

The government believed it was prepared for any terrorist attack,  
except from one place...

# DEADLY EXCHANGE



A Novel

GEOFFREY M. GLUCKMAN

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Geoffrey M. Gluckman

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, names, incidents, organizations, and dialogue in this novel are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Author's Note:

While this is a work of fiction, the technology described is real. I have taken the liberty to enhance its capabilities. Please see the technology section at the back of the book.

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## PART ONE

“Many things can be proven that are not true.”

—Anonymous—

## CHAPTER 1



### **Suburbs of Washington, D.C. Tuesday, 4:01 A.M.**

Near a forest green telephone relay box on a narrow side street shrouded in the darkness of a moonless night, three figures wearing caps and clad in black stepped from the side doorway of a gray van. The idling engine offered a low rumble in the early morning silence.

The team leader, the only one knowledgeable about the operation, opened the box with a key. He hooked an object the size of a pen cap onto the main line that dispersed phone service to the surrounding oversize single-family homes. The other two men maintained strict vigilance from the shadows.

“Damn,” the leader whispered into a miniature microphone clipped to his shirt collar. “The wire coding’s different than our schematic. Get me updated info and quick.”

A deep voice came through his earpiece, “Sorry, forgot to update the codes.”

“Yeah, nation’s capital—security. Just hurry!” The man at the box tapped his fingers in the seconds that passed like hours.

“It’s blue to green, pink to yellow, and red to black.”

In minutes the man’s practiced fingers completed the last of five hundred installations. The device’s intended function began immediately, receiving signal by satellite.

All three men returned to the van. The leader checked his watch. Total stationary time: ten minutes, twenty-five seconds, an acceptable performance despite the delay.

\* \* \* \*

**Hotel Room, San Diego, California  
Tuesday, 7:55 A.M.**

Hand trembling, Jennifer Chance hung up the phone—the reminder call from Charles, her assistant.

Time to go.

Wanting to check her look one last time, she hesitated, afraid of what the mirror may reflect back. Just before the call it had happened again, the other image. As usual, the double take revealed nothing. That other face came only with glimpses. The kind one gets of things too transient to behold, like a familiar visage on a stranger's body.

Standing before the door that led out into the suite, the vanity mirror just off to the right, she took a deep breath. She'd just have to trust that she looked the part for the performance, the job, and the company.

With manicured fingers, nails the color of pink roses, she stroked the nickel-sized gold circle pendant, tracing the raven etched into the translucent material. It was a gift from her boss, the Director of Lectures And More, Inc, upon completion of eighteen months training for presenters. That was three years ago. Since then, she had risen to the top of the motivational speaker circuit.

All of a sudden the room began to sway. She clutched at the door's edge, simultaneously fighting the nausea that swam in her belly. The thought of calling Charles and canceling the keynote address enticed like a siren song.

Breathe, she coached herself.

After several deep breaths, she gathered strength despite the deep exhaustion that had clung to her like a heavy overcoat since early spring. If she could only slow down for a few days and rest a bit. Winking at the mirror, she grabbed a small purse and left the room.

Bypassing the elevators she descended the nine flights of white-walled stairs, her two-inch heels barely whispering a sound. Exiting at the lobby level, she saw Charles, dressed in the perennial blue jacket and tan slacks, tapping a foot and watching the elevator lights.

"Boo!" she said, poking him in the ribs from behind. He jumped at least a foot, boyish face flushing a few shades lighter than a beet.

"Pleased with yourself?" he asked, watching her double over in laughter. "Another trip to the hairdresser after that convulsion."

Erect again, with hair restored to primed perfection, she smiled with sweet confidence. "How many times have I used the elevator in the last three years that we've been on the road together?"

"Uh, I don't know. Why do you take the stairs?"

“It feels good. Stimulates the senses. Come on.” Placing a hand just above the elbow she guided him to the hotel restaurant. “See the goal is to descend as fast as you can, but without making any noise. I don’t remember where I learned that, but you should try it.”

“The exerciser, I’m not.” He eased his plump five-foot eight-inch frame into a booth that overlooked the sparkling San Diego Bay. Straightening a red necktie with faint blue specks that matched his jacket, he said, “Now listen, here’s the itinerary, we....”

