

Richard A. Fritz
208 Oak Forest Lane
Trinity, North Carolina 27370
(336)-861-5487
Carlislekid@northstate.net

Bohn of Contention
A short Story

--Richard A. Fritz

The brisk desert morning found John Bohn trying to breathe some life into the remaining coals in the stove. This morning he had a few things on his mind. First and foremost was he was freezing his ass off and wanted to bring back the warmth of last night's fire and secondly he was desperate for a hot cup of coffee. Squatting down, he chucked in several more pieces of kindling and gently blew on the coals causing some sparks and a bright red glow.

"Ahh won't be long now." He said aloud. He rose from in front of the stove and grabbed the tin coffee pot. Striding across the dirty plank floor of the squalid little shack he'd built, John stepped outside into the brisk morning air.

The ground shook as he dumped the remains of last night's coffee onto the dirt. The Grand Central Stamping mill was in full swing this morning. The Head Center mill and the Contention Mill still remained quiet waiting for parts from Tucson. Walking across the front of the shack, John lifted the lid to the water barrel and plunged the coffee pot down into the barrel, rinsing and refilling it all at the same time. Satisfied with the cleanliness of the pot, John swung around and headed back inside. He ducked through the door and once again stood in the chilly cabin, this time he was not alone.

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Standing in front of the stove shivering, wrapped only in a flimsy bed sheet, and stood Felipa Consuelo Maria del Gado. Her father and brothers owned the land the mine stamps were now standing on. Her family had received it from a Spanish Land Grant back around 1650 or something like that.

John's return startled her and she wheeled around to see who had come in.

"Oh it's you John," she said softly before yelling and jumping away from the stove. "Madre mía" she shouted "Quemé mi asno!"

John laughed out loud at her antics. There she stood naked but for the sheet, rubbing her ass where she'd touched it up against the stove. So much for the regal image she tried so hard to keep up.

Putting the coffee pot onto the stove and still chuckling just a bit, John scooped Felipa up into his arms letting the sheet fall to the dirty plank floor.

"What do you think you do John?" she asked with a twinkle in her dark eyes and a slight smirk on her face.

John knew exactly what he was doing as he laid her on the bed.

Felipa grabbed the quilt and pulled it over her naked body, trying to restore some form of dignity and modesty. After all she was no common whore, but the daughter of the richest man in southwestern Arizona Territory.

She watched fascinated as John began to undress. Standing next to the bed, John towered over her. At 6' 5" tall, John was a huge man compared to most of his peers. His body was rippled with muscle from working in the mills. The only

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disfigurement he had was a scar that ran around his chest from his right nipple to his right shoulder blade, a permanent memento of his army service during the Civil War. John had a small waist and thick powerful thighs. Long legs and big feet finished off his physique.

Felipa's favorite part, other than the obvious long thick wonderful manhood hanging placidly for now between his legs, was John's luxurious brown hair. How she loved to stroke it while they were making love. She could spend hours washing it, combing it and use it to frame his rugged handsome face. But he wouldn't let her.

Naked, John climbed into the bed. Reaching over he pulled Felipa close to him. He loved the warmth of her body pressed up against his. Pulling down the quilt John exposed he flawless breasts, both nipples instantly responding to the cold.

"It's cold John." Felipa said pulling the quilt back up around her chin.

"Won't be for long!" he said while pushing her onto her back as he rolled on top of her.

"John, John wake-up, WAKE-UP" Felipa hissed through clenched teeth. "There is someone in the house!"

John woke on the second shake; he reached under the bed and grabbed the handle of his .45 Peacemaker. Throwing back the covers John slipped on his pants. Quietly he moved towards the front of the shack towards the kitchen.

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Standing up straight, John wheeled around and went back into the little closed off area that served as his bedroom.

“It’s the coffee pot boiling over.” John said. “Want some coffee?”

“No.” she replied, “Just some hot water and a pan so I can wash up.”

