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Dance of Submission

Lisette Ashton

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Jane's eyes opened wide. She shook her head and glared at McGivern, wondering if she should beg him for some compassion. It was bad enough having to suffer this degrading punishment. She didn't want to be gagged as well. 'Please. No,' she whispered. 'Not that.'

His reply left her cold. 'I might as well gag you,' he explained. 'I'm tired of listening to your pathetic lies and unacceptable excuses.'

'But I . . .'

Jane got no further. The hard rubber ball was pressed against her teeth and although she struggled not to take it into her mouth she was left with no other option. Her jaw was forced wide open and the straps were fastened at the back of her head.

By the same author:

THE BLACK ROOM
THE BLACK GARTER
AMAZON SLAVE
FAIRGROUND ATTRACTIONS
THE BLACK WIDOW
THE BLACK MASQUE

DANCE OF SUBMISSION

Lisette Ashton



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This book is a work of fiction.
In real life, make sure you practise safe sex.

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One

‘Welcome to the castle, my friends. Welcome to the home of every depraved dream you’ve ever held, to a haven where the rules of the outside world no longer intrude. Welcome to paradise.’ McGivern flashed a grin at each of the guests.

Beside his seat at the head of the banqueting table, a naked slave knelt on all fours. A long, dark fringe hung over her face, loosely masking her identity. The mounds of her arse were at hand height and he casually slapped his palm against one cheek. The echo of flesh striking flesh resounded from the stone walls, yet the slave remained silent. As she accepted the smack to her bottom, McGivern saw that her fringe didn’t even sway.

He grinned to himself, delighted with her servility.

‘This island holds a unique geographic position,’ he went on. ‘It rests in the overlapping coastal waters of three separate countries, none of which enforce their jurisdiction. We’re just out of the English Channel but not quite in the Atlantic Ocean. Mainland Europe is far enough away to be out of sight but close enough so that supplies can be affordably delivered.’

‘We know where we are,’ Frankie told him. ‘We managed to get here without you holding our hands.’

McGivern frowned, unhappy with the interruption and bristling at her disparaging tone. In a didactic voice, he said, ‘As a result of its unique location, this island is unfettered by any laws of human rights or alleged obscenities. Inside this castle, the owner may do whatever they please, however it pleases them.’

He allowed his guests a moment to contemplate this before continuing.

‘Ownership of the castle is not just a prestigious honour. It is ideally suited to people like us: people with an absolute need for privacy. This castle is far away from the sneers of the righteous but, at the same time, the dungeons offer endless opportunities to the imaginative. Trust me when I tell you that this building is kingdom come for people with requirements like ours.’

‘Can the speech, McGivern,’ Frankie broke in. ‘Where’s my bloody money?’

His frown returned. ‘I’ll be coming to that in good time. I have other points to make first and you’re going to let me make them.’

She glared at him and he glowered back, unintimidated by the steel in her ice-blue eyes. Frankie was absurdly pretty for a dominatrix. Even with her menacing scowl and the skull-and-crossbones tattoo on her upper bicep, she still looked truly beautiful. Her mane of long, dark hair glistened in the morning light and McGivern realised the tresses were her only concession to femininity. He watched her fling the dark locks back from her face as she concentrated her wrathful gaze on him. The combination of prettiness and masculine authority made for a heady meld that was almost irresistible.

Her leather waistcoat was cut low, revealing a deep, inviting cleavage. The hem of her matching mini displayed her upper thighs and his gaze was drawn to the sight. In spite of her contemptuous sneer, and the thick Havana jammed between her teeth, he had to concede that she was desirable.

Studying the tops of her legs, he wondered what it would be like to dominate her. He didn’t entertain the thought for long, but the idea of enjoying her submission brought a wicked sparkle to McGivern’s eyes. Holding her gaze with his own defiant smile, he reminded himself that she was a distraction he couldn’t afford right now.

