

The first man reached into his coat and removed an automatic pistol. He pointed it at Miles head.

"If you do not answer my questions, I will shoot your husband."

Phoebe's eyes widened and she dropped the coffee scoop with a small clatter. Her hand strayed into the open drawer.

Miles, however, smiled broadly. He reached up and set a finger on the side of the barrel, pushing it gently aside.

"Oh," he said in a disappointed voice, smile disappearing. "I thought it was a .45 automatic 1911 at first, but that's not a .45 at all."

The smile returned gradually. "I carried a Colt .45 1911 back when I was fighting the Bochs in WWII... Now that was a gun. Nickel plated, ivory handles, smooth action. It was given to me by Patton himself... We were at Verdun... and ..."

The man backed up a little with an expression mixed between disbelief and disgust.

The man behind him began speaking in a foreign language.

"He is lying."

"What?" The front man turned to look at him.

Aha, thought Miles. Farsi. Iranians.

"He is saying that he served with Patton in World War II... Even as old as he is, he is not that old. He is playing you."

The first one nodded thoughtfully, then spun back around rapidly, swinging his pistol towards Miles's head.

But Miles's head was no longer there. He ducked. And stepped in under the swing. Grabbed the wrist holding the gun and twisted. Yanked down. And then stood up briskly, breaking the arm at the elbow.

Less than a second passed between the swing and the scream.

The scream broke off almost instantly as Miles delivered a sharp blow to the man's throat with the edge of his hand. Miles threw the first man aside, prepared to deal with his friend.

The second man was standing stock still, his hand tucked inside his coat, presumably reaching for his own weapon. But his wrist was pinned to his chest, just over his heart, by the blade of the eight inch high carbon steel chef's knife. Only the protruding hilt was visible, but Miles instantly recognized one of Phoebe's favorite meal preparation tools.

The man seemed utterly confused, and then he toppled forward.

"Damn, woman." Miles complained. "I was going to keep that one alive for questioning." He bent over and picked up the gun. Biscuit had also entered the fray and was growling and pulling on the man's pant leg.

Phoebe tsk, tsked at him.

"I should have thought you would be more careful with yours... He was right there in your hands... Miles!"

The first man wasn't quite dead. He kicked out at Miles with the leg Biscuit was gnawing on. The dog went flying and Miles fell heavily.

"Not the dog! Damn you!" cried Phoebe.

The man produced a knife and lunged forward. Miles sat up and shot him in the forehead.

The man crumpled.

"Miles dear. I'm afraid you're losing your touch. That man wasn't dead at all."