As Felipa washed and began to get dressed, John poured himself some coffee and again stepped outside.

The morning sun was fully up now and was quickly burning off the morning chill.

The ground still shook from the murderous hammering of the Grand Central Stamping Mill just up the road from where John had plopped down his gear and decided to build a shack to live in.

Contention City wasn’t much. A few shacks thrown together along with three major stamping mills. Ore from Tombstone mines arrived at the mills almost hourly it seemed to John. The mills never ceased their operation. Twenty-four hours a Day, seven Days a week, the mills stamped breaking down the ore so the silver can be extracted.

The owners of The Head Mill and the Contention Mill were both furious with John and his partner Enrico del Gado, Felipa’s brother. John and Enrico had come to Contention City back in ’81 and set up a freighting business to haul material and supplies between Contention City and Fairbank or Tombstone, both towns that were within spitting distance of Contention City. Fairbank had a railroad line. Tombstone did not. The owners of the two non-operating mills

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blamed John and Enrico for the delivery failure of some essential parts for their mills.

Everyday the mills were non-operational cost the companies and their investors thousands of dollars. When Henry T. Gilder, owner of the Head Center Stamp mill barked, he expected people to jump to action.

John and Henry had had words more than once. First Henry didn't like the prices del Gado freighting charged for moving ore to the railhead at Fairbank. Secondly Henry didn't like the fact that his shipments didn't always go first over the other two mills' output.

Hearing the rattle and bang of the freight wagon coming down the street pulled John from his thoughts. Looking down the street he saw Enrico and Tommy O'Kelly coming up the street towards him. Enrico was driving with Tommy riding shotgun.

The wagon pulled up in front of the shack in a cloud of dust.

"Any trouble?" John asked Enrico as he dismounted the wagon.

"Just a leettle" he said in his very poor English. "But that is to be expected in Tombstone, No?"

"Billy Claiborne was in town and was giving Enrico some shit about the cattle that arrived in Fairbank." Said Tommy.

"Pienso que él y sus amigos planean a rustle some of the cattle on the drive up from Fairbank to the ranch." Enrico added in both Spanish and English.

"Did you make it to the telegraph office?" asked John.

“Sí, había un telegrama.” he said.

“Let me read it!” John snapped as Enrico remove the telegram from his coat pocket.

John scanned the telegram, the lines on his face deeply furrowed and scrunched up in worry.

In a couple of seconds his whole demeanor changed. Tommy saw John’s shoulders relax and the worry on his face fade away.

“Good news John?” Tommy asked in his thick Irish brogue.

“Yeah” John replied. “Enrico you go get the surrey and take your sister home. Tommy you go get some fresh mules for the wagon, we gotta go to Fairbank today. The parts for the mills are in at the Union Pacific Depot.”

Everyone scattered to get what needed to be done, done. Enrico headed for the Livery in town and Tommy headed for the corral behind John’s shack.

John turned and ducked back inside the shack. Standing next to the stove was Felipa, now dressed in a beautiful red velvet riding dress that showed off her shapely figure. Her long black hair was perfectly combed and bobbed at the back of her head, held in place with a diamond-studded comb.

“I forgot to put my shoes on first.” She laughed. “Will you help me put them on por favor? I can’t bend down to get them on.”

“Dios bendice a los Españoles” John sighed as he brought her a stool to sit on.

“Why you say God Bless The Spanish?” she asked as she sat on the stool.

“You won’t see any gringo women wearing a dress like that one. They prefer to wear ugly sacks. Modesty and all that crap.” replied John. “Only you Spanish señoritas can get away with that!” he said motioning towards her outfit

Kneeling in front of Felipa John reached under her skirt until he felt her foot. Grasping her ankle he raised her foot up onto his bended knee.

The sole of her foot was dirty from walking around barefoot in the shack. Not wanting to spoil the insides of her beautiful leather shoes, John leaned forward and tried to blow the dust off her foot.

Felipa immediately burst into laughter.

