked him inside. At the same instant a bullet thudded into the front of the jail, directly on a line with the spot where Jarvis’ head had been.

“Yuh danged fool!” snorted Yuma Carter, releasing the deputy’s collar and slamming the door shut. “What you tryin’ to do, get massacred the first thing? Yuh oughta know Stinson would pull somethin’ like that. I’ll bet he’d ordered you shot without warnin’ if you refused to do what he wants. If I hadn’t seen that little runt on the pinto edgin’ out to where he could get a shot at you, you’d be just so much fertilizer by now!”

“Thanks, Yuma,” Jarvis grinned at him. “No, I wasn’t expectin’ anythin’ like that. Should’ve, though. What they doin’ now?”

He leaped to a window, urged on by the clatter of approaching hoofs. Grabbing up a Winchester just as a bullet shattered the glass in front of him, he cut loose. Yuma Carter and the eight other Blue Wells men were doing exactly the same thing; shooting methodically, quickly into the onrushing horde of gunmen. Three saddles were emptied at the first fire, while four horses went down heavily, piling their riders in a mad swirl of dust.

Stinson had not expected that appalling burst of fire, thinking that Jarvis would only have a couple of men with him. He raised his hand in a signal, and his gunmen pulled in their horses. For

an instant they hesitated, not knowing what to do.

That instant was disastrous, for now the ten men under the sidewalk caught them with a hail of lead and steel that emptied two more saddles and wounded half a dozen other riders, throwing the entire group into a panic.

The dust rose thickly, hiding the horsemen in front of the jail. Into it Jarvis and his men fired blindly again and again. The sound of hoof-beats reached them, dwindling rapidly, and when the dust had settled the plaza was empty.

“Whoopee!” yelled Yuma. “Scared ‘em off the first thing. Le’ssee,” counting the bodies, “we got nine, ten, ‘leven of ‘em, and six horses.”

“Shucks,” said a tall, thin cowboy in an aggrieved tone, “is that all? I had an idea we’d wiped out the whole crowd. Now we’ll prob’ly have to do it all over again.”

“Why you big hog!” snorted Yuma. “Whatcha want to do, slaughter ‘em? Ain’t yuh never satisfied, Art Simmons? You oughta been a Indian, you’re so danged bloodthirsty!”

“Well, I guess he’ll get plenty to do before this thing’s over,” put in Jarvis, coming up to them with a Winchester .45-90 he had found in the sheriff’s gun rack. “Which one of you two is the best shot?”

Both of them eyed the rifle suspiciously.

“If you’re figurin’ on us usin’ that old buffalo slayer,” Yuma answered, “Art is the best shot. He can work that thing to a fare-you-well, he can.”

“I am not!” protested Simmons indignantly. “Yuma is a better shot than me. Besides, he’s heavier than I am, and that gun won’t kick him so hard.”

“You’re elected, Yuma,” Jarvis grinned humorously. “Only, don’t let it kick you out of the cupola on top of Haskel’s barn, because that’s where you’re goin’. Here’s enough shells to last you all day. Don’t be afraid to use plenty of ‘em.”

“That ain’t so bad after all,” Yuma said hopefully. “Man, what I can’t do with that cannon ain’t worth mentionin’. Any orders, Red?”

Jarvis grinned again.

“Yeah. If you see any of Stinson’s gang, use your own judgment.”

“Huh!” Simmons grunted a trifle enviously. “You tell him that and he’ll be shootin’ us up instead of Stinson. Go on, darn you, get outa

here!”

Yuma took a playful swing at him and slipped out of a side door. His destination was a huge red barn on the edge of town some six hundred yards from the jail. With a long-range weapon such as the .45-90 he could play hell with anyone attacking the jail.

CHAPTER II THE CITIZENS' BUCKBOARD

SAFELY OUT of range of the devastating fire from the jail, Stinson gathered his disorganized force around him. His wrath increased as he counted his losses.