His palm still rested on the slave's bare backside and he stroked her cleft as he stared at Frankie. Whilst the slave's arse remained rigid, the dewy lips of her labia parted at his touch. Her intimate wetness warmed his finger.

'Make your point, then tell me where my money is,' Frankie hissed. Wisps of cigar smoke accompanied each word. 'I'm not renowned for my patience, especially where so much cash is concerned.'

He considered taking issue with her curt tone. McGivern wasn't used to being spoken to in such a way and he wanted to remind Frankie that he was an equal, not an unbroken initiate. The words hovered at the back of his throat before he resisted the urge to vent them. Let the others fight for dominance, he warned himself. He was in a position where he could look down on their struggles. With a massive effort, he forced a smile and vanquished the urge to berate her.

Including himself, there were only three people in the banquet hall that mattered and they all shared the same perverse tastes in pleasure. Frankie was a celebrated slave-breaker and dominatrix, as was Simon, draped casually over a seat opposite hers.

Simon was studying McGivern warily but so far he had said nothing. He wore an ornate ring on the little finger of his right hand, an oval of blue and green azurite set in a long gold mount. Whilst listening to McGivern's speech, he had toyed with the stone, but it was the closest he came to showing an unsettled composure. He occasionally raked manicured fingernails through his long, blond hair but otherwise he was simply pensive and watchful, exactly as McGivern had expected.

Of course, there were other slaves in attendance, but they were just trimmings, no more important than the gold cord sash on the purple drapes. Clad in a uniform of fishnets and leather, they lined the walls with a sumptuous display of

near-naked flesh. Their presence added a finishing touch to the air of perverse perfection he had been striving for.

And there was also Jane, the platinum blonde solicitor, blushing furiously and avoiding everyone's eyes. Her dark grey suit, with its cinched waist and short skirt, set her out of place amongst the slaves and masters. The clothes were an attempt at sexiness for the respectable confines of an office but, in the castle, that image didn't work. She seemed intimidated by the nudity of his slaves and repulsed by the lecherous glances of his guests. Her gaze was fixed nervously on her lap where her fingers twisted together. When she did dare to look up, her eyes were wide and her cheeks were painfully crimson. McGivern took solace from the fact that, for the moment, she was mercifully silent.

Mentally dismissing her, he decided she was on the same level as the slaves. She was there for a purpose but she was expendable and, if he chose, she was ultimately replaceable.

'I'm sure we've all known about this castle since beginning our careers in the perverse. It has an enviable reputation and ownership has always been regarded as the ultimate goal for the successful master or mistress. Today I'm going to give you the chance to become the owner of the castle.' McGivern held up a silencing finger, aware that Frankie was about to assail him with another outburst, and determined to make his point first. 'Today I'm going to offer you the chance of proving your mastery and this castle will be the prize.'

Frankie sat back in her chair, wafting cigar smoke with a careless hand. 'You've finally intrigued me,' she growled. 'What's the pitch?'

His smile was fleeting. He raised his hand again and brought it down hard against the slave's backside. This time, the slap echoed ferociously around the banquet hall and he saw the solicitor recoil, as though she had received the blow. Unaware that he was doing it, McGivern sneered

at the woman. 'I'll explain the "pitch" in my own good time. First, I insist that you watch the dance of submission.'

He snapped his fingers and two of the attendant slaves rushed from the walls. They had been given their instructions before the guests arrived and McGivern wasn't surprised to see them working exactly as they had been told. The slave by his side was hauled unceremoniously on to the table and, for the first time, McGivern noticed her identity. The dark fringe of hair was brushed back from her face and he recognised her as number three, the most willing and servile of his minions. His confidence soared when he realised she was going to perform the dance. Number three wasn't only beautiful, she was also pliant enough to give a marvellous show for his guests.

The summoned slaves were armed with brimming buckets, brushes and cloths, as well as the other paraphernalia he had insisted on. A grey ghost of steam wafted from the water's surface and McGivern watched as one slave pushed a brush into the pail and began to build a lather. Working quickly, she created a creamy foam then pressed the brush against number three's backside. With uncaring movements, she began to work the bristles briskly up and down.