“What?” John asked knowingly.

“Usted sabe que cosquilloso soy.” She replied.

“Yes I know how ticklish you are.” John said slyly.

Not withstanding John tried to brush the dirt off her feet with the side of his hand causing Felipa to buck and squeal and almost fall off the stool. Satisfied he slipped her expensive leather shoe onto her foot and began lacing it up.

Repeating the process with the other foot, John succeeded in making her fall off the stool.

“There you go!” John laughed as he put the final tug on her shoelace and got up off the floor.

Enrico and Tommy came through the door just as John got up.

“¿Qué hace usted en el suelo?” Enrico asked his sister.

“Yeah Felipa what are doing sitting on the floor?” Tommy repeated.

“John thought it was funny to tickle my feet while helping me put my shoes on.” She said.

“Got your shoes on?” Enrico asked. “Good because we need to get you home.”

“John the rig’s ready” Tommy chimed in while soaking in the spectacle of Enrico helping his sister off the floor.

Felipa stood up straight, brushed herself off, tugged at her coat hem, fixed her hair and put her nose right up in the air. With a mighty “hrmmf” she headed out the door with Enrico closely behind her.

“Tommy me boy,” John said in his best imitation Irish brogue.

“Let us go to Fairbank. Hurry know times a waistin’ There’s money ta be made.”

“And don’t ferget there’s whiskey ta be drunk and women ta be had!” added Tommy as he scooted out the door just in front of John.

“These best mules we got? John asked as he picked up the reins for this eight-mule team.

“They’s all getting’ wore out John.” Tommy replied as he laid the double-barreled shotgun across his lap.

With a hard slap and loud whistle John got the team moving and headed south for Fairbank.

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It was late in the afternoon when John and Tommy pulled into the Union Pacific Depot in Fairbank. Tommy headed for the saloon as soon as the wagon stopped and John headed for the Station Masters Office.

“No trouble now!” John yelled after Tommy.

“Ain’t lookin’ for none!” Tommy yelled back.

John found the Station Master who showed him where the crates were stacked in the warehouse. After paying some extra charges due to their weight, John was ready to get the wagon loaded and get back to Contention.

Sauntering across the street John headed for the Golden Harp saloon. That’s where Tommy ducked into, as he knew it to be one of the few Irish friendly saloons in Cochise County.

Stepping up onto the boardwalk John’s frame filled the door to the saloon. The smell of stale beer, cheap cigars and two-cent perfume assaulted his nose as he leaned on the swinging doors peering into the dark little saloon.

He could make out about a dozen or so men in the bar. Tommy he recognized. The rest of them were just a gaggle of nondescript miners or cowboys.

Reaching down John checked to make sure his peacemaker was with him. Feeling it there, he swung around and pushed through the doors and went into the saloon.

As the doors clacked and banged all eyes turned to see who had come in. Sizing up the stranger as it was.

“Anyone want to earn a few bucks?” shouted John.

“If ya do, line up at the bar and I’ll buy ya a drink and give ya a job.” said John.

Some miners and a couple of cowboys pushed back from their tables and shuffled over toward the bar.

“Set ‘em up barkeep. Whiskey for everyone!” shouted John.

By this time the working girls of the saloon were lined up along the rail gazing down at the big man spending big money.

Glasses clinked and Whiskey flowed. As soon as those at the bar could see the bottom of the glass John piped in additional instructions.

“OK, Listen up! All of you assholes that drank my whiskey are gonna help me load my wagon. Come on over to the UP depot and lend a hand. There’s \$2.00 per man for helping.” yelled John.

“Move ‘em out Tommy.” Said John as they began herding their motley assortment of labor towards the depot.

“Who the hell are you anyway?” asked a cross-eyed miner.

“Bohn of Contention” replied John.

“Yeah well I got a bone to pick with ya anyways. Slurred the miner. “I’m supposed to be working my claim right now. My wife is gonna come to the lift at 7:00 to bring me my supper. I like to eat underground. I cain’t be anywheres else but dere or she’ll kick my ass.