Jennifer tried to appear attentive while gazing out the long, tall windows at boats in the harbor locked by their moorings. Her thoughts drifted, trying to recall the fleeting image from the mirror. Is something wrong with me? Maybe I should see a doctor? But I see the company doctor every three months. Jolted back to reality by her assistant’s insistent voice, she gave him an apologetic look.

“Yeah, sure Charles, Washington, D.C. and....” Putting a hand up, she stifled a yawn.

He droned on about the impending travel schedule, pausing only to check his look in a thin strip of smoky reflective glass that decorated all four sides of a post, which rose to the sixteen-foot ceiling.

Without any of the usual politeness, she suddenly interrupted him. “Charles, have you ever looked in the mirror and seen...?” She stopped as the waitress approached, holding a coffee carafe.

“Go on, you’ve got my interest now. Besides, we’re like ... like....” He tapped a chubby finger to his lip, searching for a word that she would accept and further endear him to her. “Close. We’re close, so you can tell me anything.”

“Well, I haven’t said anything lately, but for the last four months or so, something hasn’t felt right ... inside. It’s as if there’s.... No, it sounds too crazy.” She paused. “It all seemed to start when I read the line in that book.”

“You mean that joke book?”

”Not that one. In the English translation the book is titled, *The Immoralist*. Anyway, I’m confused. I’m not even sure who I am anymore. Maybe a break from LAM and the speaker’s circuit would be good.”

She didn’t notice the sudden whitening of Charles’s knuckles around the coffee cup. He took a steady sip, ears at full alert.

“How can you say that? You’re Jennifer Chance, big headliner for Lectures And More. And ... and look at all they’ve done for you—the clothes, the parties, the fame, the success.”

“Yes, the success. What is success, really? To wear yourself out for the purposes of another?”

“I can’t believe you!” Charles glanced at his designer watch. “That’s ... we’d better go.”

He got up, smoothing his tie and flashing a weak smile.

“Don’t be angry. I know LAM gives me security and stability. And the programs we offer are worthwhile.”

In the pastel-colored hallway, music reverberated beneath their feet as they neared the two-thousand capacity conference hall. Through the doors Jennifer observed the usual laser lights dancing around the crowd.

“Your fans await,” said Charles, fixed smile still in place. “By the way, that dress fits you like a pampered hand in a satin glove. It really matches your—hey, you’re not wearing the colored contacts.”

She put a finger to her lips then eyed the outfit, smoothing a wrinkle from the midnight blue dress that shimmered with her every movement. All perfectly tailored to sell the product: Jennifer Chance. She glanced at the large Lectures And More welcome banner that spanned the doors. It listed her name followed by T. Harv Eker, Zig Ziglar, and Samuel Caravell. Through a forced smile, she said, “Time to talk about the keys to unlock one’s deep potentials through one’s beliefs.”

Trying to cover agitation about the conversation over coffee, Charles rubbed her shoulder as he spoke. “Show time, super sparker, knock ’em dead.”

With a nod she entered the nearby prep room. She took the mini-microphone from the waiting sound engineer. Clearing her mind, she settled into the role of master motivational speaker, at once exuding calmness and confidence. She winked at Charles, and turned toward the soundman.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Charles cast a furtive glance in her direction, then take a cell phone from his inside jacket pocket. He pressed a speed dial key on the phone and adjusted his tie again with the other hand. Just about to speak he shut the door to the green room.

Jennifer turned her head and stared at the light brown door, wondering, while the engineer completed the sound check.

\* \* \* \*

### **Near Coit Tower, San Francisco, California Wednesday, 5:15 A.M.**

In the bedroom of his seventh floor condo, Frank Revere fought the sweat-soaked top sheet of his queen size futon atop a solid wooden frame. The light blue sheet entwined his right leg as a nightmare played out:

...a not-so-distant screech of tires on asphalt pierced the permeating silence of early morning. He swung an arm around a blonde-haired girl in her middle twenties as they leisurely jaywalked across Powell Street just north of Sutter, a stone’s throw from Union Square. Another spontaneous Sunday. She pulled his head closer and kissed a stubbly cheek. Halfway across the street, he looked at her—the most tender woman he had ever known. Joy abounded, warmth flowing between them.