Spread across the head of the table, number three remained silent. McGivern could see her fingernails biting hard against the oak surface but it was the only sign of discomfort she allowed her body to express. Through the veil of her fringe, he saw that her face was sanguine as the bristles scrubbed against her sex.

McGivern swallowed, the sight inspiring a delicious stiffness between his legs.

With the cleaning completed, the attendant slave dropped her scrubbing brush into the bucket and wiped away the remnants of lather with a sodden cloth. The end of her finger played against number three's anus before sliding inside. It was unnecessary and gratuitous behaviour, done

purely for the slave's own excitement rather than for cleaning or preparation. If there hadn't been guests in attendance, McGivern would have castigated the trio for their self-indulgence. Instead, he simply coughed, allowing the sound to carry the implications of his displeasure.

The seditious slave glanced up then snatched her finger away. Seeing the fury in McGivern's eyes, she lowered her gaze and went back to the task she had been given. After dropping the cloth in the bucket, she rubbed caressing hands against number three's bare arse, spreading the cheeks wide apart.

McGivern turned his attention on the other slave as she began to prime the enema. She had donned a pair of latex gloves for the operation and the ends of her fingers were already glistening with preparatory jelly. She worked her fist slowly up and down the shaft of the enema's pipe, lubricating it fully as her colleague began to fill the bag.

Their joint concentration would have been warming for a lesser individual but McGivern didn't have the time to waste on such indulgences. He was confident enough to let the slaves perform their duty while he captured the interest of his guests.

'The dance of submission is the litmus paper for servility,' McGivern explained. He climbed out of the throne-like chair he had resided in and began to strut around the banquet table. 'Any slave who can perform the dance properly should be deemed well and truly servile. Any master who can make a slave do the dance should be considered more than worthy of that title.'

Number three released a small groan and McGivern turned to study her. The cheeks of her arse were wide apart and her anus was a taut circle. She had muttered her protest as the enema's tip started to probe the centre of her arsehole.

McGivern's face was a mask of indifference as he watched the pipe plunge inside. Slowly, the slave began to massage the enema bag, working it into a shrinking ball. She

squeezed soapy water through the intrusive shaft, using harsh clenching motions. As an undercurrent to the room's silence, McGivern heard the squirt of bubbling liquid flooding into number three.

As she had with the brushing, number three remained unmoved by this latest violation. Her eyes were closed but not squeezed tight shut, as McGivern had expected. Her body was stiff but, aside from the herculean bracing of her buttock muscles, she showed no signs of her discomfort. She continued to gouge her fingernails against the table, and McGivern saw her knuckles were whiter now, but it was the only visible reaction she allowed.

The final rush of soapy water was squirted from the enema.

Number three glanced up at him and, for an instant, McGivern thought he saw a flicker of despair cloud her eyes. It was only a fleeting image, barely glimpsed as she cast her gaze away from his, but he felt sure he had seen it.

His erection hardened.

Dragging himself away from the scene, McGivern strutted around the table and addressed his guests. 'I don't doubt you're familiar with the dance and its many variations, and I know you both believe you could demand it from your own subordinates. But before I move on to my "pitch", I want you to see how I have it performed.' He had reached the foot of the table and saw that his props were waiting for him. After draping a sheet of white linen over the end of the table, he retrieved a short, stubby mace from the chair and sat down.

Jane placed a hand on his arm. Her body was shaking and, when he looked into her pallid face, he saw her blue eyes were wide and fearful. 'I don't think I should be here,' she began in a trembling voice. 'Could I please be excused?'

'No.'

'But I really don't want to see this,' she hissed. 'And . . .'