“Pay me for the whiskey and you can go the fuck home I don’t care.”

Stumbling over the two guys next to him the drunken cross-eyed miner came up to Johnny and put a small leather pouch of gold dust in his hand.

“We’re square!” he mumbled as he tripped and fell into the street.

“We’re as right as the mail.” John said, knowing from the feel of the bag that he had more than enough for the drinks.

“Gwon git” Tommy said kicking at the miner sitting in the street.

Arriving at the Depot, John wasted no time in getting this drunken Rowdy lot organized enough to put the crates of parts into the freight wagon.

“Tommy you oversee this lot.” John said as he headed for the bank.

At the bank John exchanged the gold dust from the miner and some of his own for \$1.00 gold coins with which he would pay off he drunken labor force.

“Wagon’s loaded.” Tommy said running up to John as he left the bank.

“Good. Give ‘em their money and let’s get outta here.” Replied John.

“It’s getting’ late John” Tommy said.

Checking his watch Jon replied “We’ll be in Contention by 8:00, don’t get dark till near 9:00. “Besides, there’s guys outta work without these parts. Quicker we get ‘em to Contention The faster they get back to work.”

Tommy knew John was right. He was just hoping for a free night in the saloon with John buying the drinks. "Oh well! He shrugged.

John whipped the mules into stepping up and started the wagon moving towards Contention City. The wagon creaked and groaned under the weight of the heavy stamping mill parts.

The mules were straining at their harnesses. It took longer than he'd expected because of the heavy weight. John and Tommy arrived back in Contention right around 11:00 P. M. John didn't stop at the shack but continued on to the Head Center stamping mill.

"Get Gilder out here." John shouted to no one in particular as they pulled the wagon into the mill building proper.

"Well, it's about time!" Henry Gilder said hooking his grey vest pocket with his thumb and rocking back and forth on his heels.

"Jódasese cerdo gordo." Was John's reply.

Henry looked around to see if anyone could translate what John had just said. There were no takers although 90% of the workers around him knew what had been said.

"Ill tell you what I said you fat pig." John sputtered in anger. "Get your fucking shit off my wagon now or I'll take it over to the Contention mill and give Mr. Holdenstein his parts first."

" Fuck that Jew John, why are you so angry with me?" asked Henry.

“Just get your shit off my wagon.” John said through clenched teeth. Tommy gathered a group of workers around the wagon and had it unloaded in no time. All that remained in the wagon was one crate for the Contention mill.

“Let’s go Tommy.” John said mounting the wagon.

“Adelante y hacia arriba” replied Tommy.

John chuckled to himself, he’d never heard Tommy speak Spanish before and Spanish with an Irish Brogue sounded strange and funny.

The wagon pulled out into the night and John headed for the shack. “We’ll unload at Contention Mill in the morning”

“Ok by me.” Tommy said.

“You going to Tombstone?” John asked.

“Yep.” He said. “Gonna buck the Tiger for awhile.”

John understood bucking the tiger was a gamblers phrase for playing Faro. John didn’t care for Faro. Odds were too even and most of the games, especially in Tombstone were rigged.

The wagon pulled up in front of John’s shack. Tommy swung down and headed for the corral to get his horse and head for Tombstone.

The shack door swung open and Enrico stuck his head out and hollered at Tommy as he rounded the corner of the shed.

“Buena suerte usted perdedor” he shouted.

“Jódale y usted es el caballo.” Tommy shouted back in a mix of perfect Irish brogue and fluent Spanish.

"My horse?" Enrico asked confused.

John just laughed at both of them. "I hope he comes back tonight with more money than your father."

John and Enrico entered the shanty. John intended to hit the bed.

"Bueno Noche Enrico." John said as he flopped into his bed.

"Mismo a usted." Enrico replied as he settled down on the pallet near the stove.