All of a sudden, his companion tensed as the screech of tires came once more. A black Buick with tinted windows careened around the corner of Pine and Powell, just missing a woman with a twin baby carriage. The car barreled down upon them. Despite instincts and reflexes honed from intense government training, he couldn’t get her out of the way. The sun’s brightness

became obscured. He flew skyward. Slow motion, the sign for the Double Rainbow Cafe turning upside down.

Maybe the car had missed her ... if only.

Relaxed, he rolled off the hood of a new red sports car—broken windshield. He smacked the concrete with a resounding thud.

Then it hit—pain, sucking all the oxygen from his body. It emanated from somewhere below his right hip and more severe than anything he could have ever imagined. But the pain told him he was still alive.

*Sarah! Sarah! Oh Sarah!* He screamed, but no sound escaped as a deep, dark, cylindrical hole closed in....

Awakened in an instant, Frank sat bolt upright in bed, heart like a trip-hammer, breathing rapid and shallow. He shook his head, trying to rid it of haunting images not seen in six months. On the wall opposite the bed, faint illumination from the city lights filtered through the heavy dark blue window shade.

He ran a hand through damp hair and pressed a fist into the muscles of a reconstructed right leg. This was not an ordinary nightmare that one simply forgets, or that one puts aside with sips of water and then returns to sleep. The ache in his hip reminded him it wasn't a dream at all. It had really happened.

He switched on the light atop the heavy oak night stand next to the bed and looked at the smooth, though raised, quarter-inch wide line of skin that started just below the right hip bone and ran eight inches down his thigh. Tracing the sickle shaped scar, images of the incident that matched the nightmare flooded his memory.

With a deep breath, he picked up a small-framed photograph which showed a handsome couple. The woman's blond hair fell about her shoulders in soft curls and a natural complexion surrounded captivating blue eyes that accented her high cheekbones. Her smile, inviting, radiated warmth and charm.

A shiver ran through his body whenever he looked at her lips, such deep sensuality. Their slight bell-shape still moved him even from a photograph. He gazed at the other figure in the picture: a young man of twenty-eight with windblown, dark brown hair, piercing eyes, and tanned face. A wry smile turned up on the right side. He always recognized the woman and the accompanying ache of emptiness in his chest. But the man—the man—a figure he would have liked to say he didn't know. Yet that would have been a lie.

He regarded the empty space next to him on the bed. She was gone. Despite years of clandestine field operations and counterintelligence, he hadn't been able to avoid a simple moving vehicle, even when the most cherished aspect of his life was at stake. For years, the weight of remorse had hung on him with the force of a ship's anchor. He could feel the tug.

"All right!" he said to himself. "Get grounded again. Center, like Sensei says. Self-criticism won't help anybody."

After a few minutes of *prana* breathing, and a gulp of water, new clarity arose. For the first time in years, he knew what must be done. He slipped on some jeans and a blue sweatshirt

that read ‘Cherish the Wild’ in red letters. Down the short hallway to the second bedroom, the unused bedroom, he paused. It had been shut for the better part of five years.

Now, the doorknob beckoned him.

He took a decisive deep breath and entered the tidy eight-by-ten-foot office. An old wooden roll-top desk, part of Sarah’s family heritage, sat off to one side. He hadn’t had the heart to throw it away, along with the rest of her belongings. The timing hadn’t been right.

He surveyed the room. An outdated calendar still hung on the wall with markings made by her to keep track of yearly travel plans for her business. He smiled at the framed poster that read: ‘In order to know others, one must know oneself. In order to know oneself, one must know others’.

Such was Sarah’s profoundness. He believed her irreplaceable, so he had stopped trying, and stopped living.

He looked at the closed doors of the bedroom closet. He knew her scent-filled clothes that hung there by heart. After the hit and run, he had spent the first five months in recuperation. The next two, after quitting the government, he searched for a trace of her whereabouts—hospital stay, surgeon’s records, anything. He never saw her body, the body of the woman he loved. At nine months, in resignation, he had moved the clothes.