‘Tough,’ he snapped. Brushing her hand away from his arm, he made a point of ignoring her. The timid solicitor’s outburst was an irritation that he could have done without at this crucial moment. He glared at the three slaves at the head of the table and snapped his fingers. Music began to play from a hidden tape recorder and McGivern tried to let the pleasant sounds help his confident mood return.

He had elected to use *Salome’s Dance of the Seven Veils* as the backing track for this performance. While he wasn’t a great lover of German opera, the piece had seemed appropriate for the dance. An orchestral flurry preceded number three’s tentative steps on to the table and McGivern cast his gaze from Frankie to Simon as he tried to gauge their moods. Everything rested on their acceptance of the challenge he was about to lay down. Their enjoyment of the dance was the key to that acceptance.

They were staring at number three with expressions of obvious intrigue and, in his heart, McGivern knew that the pair were hooked. There were still a lot of variables, he reminded himself. There was always the potential for catastrophe – but their interest had been caught and that meant the main hurdle had been overcome. Feeling sure that things were going to go well, McGivern settled himself back in the chair.

Number three stood at the head of the table, her nakedness revealed to them all. Her young, slender body was attractive to the point of perfection and McGivern knew his guests would be excited by her tattoos and intimate piercings. Aside from the celtic band around her left bicep, she wore an ornate number three over her right breast. The tattoo was a character from some illuminated calligraphy, drawn in garish crimson with gold and black trimmings. The lower curl of the number followed the edge of her areola. The tattoo’s spectacular artwork was almost enough to draw attention away from her body jewellery.

Her pert breasts were pierced through the nipples. Between her legs, clearly visible because her sex had been freshly shaved, the glimmer of ball closure rings glistened slickly. She looked like the embodiment of servility and, as he admired her, McGivern's smile broadened.

The enema pipe was pulled from her anus and the two slaves returned to their position at the walls. Number three stared at McGivern with sultry brown eyes, patiently awaiting his instruction.

He waited until the overture had finished before clearing his throat. The taped orchestra began to whisper the rhythm of Salome's dance and McGivern nodded at his slave. 'You may begin,' he declared.

Number three needed no other command. Swaying her body with the music, she began to dance towards the foot of the table. She bobbed and arched with careless grace. Her slender arms stretched out, and then she embraced herself as she spun around and around before pirouetting. Throughout the dance, her face was a mask of composure, occasionally hidden by her unruly fringe.

McGivern watched with hawk-like scrutiny. He could see subtle signs that her resolve was already threatening to weaken. Beads of sweat had erupted on her forehead and her eyes were touched by an unspoken plea for release. He wasn't surprised by her anguish, aware of how difficult the dance was from the moment he had devised this variation. He hadn't been misleading his guests when he said it was the ultimate test of servility but, although number three was struggling to contain herself, McGivern felt confident that she would perform the dance exactly as he expected.

She spun slowly at first, building her actions in time to the quickening pulse of the music. With graceful steps, she avoided the bottles and glasses that littered her stage.

In spite of her seemingly lithe movements, McGivern could see she was exerting a tremendous amount of self-control. The cheeks of her arse were stiff with tension and he knew

she was trying to ignore the release that her bowel craved. He smiled wickedly, aware of the torment she would have to endure before he allowed that.

He glanced at his guests and saw they were now properly hooked. They studied number three with appreciative awe as she danced over their wine bottles and made her way down the dining table. Frankie's cigar was forgotten, the vile-smelling stub no longer smouldering between her fingers. Her attention was wholly captured by the slave's dance.

McGivern congratulated himself for having known that this display would appeal to her. She was a cruel dominatrix with a reputation for enjoying the kinkiest of games - and he knew that games didn't come much kinkier than this one.

Frankie licked her lips as number three spun past and, although he still had to make the bet with her, McGivern knew that she would accept the challenge.