John awoke with a start; he thought he heard someone pounding on the walls of his shack. Reaching under the bed he retrieved his Colt.

"Bohn! Bohn!" he heard several voices calling his name.

Rising, John went to the shack door and flung it open.

There standing around in the street in front of his shack was a small group of miners, most of which John recognized as workers from the Contention Stamp Mill.

"We were told that you have the parts for our stamping mill and that you delivered the parts for Head Center last night over ours!" Shouted one of the miners.

John recognized the miner shouting at him. It was the little cross-eyed drunk from Fairbank.

"Boys," John shouted in return. "You know I don't play favorites although I've even told Gilder that before."

"We've come for the parts!" the cross-eyed miner shouted angrily.

“They’re in the wagon. John said. Looking around he didn’t even see the wagon he’d left there last night.

“Oh Shit!” he thought to himself. “Where the fuck did the wagon go?”

“Enrico!” John turned and shouted into the shack.

There was no answer. John looked over and saw the pallet where Enrico slept was all disheveled and empty.

The angry crowd moved closer to the door and John stepped back inside but didn’t close the door.

“First one of you cocksuckers comes through that door will get a taste of Sam Colt.” John yelled harshly.

Sure enough someone burst through the door; it was the little cross-eyed miner. John leveled his shooter at the man.

Without further warning John pulled the trigger sending a .45 round right into the man’s forehead, splattering his brains all over the shack’s door and out onto the dirt.

The miner dropped into a crumpled mass where he stood.

The rest of the crowd now backed off some. One or two of them began drifting away, not wanting part of any bloodshed.

“Shit John you killed him!” the miner they call Charlie shouted.

“I warned all of ya! NOW GIT!” he yelled so loud that dust fell from the ceiling.

The party of miners began to disperse in earnest. Within five minutes the street in front of the shack was empty save for the body of the cross-eyed miner John had dragged into the middle of the street.

Looking around, John saw for sure that his wagon and mules were gone. There were too many old ruts and tracks for John to be able to discern which way the wagon had gone.

Ducking back inside John quickly dressed and went back outside and around the shack to the corral. He noticed that Enrico's horse was missing.

Saddling his own bay, John mounted and started to ride out of town. His wagon stolen and his partner disappeared, John headed for Tombstone.

John was hungry. As he rode along the dusty dirt road to Tombstone his hunger struck him hard. He was so hungry his stomach felt like his throat had been cut, although this morning's little escapade almost made it come true.

As he crested the last hill, Tombstone appeared before him, sprawled out on the desert floor like so many little matchboxes scattered about interspersed with the huge head frames of the silver mines that were all located underneath Tombstone.

Trying to sneak into Tombstone is impossible so John just came right into down, right down Allen Street. The street was crowded with horses and wagons, there people everywhere, miners, gamblers, cowboys, Chinamen, Mexicans. John jostled his way down Allen Street to the OK Corral. Leaving his horse at the corral, John made his way across the bustling street to the Can-Can Restaurant.

He stepped inside and noticed a considerable change in the noise level, the hustle and bustle and noise of Allen Street to the hush of hungry people concentrating on getting food into their gullet. More than a few of them looked up from their repast to eye the stranger coming in.

John searched the room looking for a familiar face but found none. Getting a table near the door so he could see who was coming and going. John settled in and ordered a meal.

The little Chinese waiter nodded and bowed smiling all the time as he took John's order.

"Do you speak English?" John asked quietly.

The Chinaman motioned with his head an obvious no.

Quong Keel the owner of the restaurant came over to John when he noticed him trying to talk to the waiter.

"He no speak language." Said Quong. "I do"

"Have you seen Enrico del Gado today?" John asked.

"Yes, Yes." Quong said his whole body moving up and down in acknowledgement. "He here at dinner time, he have bite to eat with Billy the kid."

"Billy the kid?" gasped John. "I thought he was dead."

"No, not dead. He runaway from gunfight with Earps and now he want called Billy the kid." Quong said.