“Where’s Walters!” he demanded harshly. “What did he tell me Jarvis had only two men with him for? Dang his ornery hide, I’ll learn him to lie to me! I’ve lost almost a dozen men already, all on account of him! Where is he?”

“They got him at the first fire,” answered Mort Adams, a stocky rider who was foreman of the Double S, Stinson’s ranch. “They must’ve got the rest of the Blue Wells bunch there before we came. You sure had the right idea bringin’ enough of us to hold the town, chief.”

“Yeah, but I’ve only got thirty left!” Stinson rasped. “Mort, you collect every man in this town you can get. Tell them that Red Jarvis has locked the sheriff in his own jail and is defyin’ every law-abidin’ citizen to make him vamoose. Lay it on thick, so they’ll believe he’s turned outlaw. That ought to bring ‘em.

“Ten or twelve of the rest of you get on the other side of the plaza and smoke those gents out from under that sidewalk. That’s the first thing we’ve gotta do.”

As soon as Stinson’s gunmen got the range of the ditch, they made it so hot that Sleepy Jones and his men scrambled out from under the sidewalk and legged it madly for the nearest buildings.

One man dropped. The rest reached safety, although three of them carried bullets. They proceeded to climb up the roofs in an effort to retaliate, while on the opposite side of the plaza Stinson expressed himself in no uncertain terms.

“What kind of gunmen do you call yoreselves?” he raved savagely. “You should’ve

dropped five or six of ‘em, and you get only one. Here’s Mort with thirty more men comin’, so for gosh sakes buck up. We’ve got to run that red devil out of that jail and do it quick, understand? Now listen to me.”

A few minutes later he split his force of sixty men into three parts, sending each one in a different direction.

By this time Osage City was fully aware of what was happening in its midst. Women and children were hastily dispatched out of the threatened areas, while their men-folks prepared to join in the general festivities on one side or the other. Forty more men fell in with Stinson’s three parties, while nearly fifty hastened in the direction of the jail to join Jarvis.

“Wonder what’s wrong?” queried Red Jarvis when ten minutes had passed without a shot being fired. “Stinson’s up to somethin’, sure as you’re born, Art.”

“I guess you’re right,” agreed Art, squinting through a window. “Judgin’ by the looks of what’s comin’ I’d say somethin’ sure was wrong. What is it?”

Jarvis looked. A bullet struck the casement at the same moment, driving tiny splinters of wood into his face. He ducked. But he had seen enough. Somewhere Stinson’s men had found a buckboard and several large sections of sheet iron. One of these they had fastened upright to the seat, while others extended out on each side and under the floor, adequately protecting the six men who were pushing it backward toward the jail. With them they had several sticks of dynamite, short fuses attached, which they expected to heave through the jail windows as soon as they were close enough.

Clang! A slug from Jarvis’ Winchester flattened against the iron shield. The deputy’s men were firing rapidly, but none of their bullets took effect. Behind the men with the buckboard, in the buildings along the north and east sides of the plaza, others of Stinson’s men poured a hot fire into the jail.

Bullets came thick and fast through the windows, shattering the glass to bits, whining, screaming, zipping as they struck the iron bars and glanced off. It was suicide to attempt to face that hail of lead long enough to shoot at the advancing buckboard. Jarvis kept trying, however,

until a slug battered itself on a bar, glanced off and raked along the side of his head. That made him mad. His red hair stuck out worse than ever.

"Give me some shells, Art!" he commanded. "I'm goin' out and bust that thing wide open!"

"You are not!" vetoed Simmons. "Not out the front door, you ain't!"

"No, I'm goin' to slip out the back way, cut around the corner and get on the roof of one of those stores. Then I can plug those gents from the side as they go by. You stay here with the other boys. I'll be back if they make things too hot."

Grabbing a handful of shells and stuffing them into his pockets, he rushed out, reloading as he went. He rounded the end of the alley into a side street and started north at full speed.