Simon teased an acrylic fingernail against his lower lip and graced number three with a thoughtful expression. Studying him, McGivern wondered if the man found the sight of the slave exciting, or if he was simply aroused by her predicament. Simon's sexual tastes were notoriously ambiguous and McGivern hadn't known if any of his dancers would appeal to the man. He had always regarded Simon as something of a wild card and knew that if his plan did have the potential for failure, it would be because of Simon. Those fears seemed like distant memories when McGivern saw the shine in Simon's eyes. His smile was illuminated by the gleam of arousal and McGivern knew that, like Frankie, Simon was captivated.

Number three arched her back and tripped daintily across the table. She glowed beneath the admiration of her audience, writhing athletically as the music built to its crescendo. Her naked ballet was enhanced by a femininity and grace that concealed her discomfort. Wrapping her arms around her chest, she spun three times before

throwing herself on to her knees in front of her master. She finished the dance in a staged pose with her arms above her head and her kneeling legs spread open.

McGivern inhaled her scent. His face was on eye level with the pierced lips of her sex and he was close enough to sense the musk of her arousal. Ignoring the heady aroma, he graced her with a critical scrutiny. From this position, he could see that she was struggling to maintain her composure. Her entire body glistened with nervous sweat and her thigh muscles trembled with exertion. Yet still her features were a mask of indifference.

‘Pleasure yourself.’ McGivern spoke loudly enough so his guests could hear. He stood up and made a ceremonial gesture of presenting number three with the wooden mace he had been holding. ‘Pleasure yourself and, when you’ve climaxed, I will allow you to be excused from this room.’ He held out the mace and waited for number three to accept it.

Her gaze flitted briefly over him and again he saw the flicker of desperation in her eyes. She accepted the mace and shifted position so that her legs were folded beneath her. Without needing to be told, she settled herself on the sheet of white linen and turned to face the guests.

‘I don’t want to be a part of this, Mr McGivern,’ Jane hissed. She moved her face close to his ear and gripped his arm as she mumbled the words. ‘I really don’t want to be here.’

He grabbed her wrist and wrenched her hand away. Their eyes met and he glared at her with as much fury as he could muster. ‘Interrupt this ceremony again and I’ll show you my unpleasant side,’ he growled. ‘You’re here for a purpose and if you have an ounce of professional integrity in that round-shouldered body of yours, I suggest you draw on it, sit down and remain silent until I tell you otherwise.’

Jane opened her mouth. McGivern didn’t know if she wanted to protest or argue and he didn’t particularly care. He let go of her wrist and moved his face close to hers. ‘Sit

down.' He hissed the warning from between clenched teeth. 'Sit down and stay quiet until I say otherwise.'

She cast him one final, fiery look then returned to her seat. She was rubbing the back of her hand as though he had hurt it.

McGivern struggled to recapture his composure, momentarily unsettled by the defiance he had seen in her eyes. It occurred to him that if she was one of his slaves, she would be a difficult one to control. The thought was no more than a passing observation and he barely entertained it as he strutted back to his throne.

Thankfully, his guests didn't seem to have noticed the contretemps. Their attention was still devoted to number three and the final act of her dance. McGivern made a mental note to thank Jane for her discretion and then forgot about it as he caught sight of his slave's performance.

The mace was a short length of wood, as thick as a man's fist at its head and as slender as a girl's wrist at the base. Its bulbous head had been carved with an intricate blend of bumps, gnarls and crevices and the implement had been lacquered and polished until it was almost a thing of a beauty. Held in number three's tiny hands, the mace looked large and menacing.

McGivern's grin widened as she teased the misshapen dome against herself. The sight of number three's pierced sex-lips always excited him. The glimmer of nine steel rings penetrated her inner and outer labia. The metal was a contrast to the suffused flesh of her pussy, making each ring seem that much more cruel. There were two through each lip and a final one behind the hood of her clitoris. Of course, the piercings through her breasts were equally arousing, but McGivern's attention was now devoted to number three's cleft and, for the moment, he had no interest in the rest of her body. This was the denouement to the dance of submission and he was determined not to miss a moment.