"Ohhhhh," John said. "You mean Billy Claiborne."

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Quong again nodded vigorously. John slumped back in his chair and tried to make sense of everything. Enrico said earlier that on their route from Tombstone to Contention he'd had a little problem with Claiborne on the road. Claiborne and his cronies threatened the new cattle waiting in Fairbank for del Gado's cowboys to come and drive up to the ranch. Now my wagon and shipment is missing...

John was brought back to reality when the little Chinese waiter put his dinner in front of him. Without much ceremony John dove in shoveling food into his mouth like a just released prisoner.

As John was just finishing up his dinner, Manuel Robles and his partner Neves Deron came in. These two were notorious Road Agents for China Mary.

They didn't see John sitting across the crowded room. They took a table while John quietly settled his bill with Quong Keel. As quietly and discreetly as he could John slipped out of the Can-Can and back onto Allen Street.

John walked around the block so he was now coming up on the 4th street side of the Restaurant and would come in the same door the roads agents used, but he would be between them and the exit.

John didn't make any pretense about being quiet. He began to whistle "The Yellow Rose of Texas." And strolled into the Restaurant and walked right up behind Manuel.

“¿Buenas noches anos, dónde está mi carro? John asked, knowing he would not get an answer from this hairball.

¿Por qué no pregunta usted a Enrico? Manuel responded.

“I can’t ask him because I can’t find him.” John hissed angrily through his clenched teeth.

“Enrico está en el Palacio de Cristal.” Neves offered.

“Thanks.” John said backing out of the Restaurant and back onto 4th Street.

As John rounded the corner of 4th and Allen ready to cross over to the Crystal Palace, John noticed Manual running across the street and down the boardwalk, skittering on the boards and dashing into the Crystal Palace.

John decided to wait where he was and he leaned up against the post holding the boardwalk cover up. He pushed back his coat to expose the handle of his colt, Shifting to lean against the pole with his left shoulder so his right arm and hand were free.

Just as he thought, Enrico came busting out of the Crystal Palace and right behind him was Tommy O’ Kelly.

Enrico stepped out into the street and was looking up and down Allen Street. Tommy was on 4th street doing the same.

John drew his revolver and whistled loudly to get their attention.

Startled they both looked up and saw John and his revolver.

Tommy swung his hand around and all John saw was the flash of nickel plate.

“Tommy NO!” John yelled as he aimed and fired at Tommy.

Tommy fell face down into the street never moving. Enrico ran over to him looking up every other step to ensure John didn’t shoot him too.

John walked across the street and took the nickel-plated revolver from Tommy’s dead hand. Shoving the gun into his waistbelt, he cocked his own .45 and put it against Enrico’s head.

“John, let me explain.” Begged Enrico. “It’s not what you think. I was forced to do this by Claiborne and his gang!”

John pulled the pistol away and holstered.

“Claiborne?” he asked incredulously. “Gang?”

“Yes.” Enrico said. “Let’s go inside and I’ll explain.”

Yeah. You’d better. John said. Pulling Enrico by the collar, John pulled him across 4th Street and into the Oriental saloon. Stumbling across the floor passing the Faro Tables John dragged Enrico into one of the small rooms used by the soiled doves that ply their trade in the Oriental.

John flung Enrico onto the bed. “Ok asshole, what’s going on?” John demanded.

Enrico sat upright in the bed, not noticing how soiled it was and how bad the stench was. “Well, Billy Claiborne me vino y dijo si le ayudé a robar al

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ganado sin marca mi padre comprado, él me ayudaría a cerrar los molinos de sello entonces podríamos ampliar nuestro rancho. Necesitamos más tierra para pastar a más ganado. El padre quiere el contract para la carne de vaca para el Ejército.”

“In English” Shouted John startling Enrico with his loudness.

“Billy Claiborne came to me and said if I helped him steal the unbranded cattle my father bought, he would help me get the stamp mills closed so we could expand our ranch. We need more land to graze more cattle. Father wants the contract for beef for the Army” repeated Enrico.