Wham! A rifle crashed at the corner, the bullet striking a brick wall close to the deputy's head and singing off into space. Jarvis dived behind a telephone pole and cut loose with his own rifle. Four men who had been hastening to join Stinson fell apart as if struck by a pile-driver. Three of them scrambled to their feet and fled, Jarvis urging them to greater speed with his slugs. The fourth lay where he had fallen, a pool of blood slowly forming under his breast.

Leaping over the body, Jarvis took a last shot at a fleeing form and ran on. Veering into an alley he swung himself up on the roof of a low shed, clambered over a higher cornice, and found himself on a store overlooking the plaza.

The buckboard had passed the center of the square, and was still proceeding slowly due to the difficulty of steering it. On the roofs of the buildings beyond the jail, Jarvis caught sight of a group of men who were shooting spasmodically at the buckboard and at the same time trying to evade the bullets hurled at them by Stinson's covering party. One of them he recognized as Sleepy Jones.

Two hundred feet from the jail the buckboard stopped, while slug after slug battered against the iron plates. Jarvis held his fire in disgust as he saw that the six men were protected from the side as well, and would not be open to his bullets until they were directly opposite him.

CHAPTER III

CARTER LEADS HIS TRUMPS

AN ARM appeared suddenly above the center shield, hurling a sputtering object that struck the front of the jail and fell to the ground. It exploded and tore the board sidewalk to pieces. Jarvis cocked his rifle and waited for the arm to appear again.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of a curious phenomenon. He raised his head and stared. In front of the cupola on top of a big red barn east of the plaza he saw what appeared to be the remains of a handful of flour thrown on the air. Whap! Something struck one of the iron plates squarely in the center, smashed on through as if it had been paper, and dropped one of the six men just as he lighted the fuse of a second stick of dynamite. One of his five surviving comrades scooped up the stick frantically and hurled it far from him without regard to direction. It crashed through the large glass window of a store opposite Jarvis and burst with a muffled roar; with the result that five of Stinson's men who had just entered through a rear door clawed each other in unreasoning terror and fought to get out again.

Whap! Again the iron plate was torn. Yuma Carter had at last decided to take a hand in the game, and had started right out by leading trumps. The heavy bullets of his buffalo gun could not be denied by a mere sheet of iron, and Stinson's men realized it rather tardily.

With a wild yell they broke and ran for cover, scattering in all directions. The .45-90 spoke once more, and one of them went down heavily. Jarvis drew a bead on a man who was leaning out of a window on the north side of the square trying to see where Yuma was shooting from, and sent him tumbling back inside with a slug through his shoulder.

Only two of the buckboard contingents reached cover in safety. They found Stinson fairly boiling with rage, muttering something about "that red-headed devil."

"Damn it, we've got to get him, and get him quick!" he snarled. "He's engineered this whole thing. If it keeps on I won't have a man left!"

"Why not burn him out?" suggested someone.

"Yeah, and have the whole town go, eh?"

Stinson queried sarcastically. "Most of those buildin's are dry as tinder. No, we've got to try somethin' else, and I think I've got a plan that'll work."

Meanwhile, "that blankety-blank red devil" was exceedingly busy. Satisfied that there was no further immediate danger from the plaza, he had climbed down into the alley, where he met eight citizens who hailed him joyously.

"Hi-ugh, Red!" one of them, a storekeeper named Pete Hankins, called out. "We was just comin' to see if yuh needed help."

"I can use you," Jarvis answered warmly, "but it's Stinson who needs help, not me. Know where I can get some dynamite?"

"How'll some black powder do?"

"Fine. Get a can or two and bring it to the jail, will you? Better keep out of the square. Stinson's got a li'l army waitin' to tag anybody that shows himself."

The storekeeper nodded and disappeared up the alley at a run. The rest of the citizens followed Jarvis, asking questions eagerly. They approached the intersection of the alley and Hunter Street and looked out cautiously. No one was in sight, but from somewhere came the sound of shooting. They paid no attention to that, but scurried across the street and made their way to the rear of the jail. Jarvis called out to Simmons as he approached.