Number three stroked the head of the mace against herself and moaned. The sound was torn from some place between anguish and delight. With her free hand, she teased the folds of her sex apart, instinctively touching the flesh rather than the body jewellery. She quivered as the tip of her index finger trailed over her clitoris.

She was clearly aroused, McGivern noted. That much was apparent from the hue of her labia and the tremors that racked her frame. Slowly, number three manoeuvred the mace's head against her wetness. She pressed the implement over her splayed pussy lips and steeled herself for its intrusion.

As the shiver rippled through her, McGivern held his breath. She clearly needed a release from the enema's churning waters and he recognised her struggle as being nothing short of heroic. Quite how she would cope during the moment of orgasm was something he dared not contemplate. She was his most obedient slave and had never disappointed him in the past – but there was a lot at stake on this occasion and McGivern knew better than to take success for granted, especially where slaves were concerned. Trying not to think of the potential for failure, he savoured the moment's excitement and forced himself to enjoy the performance.

Number three cried out as she pushed the mace against herself. The splayed lips of her slit began to yield beneath the pressure of the misshapen dome. Her labia peeled apart and, with a rush, the gnarly head plunged inside. The tremors that shook her body were more severe this time.

The slave brushed a finger against the nub of her clitoris and McGivern wondered if she was already in the throes of orgasm. If she hadn't pushed herself there yet, he felt certain she wasn't far away. Swallowing thickly, he leant forward as number three pushed the mace deep into her sex.

She shivered uncontrollably as its length filled her. Her eyes were closed tight and the tendons in her neck strained like taut cables.

‘She’s good,’ Frankie murmured quietly. There was an appreciative glimmer shining in her ice blue eyes. She licked her lips as she watched the scene.

‘She’s very good,’ Simon agreed. He was rolling his fingers against the azurite ring as he spoke, his gaze never leaving number three.

McGivern glowed as they praised his slave, his cheeks colouring with an uncharacteristic blush. Number three’s cheeks were also reddened, although McGivern doubted this was because of the compliment she had just received. Her brow was dripping rivulets of sweat and, as she worked the stubby length of the mace in and out, her hands began to shake. Small, near-hysterical cries fell from her lips when she dared to touch the swollen nub of her clitoris. Her nipples had hardened with excitement and her lower lip jutted forward in a pout of arousal. Her eyelids were almost closed in a dreamy leer and all the time she continued to frig herself with the make-shift dildo.

‘Coming!’ She shrieked the word as a strangled falsetto.

As one, McGivern and his guests leant further forward in their seats. The beat of his heart was synchronised with the rapid to and fro of her wrist. This was the most difficult aspect of the dance and everything he had planned hinged on the slave’s ability to perform properly.

‘I’m coming,’ she gasped again. There was a note of urgency in her tone.

‘You know what I expect of you,’ McGivern said. His calm tone didn’t reveal the stomach-churning thrill of his nervousness. ‘You may have your orgasm.’

It looked as though she had been waiting for the words. As soon as he had given permission, number three pushed the mace deeper inside herself. There was still enough of the shaft outside her sex for her to hold but the rest

disappeared into the slippery confines of her pussy. Her posture was a balanced combination of control and elation, as she threw her head back and drew staccato fingers against her clitoris. It took little effort to push herself beyond the brink of orgasm. She screamed and held herself still as the climax started to rush through her.

McGivern held his breath as he watched.

Number three was obviously torn between opposing needs. She clearly wanted to give in to the orgasm's relief but she resisted the impulse until she could control it. Her body quaked with a twofold desire for release and she wilfully denied one urge as she tried to succumb to the other. She delayed her climax for long, excruciating minutes and McGivern saw that she was deliberately staving off the pleasure until she could be sure to contain the enema-inspired impulse. She finally submitted to her orgasm in an air that was thick with expectancy. Her guttural roar of pleasure echoed around the banquet hall.