“Oh, so that little cocksucker is trying to be Billy the Kid.” John said knowing that ever since the fight behind the OK Corral between the Earps and the Clantons, Bill Claiborne has been demanding people call him Billy the Kid.

“It’s to the point where people are ready to shoot him on sight just because he’s an asshole.” Enrico said.

“What’s Tommy got to do with all this?” John asked.

“He stole the wagon and parts and hid them in the mountains, then went to Contention City and stirred up the workers against you. We were trying to get the owners of the stamp mills to close up because they were losing so much money. It was Claiborne and his gang that broke the machines anyway. They would sneak into the mills after midnight and throw horseshoes or tools into the gears to break down the mills.” Enrico explained in one long breath.

“My Father and Felipa are in Charleston trying to organize the mill owners there to try and force the Contention City mills closed and all the ore from Tombstone to go to Charleston and Millville. My Father has paid much money to try and do this.” Enrico said.

“Even if it meant getting me killed?” asked John.

“Yes, Enrico said. “My father knows you have been sleeping with Felipa and for that wants revenge on you.”

John slumped down on the only chair in the small cramped room. Enrico finally realized what he was sitting in and stood up on the bed then stepped down onto the floor.

“What are you going to do now John?” asked Enrico.

“ I don’t have an idea right now Enrico. Maybe if I sleep on it. I gotta get outta here before the Marshal finds me and hangs me for killing Tommy” said John.

“But first, do you know where the wagon is?” John asked Enrico.

“Yes I do” Replied Enrico.

“Go get it and meet me at the Contention stamp mill.” Said John. “And stop at the shack and get the Winchester and the shotgun.”

“Sí” Enrico said and left the room

There was no way John was going out the front doors of the saloon. He slowly opened the crib door and peered out into the hallway. No one there, so he stepped quietly into the hall and went out the back door into the alley behind the

saloon. There were a few people in the alley mostly drunk tinhorn gamblers that had been thrown out of the saloon, but none of them noticed John as he slipped away.

John made his way back to the OK and retrieved his horse as well as Enrico's and Tommy's and headed out of Tombstone towards Contention City.

He caught up to Enrico in the wagon about a mile outside Contention City. John instructed Enrico to go to the shack and retrieve the weapons then come to the mill.

John was at the Contention Mills for two hours before he heard the rattling of an approaching freight wagon. He'd all ready had to fight off two waves of mill workers still pissed about John killing the cross-eyed miner. John was relived to find out he was part Mexican. Ain't no law about killing Mexicans.

Contention's mill owner was also with John He was anxious to get him mill up and running again. He could not believe John's story about the conspiracy to get them shutdown. He and the owners of the other mills would be meeting in Tombstone tomorrow with some of the stakeholders of the mines in Tombstone.

John would also be at that meeting. He had Enrico get the wagon unloaded while he stood guard to ensure the miners didn't rise up against them for the killing of their co-hort. After the wagon was unloaded John took the wagon back to his corral. Mounted his horse and headed for Tombstone.

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The good thing about Tombstone, it was 24 hours a Day 7 Days a week, you could always get a room, a meal, or a woman. Right now John wanted a meal and a room. Mostly the room.

John checked at the Grand Hotel and found they still had a room available. He took it. He holed up in his room with a bottle until dawn.

In the morning John came downstairs to find many notable mine owners and several of the mill owners hanging around the lobby of the hotel. Gilder recognized him John even though he was much disheveled and hadn't shaved for days.

"John?" he queried.

"Fuck yes it's me you fat pig!" retorted John.

"I asked you the other night, why are you so angry with me?" Gilder questioned.

"I think you're all working together to fleece these min owners of as much silver ore as you can get your hands on. I think every other wagon load that you reroute to Galeyville is being hijacked by Billy Claiborne and Associates sent to Galeyville, processed and the ore kept by you and Holdenstein.