"Howdy, Art," he grinned as the cowboy let him in. "Brought some re-enforcements, but we ain't gonna stay here any longer. Stinson seems to want this jail so bad we're gonna let him have it."

"Suits me," Simmons grunted. "As a fort this place is only about half of one per cent perfect. There's been more bullets buzzin' through here since you left than I could count in a week, workin' overtime. Whatcha gonna do?"

"Give him a li'l surprise. You take our prisoner, put a pair of handcuffs on him—ne'mmind about the key—and we'll see that he's put in some safe spot where Mr. Stinson won't get ahold of him. Guess we'd all better go see Sheriff Tolliver. I've got a hunch that Stinson'll do him no good if he knows nobody's guardin' him. Send a man to bring Sleepy down here before he shoots himself. I don't want any of our men around when Stinson comes bustin' in."

Hankins came in at this moment, bearing a

five gallon can under each arm and a roll of fuse in one hand. Jarvis took them and looked around him. In one corner of the sheriff's office was a small trapdoor, leading to a tiny cellar where the supplies were kept. He opened it, carried the two cans into it, and lighted one end of the fuse.

"This town needs a new jail, anyhow," chuckled one of the citizens as he returned to the office. "So that's the li'l surprise, eh?"

"Uh-huh. If it works, we'll stamp out this conspiracy at one swoop. Come on. That's a fifteen minute fuse, and I don't want to be here when it's burned that long."

Herding Barker ahead of them, they trooped out into the alley. At Hunter Street they looked westward just in time to see a band of thirty men coming toward them.

"Them's not our bunch," asserted Art Simmons positively. "That big-beaked gent in the lead is Tom Saunders, one of Stinson's punchers. We'd better sorta massacre them, hadn't we?"

Jarvis nodded.

"Sure! No sense in lettin' 'em runnin' around loose takin' potshots at us. Where's Sleepy?"

"Here I am," Sleepy answered for himself, pushing his way forward. "Whatcha want, Red?"

"See if you and four-five fellahs can get up on the roofs. The rest of 'us are gonna duck across the street and mow that gang down. We can make it before they can get shootin' straight. Hurry up, because they're almost here."

BECKONING to four other men, Sleepy scurried away. At a signal from Jarvis the rest bent low and raced across the street, Simmons shoving Barker roughly ahead of him. A yell went up, testifying that they had been seen. Several shots were fired, but the appearance of Jarvis' party had been too much of a surprise. None of the bullets found their mark. Throwing themselves behind whatever shelter they could find, the deputy and his men returned the fire with commendable vigor and much enthusiasm.

A storm of bullets swept into the crowd coming toward them. The Stinson faction immediately scattered, leaving two of their number on the ground, but continued to advance. They ran from doorway to doorway, shooting at anything and everything.

"Come on, let's get 'em!" yelled Saunders,

stepping out on the sidewalk in full view. "There's only a few of them!"

Spat! A tiny puff of dust rose from his shirt, and he went down." The man in the doorway behind him gasped, and then stepped forward to look at him. This was very foolish inasmuch as Yuma Carter's view of Hunter Street was perfect.

Spat! A second bullet arrived with a rush, and once more Mr. Carter cut a notch on the sill of the cupalo.

At this juncture, Sleepy Jones stuck his head over the top of a cornice above the largest group of gunmen. Four other heads followed his; then appeared arms and guns, which began spitting streams of lead into the street. At the same moment Red Jarvis leaped into sight with a yell and charged like a wild man, his seven companions close on his heels. Bullet after bullet sped from their weapons, some finding flesh, others splintering door and window sills freely.

That was too much for Stinson's men. They broke and fled suddenly, thereby causing much disgust to Yuma Carter, who had been about to shoot his old "buffalo-torturer" for the third time. In less time than it takes to tell it, Hunter Street was utterly deserted by the opposing faction. Jarvis signaled to Sleepy.