Simon had stopped lazing in his chair. He leant over the table, no longer able to feign disinterest. Frankie chewed on the end of her cigar, oblivious to the fact that it was unlit. McGivern saw that their eyes were wide and their incredulous smiles were appreciative.

The mace was expelled from the slave's sex as the pleasure ripped through her. Her body was dripping with sweat and climactic tremors shook her. In a ragged voice, she spat guttural words of elation that rang hollowly in the castle's acoustics. Her jaw was set in a resolute square and McGivern saw that she was still exerting a phenomenal control over her body's needs.

Number three shivered and groaned, enjoying the aftermath of her climax in small, manageable morsels. Each ripple of euphoria seemed more debilitating than the last, but it was never more than she could cope with. As the final wave ebbed away, he saw that tears of effort had been squeezed from the corners of her eyes. The after-echoes of

her climax sparked a final tremor and she almost collapsed beneath the weight of their voyeuristic gazes.

McGivern allowed her a moment to savour her pleasure before raising from his seat. He beamed at his slave with genuine affection and said, 'Wait there.' His voice was crisp and powerful, not revealing his gratitude.

Number three struggled to her knees, nodding her willingness to obey his command. She almost stumbled as her pleasure-weary body tried to cope with the task. Frankie stopped her from falling with a steadying hand.

'There you are,' McGivern exclaimed jubilantly. He pointed at his trembling slave. 'The proof of ultimate servility and a testament to absolute mastery.' As he switched his gaze from Frankie to Simon, he heard number three sob. The sound of her misery was almost lost beneath the reluctant applause that Simon was beginning. McGivern grinned his acceptance of the man's praise then turned to the slaves at the wall. Snapping his fingers he selected a pair and said, 'Take number three to the garderobe.'

They rushed to help the slave, half-carrying, half-leading her as she struggled to escape the banquet hall without embarrassment. It was a graceless gait and he supposed it was a disappointing exeunt for the show's leading lady but neither of the guests seemed to notice. McGivern watched the slave leave, a triumphant grin still revealing his teeth. 'That was the dance of submission,' he told his guests. 'And that's the crux of the challenge that I'm laying down for the three of us.'

'Go on,' Frankie said. She was relighting her cigar, having scratched her match across the polished surface of the oak table. 'You've intrigued me now.' She lazed back in her chair and blew a thoughtful smoke-ring into the air. Her eyes shone with an obvious appreciation for the scene she had just witnessed.

McGivern turned to Simon and waited for his encouragement before speaking.

Simon nodded and, with the silent assent given, McGivern drew a deep breath to lay down the challenge.

‘We all consider ourselves masters in the art of domination. And we each dismiss the others’ abilities as being inferior to our own. My proposal is to put our skills to the ultimate test and see which of us really is the best. We each take an unbroken initiate – a new and untested slave, if you will – and whichever one of us can make our initiate do the dance, wins the castle.’

The banquet hall fell silent. The air between them was so still, McGivern thought he could hear the wails of number three as she finally released the enema in her distant garderobe. He turned to Frankie. ‘Earlier, you asked where your money was.’ Glancing at Simon, he said, ‘I guess you were wondering the same thing. Well, take a look around. Look at the stone walls and the gothic architecture and see what’s happened to your money. For the moment, this place is your money.’

Frankie almost choked on her cigar. ‘You bastard!’ she gasped, struggling not to cough as she made the explosion.

McGivern laughed.

‘How the hell did you manage it?’ Simon demanded.

McGivern’s smile was reassuring and he waved their questions away with a noncommittal hand. ‘I won’t bore you with all the details. It’s sufficient to tell you that the owner upped the price at the last minute. I had the chance to make the purchase but I didn’t have the resources. However, I had access to the money that you two had put up and, to cut a dull story short, I bought the castle. We three are now the proud owners of this remarkable building and that leaves us with two choices.’

Frankie’s ice blue eyes were glowering passionately. ‘You’d better make this good,’ she growled between clenched teeth. ‘The money I’ve invested was the full asking price for this castle, a week ago.’