His right hip began to ache again. It signaled time for movement. He kneaded the area a bit, knowing enough was enough.

Rummaging through the desk drawers, intending to pack things up, he found a set of gold plated pens, a folder. Each item triggered memories—a lawyer placing a brass urn into his hands. The urn—hard, bronze, metallic, devoid of breath and life—had replaced the vibrant, living silk-and-honey skin that surrounded the beautiful essence of Sarah.

He laid her last will and testament on the desk, muttering. “Flesh to ash, papers to money.”

He pulled out a small, black velvet-covered box and stopped. More fragments started to come: his cane, a limp, and the dark-suited man calling to him with outstretched hand holding a key.

“The key!” he exclaimed aloud.

He opened the box and a small, silvery metal key lay atop more velvet, right where he’d left it, almost five years ago. He had thought Sarah had shared everything with him—desires, pains, passions—but not the safe deposit box.

Grabbing the key he checked his black, steel, diving watch. Too early for the bank. He pocketed it and limped into the kitchen, the leg always stiffer in the morning.

Half an hour later, steaming black tea in hand, he stared at a black kevlar-lined briefcase on the coffee table. Opening the case he hefted the Browning .45 caliber automatic—perfect fit, as always. Next, he inspected a set of perfectly balanced throwing knives, then some of the more arcane weapons collected during those counterintelligence years with the National Security Agency: a thin piece of wire with sturdy rubber handles, a ball-point pen that housed no ink, only three inches of surgical-grade steel.

Images resurrected in his mind, moving limbs flickering under the cover of darkness. Too many nights, too much danger, too many deaths.

He shut the case and locked it.

Shouldering a black nylon backpack, he grabbed the bulletproof weapons-case and left the apartment. Filled with resolve, he strode toward the Aikido dojo eight blocks away, trying to catch Sensei before the first morning class.

As Frank entered the three-story brownstone, he bowed and slipped off his shoes. An older gentleman, whose nimbleness and fluidity belied his age, approached with a modest smile and eyed the black case.

“Konichi wa, Frank san. What brings you for visit so early?”

Frank bowed to his master, explaining that he had a favor to ask. He followed the older man to a back office, the formal *gi* swishing about his legs. As always, to his eye, the man seemed to glide, rather than walk.

“We talk here, no one ‘round.”

“I wish to entrust you with this case, Sensei. The contents are very dangerous, as you know my history.” Frank bowed and put the case on the desk.

“Hai, wise choice. Water way of harmony better than weapons of survival.” Sensei took the case with a bow and disappeared behind a shoji screen. He returned, led Frank to the mat, placing a long hard wooden staff, a *jo*, in his hands. “Words not enough.”

Immediately, the master attacked with a hard wooden samurai sword, a *bokken*. The two commenced fighting over the entire area of the mat, each strike matched by an appropriate countermeasure. The air soon filled with clicks from heavy wood on wood, and swooshes from weapons moving at blinding speed through empty space.

Then, sensing an opening, Frank struck hard at his teacher who held the ground until the last second when he surrendered his stance. With inches to spare, Sensei glided out of the way of the attack and grabbed the handle of Frank’s weapon as it sliced the air in front of his face. With a flick of his wrist, Sensei flipped his student into the air. Frank landed with a resounding slap, lessening the impact with a practiced break-fall.

In a flash, Sensei placed the sword tip into Frank’s right shoulder socket, pinning him.

“You have progressed much in last four years, but true strength of vulnerability surpasses aggression. It is eternal.”

After the impromptu lesson, and moving with much more ease, Frank ambled over to the Bank of America at Union Square. Within minutes what had remained hidden for five years came to light—the location of Sarah’s safe deposit box. Now it was a matter of opening it. That would require a visit to San Diego—old stomping ground.

Back in his top floor condo, Frank made the appropriate arrangements with the office and had his secretary order a ticket for the next morning.

He stood in front of the living room bay window as mid-morning sun flooded in, though mist still shrouded the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance. He tapped the pocket of his jeans, the

one that held the key. Regardless of outcome, the key in the lock of that bank box offered a certain degree of finality to the mystery of his former life.