"That sure was a bright idea, puttin' Yuma up in that cupalo," laughed Simmons as they waited. "Trouble is, that danged old coot will get such a swelled head about his shootin' that we'll have to kill him off out o' pity."

Sleepy came on the run across the street, his four men trailing him.

"They're comin' back," he reported. "I saw 'em meet another bunch from the roof over in that big vacant lot on the next street."

"Well, we won't worry about that," Jarvis told him, looking out into the street. "There they are now. We'll give 'em a few slugs to make 'em think we're tryin' to keep them away from the jail, and then we'll hightail it outa here."

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAP BUSTS OPEN

WHEN Stinson's scouts reported that the jail had been abandoned, the rancher was exceedingly puzzled. He entered it with his men

and looked around. Bullet holes there were in plenty, but Sam Barker and his captors were nowhere to be seen. In the sheriff's office he sniffed curiously.

"What's that funny smell? Must be somethin' burnin'. We better take a look outside, Mort."

He stepped out on the sidewalk with his chief lieutenant. Whap! Adams cried out strangely and clutched at Stinson, who was gazing at the cupalo on Haskell's barn, where a wisp of white was slowly floating away.

With a sudden burst of energy he threw Adams violently from him and jumped quickly through the door. He was not a second too soon. A huge .45-90 bullet struck a hinge of the door, split in two, and nearly severed an ear from a bowlegged cowboy who was bent on investigating the trapdoor.

"Get out of here, everybody!" bellowed Stinson frantically. "It's a trap!"

There was a concerted rush for the back door. The floor heaved drunkenly, throwing them to their knees. Plaster and laths rained about them profusely, while the walls were shaken as if by a giant hand.

From the cupalo, Yuma Carter saw the entire front of the jail blown out into the plaza, and his mouth opened wide in astonishment. He stared at his Winchester in deep respect, wondering vaguely what that last shell had been loaded with.

About this time the party of men whom Jarvis had encountered on Hunter Street arrived and began pulling Stinson and his followers out of the ruins of the jail. Luckily for them, they had fled the office a second before the explosion, and so had escaped its full force.

"What—what happened?" queried Stinson in bewilderment, feeling tenderly of a big bump on his temple.

"Looked like an explosion," one of the new arrivals answered. "Musta been, because the whole front of the jail is wrecked."

"More of that red devil's work!" Stinson swore darkly. "Here, half a dozen of you go get that man in Haskell's barn that's snipin' with a buffalo gun. I don't care how you get him, but do it before he slaughters the whole bunch of us. The rest of you follow me. We're gonna visit Tolliver and make him call off his dogs or know the reason why! Anybody know where Jarvis went?"

"I reckon some of us know where he was," one of them grinned ruefully, feeling a long gash on his thigh. "We was comin' down Hunter Street, thirty of us, mind you, when danged if he didn't charge right at us with less'n ten men back of him! That gent is a fightin' fool, le'mme tell you. I betcha he'd just as soon have tackled us by hisself. Yessir! Then that fellah on Haskell's barn cut loose, and so did four or five gents on the roofs, so we made a lotta dust away from there.

"We met another bunch of your men in Spring Street and came back. We came mighty careful, too, and sure enough some of us got shot up again. Took us ten minutes to find out only two men were doin' that shootin', and when we got to the corner they was gone. So we come over here to join you."

"Uh-huh. Well, we'll see if we can't find Mr. Jarvis. If we do, we'll settle his hash pretty quick."

"Or else get ours settled," spoke up some pessimistic soul. "But let's go."

Stinson and his sixty men crossed Spring Street and headed for Baldwin—and the house where Tolliver was convalescing. Turning into Baldwin, Stinson began stationing small groups of men here and there, with instructions to open fire on any hostile person who appeared.

Then he strode confidently to a large frame house in the middle of the third block and climbed up on the porch with three of his best gun-fighters behind him. He pounded on the door. It swung open suddenly.

"DID you want something?" demanded a quiet but ominous voice.