"Can't trust that damn Jew bastard!" Gilder said with a sneer.

John just peered down his nose in disgust at Gilder. A flurry of people entered the lobby, It was Felipa del Gado and her father Antonio Miguel del Gado. As they moved through the room the people parted like the Red Sea to let them through.

Richard A. Fritz
208 Oak Forest Lane
Trinity, North Carolina 27370
(336)-861-5487
Carlislekid@northstate.net

John could smell Felipa as she drew closer, she flashed a modest smile of acknowledgement at him and batted her dark eyes. She held tightly to her father's arm as they went into one of the big rooms. That had been set up for the meeting.

"Who are you?" asked a nattily dressed mine owner.

"Bohn of Contention." Answered John tipping his hat in mock chivalry.

"Yeah," the man said, "You look like fuckin' trouble."

John felt like sticking Tommy's nickel plated revolver into this guy's gut and letting some stuffing out. He thought better of it and went into the room with the others.

John scanned the room and noticed it was full of Tombstone note worthy's, Richard Gird, Henry Gilder, Fred Holdenstein and others. Coming into the room opposite him John noticed Enrico as well as two of China Mary's best Road Agents, Manuel Robles and Neves Deron. Billy Claiborne couldn't be far.

Señor del Gado spoke first. about how the mills had damaged his ranch and how he was unable to raise enough beef without the extra land and how the poor soldiers and Indians would suffer without his beef.

To the man, each owner in the room spoke about how their interest best benefited Tombstone and all of Arizona Territory for that matter.

John was about to address the distinguished members about his situation when a drunken cowboy came stumbling into the room shouting that Billy Claiborne was having it out with Buckskin Frank Leslie at the Oriental.

Ignoring him John stood on an ottoman so his all ready impressive figure towered over those in the room. Before stepping up John checked his revolver.

John stepped up and cleared his throat.

“Who the hell is he?” asked a voice from across the room.

“Bohn of Contention.” Replied John.

“He killed Tommy O’Reilly!” shouted Manuel Robles.

“Gentlemen,” started John. “There is a conspiracy amongst you to rob you of the output of your mines. It isn’t as blatant as China Mary’s ore wagon robberies, but it’s pretty ingenious.”

John continued explaining how the ore wagons were diverted and the ore stolen by the Mill owners and how del Gado was skimming some of it off the top to run his beef herds in New Mexico to fulfill his beef contracts with the army. And he had hired Billy Claiborne to play the role of Billy The Kid to scare people off who got too close or asked too many questions.

“Where do you get this proof from!” demanded Señor del Gado.

“From me papa!” shouted Enrico from across the room.

“You wish me involved with Claiborne and his men against my friend John and Tommy. You force Tommy into it and now he is dead. I am tired of hiding and stealing and cheating these people. You hire Claiborne and his gang to put the mills out of service so you can charge higher prices at your other mills and force the mines to put their ore wagons out into the desert for you to prey on them. I will no longer be involved Father!”

The room was silent.

The report of a shotgun made everyone flinch. In a few minutes the drunken cowboy returned shouting that Billy Claiborne was dead. Buckskin Frank Leslie wouldn't call him "Billy the Kid" and Claiborne threatened to shoot Frank! Frank came out a side door at the Oriental and cut Billy in half with a shotgun!

It was obvious the meeting was over as the curious crowd moved out toward Allen Street. John stood on the ottoman stunned by two things one nothing had happened with the mill owners and two that pain in the ass Billy Claiborne was dead.

As the room cleared, Señor del Gado approached John, Felipa still on his arm.

"Juan," he said slowly choosing his words carefully. "You are truly a bone of contention for me and for Tombstone. You must keep working for me. Come to supper at the hacienda tonight." He said in a patronly voice.

Felipa sided over towards John, letting go of her father's arm and taking his.

"You need a bath!" she claimed.

John raised his eyebrow.

"Only if I wash your hair." She giggled.