Stinson blinked. Before him stood a tall young man with fiery red hair. One of the gunmen cursed. Stinson's hand dropped swiftly, but he leaped to one side as Jarvis' revolver crashed.

The center gunman went down heavily, his gun exploding into the porch. The others sprang backward and dropped out of sight. The door slammed, and two bullets struck it simultaneously, splintering the panels.

Everywhere about the house other guns began to crash. Men appeared magically in the windows of a dozen houses, firing rapidly into the groups of sentinels in the street. These returned the fire, while they milled frantically about

seeking cover.

In the house with Jarvis were more than twenty men. From every front window they poured a galling fire. Jarvis was darting from room to room, shooting, cramming shells joyously into his guns and shooting some more. Stinson's strident voice rang out more than once, calling his men around him.

Before the battle was a minute old he was leading a determined rush upon the house, swarming up on the porch, battering at the door and smashing in the windows.

Abruptly four men appeared at a side window, breaking the glass with the muzzles of their guns and starting to rake the room.

Grabbing up a shotgun, Jarvis cut loose with both barrels. The recoil was staggering, while the smoke from the heavy charges of black powder was blinding. When it cleared away the window was empty.

A bullet smashed a pitcher on a shelf above Jarvis, bringing the fragments down on his head. Someone lurched into him, clutching at a wounded shoulder. It was Sleepy Jones.

"Gimme a gun!" he roared wildly. "I can lick the whole bunch of 'em!"

"Here!" said Jarvis, grinning at him and shoving a revolver into his hand. "But don't bite off more'n you can chew, Sleepy. We've got enough fellahs to bury now."

A cheer went up in the street.

"Yow!" came a yell. "We've got 'em on the run!"

The shooting grew in volume. Then the sound of running feet testified that the opposing faction was in full flight. Jarvis slammed shut the cylinder of his revolver and flung the door open wide. Stepping out upon the porch he stared eagerly down the street, where a group of his men were busy chasing a number of Stinson's make-believe gunmen. He walked down the steps, halting beside a bush. Something moved.

"Now I've got you!" a voice snarled. "You will buck me, will you!"

Instinctively, Jarvis fired from the hip, two bullets stabbing lightning-fast at the figure that had risen from behind the bush. A gun flamed almost in his face, the slug tearing off part of his hat-brim so close to his head as to sear the skin. He fired again, but his third shot was not needed.

The figure was already pitching forward through the bush.

Simmons and several other men came running to the side of the deputy, their eyes wide with wonder.

"Who is it?" they queried in awe. "Gosh, Red, he almost got you!"

Jarvis stooped and turned the form on its back. The glassy eyes of Stinson glared up at them, the gaze malevolent even in death.

"Well, that ends this li'l fracas," observed Art Simmons. "Me—I'm sure glad of it. If I'd got tore up any more I'd have to get some haywire to keep me together. What's this, I wonder?"

UP the street came a queer procession. Tied to a long pole, at intervals of two feet, were five men followed by a tall, bow-legged figure proudly carrying a Winchester .45-90. Mr. Yuma Carter had arrived.

"Howdy, folks," he grinned broadly, halting his captives with an expressive phrase. "War all over?"

"Uh huh," Jarvis answered, grinning. "And Stinson's cashed in, too. What you got there, Yuma, wild animals for the zoo? They look like they'd eat you up in about two bites if they had the chance."

"I ain't figurin' on givin' them the chance, though," Yuma told him. "These gents took on more'n they could handle, that's all. Tried to drag me off'n my perch in that cupola. At that I had to kill two others before these would listen to reason."

"Well, I dunno what you're gonna do with 'em," said Jarvis seriously, scratching his head. "All I can think of is herd them out of town, along with Sam Barker, and give 'em ten seconds to get over the hill."

"That's what I call a bright idea," Yuma agreed enthusiastically. "I betcha every one of 'em can travel faster'n a bullet!"

Jarvis laughed as Yuma winked broadly.

"Then suppose you test 'em out while I go up and tell Sheriff Tolliver he's still boss of Osage County."