PROLOGUE

Cambridge, Lammas Day (1 August) 1358

Oswald Stanmore knew he was dying. He also knew it was time to push earthly concerns from his mind and concentrate on his immortal soul, but he could not bring himself to do it. At least, not yet. His beloved wife Edith sat at his bedside, and her good opinion was important to him – he did not want her to learn that not everything he had done during his long and very successful career as a clothier had been legal or ethical.

He had managed to destroy all evidence of his more serious transgressions – the reek of burnt parchment still hung about him – but what about the rest? It had not been easy to be a merchant in such turbulent times. The interminable war with France, famine, plague, years of unpredictable weather – all had taken their toll on trade, and only the strongest had survived. Stanmore had done what was necessary to protect his family from the wretchedness of poverty.

He closed his eyes, aware that he was deluding himself, which was hardly wise at such a time. The truth was that he loved the darker side of commerce – outwitting competitors, avoiding the King's taxes, driving a ruthless bargain. His willingness to bend the rules had given him an edge his rivals had lacked, and had made him one of the wealthiest businessmen in the shire. Edith knew nothing of it, of course, and the thought that she might find out when he was dead sent a pang of distress spearing through him. He groaned aloud.

'Doctor Rougham will be here soon,' said Edith, misunderstanding the cause of his anguish. Her bright smile reminded him that she had no idea of the gravity of his condition. 'You have chosen a bad time for a fever, dearest. Matt is away.'

She referred to her brother, Matthew Bartholomew, considered by the family to be the town's best physician. Rougham, on the other hand, was an indifferent practitioner, more interested in making money than in his patients' welfare. Stanmore grimaced. He could hardly blame Rougham for that – a fondness for money was a failing he owned himself.

The door clanked, and Rougham entered the room. As befitting a man of his academic and social standing, he had spent a small fortune on his clothes. The material had come from the Stanmore warehouses, naturally, but there was a flaw in the weave that prevented the tabard from hanging as well as it might, and Stanmore was gripped by a sense of shame. He remembered that particular bolt, and should not have charged Rougham full price for it.

'Marsh fever,' announced Rougham, after the briefest of examinations. 'It always strikes at this time of year. Indeed, I have only just recovered from a bout of it myself.'

Stanmore knew otherwise, but made no effort to say so. Why bother, when it would make no difference? Rougham and Edith began to discuss remedies and tonics, so he let his mind wander to what he had done that day.

He had spent most of it in his solar, frantically destroying records in the hope of sparing Edith some worrisome discoveries – a difficult task when the deceitful was so intricately interwoven with the honest. A summons had come in the early evening, inviting him to a secret meeting. He had gone at once, hoping it might win him a little more time. It had not, for which he was heartily sorry – another day would have seen evidence of *all* his misdeeds eliminated, and he could have died safe in the knowledge

that Edith would never learn what he had kept from her for so many years.

If he had known then that he would not see another dawn, he would have hurried home and spent his last few hours finishing the task he had started. Instead, he had attended a gathering of the Guild of Saints. The Guild was a charitable organisation that he himself had founded as a sop to his nagging conscience. He had encouraged other rich citizens to join, too, and was proud of the good work they had done. He had gone that night to reassure himself that it was strong enough to continue after his death. After all, it might count in his favour when his soul was weighed.

He had started to feel unwell during a discussion about the widows' fund, but he had paid the signs no heed. However, when he had stood up at the end of the meeting, he had known that something was badly amiss. He had hurried home, and succeeded in burning a few more documents before pain and weakness drove him to his bed, at which point Edith had sent for Rougham.

Stanmore glanced at the *medicus*, who was haughtily informing Edith that the only remedy for marsh fever was snail juice and cloves. How the man could have made such a wildly inaccurate diagnosis was beyond Stanmore – Matt would certainly have seen the truth. But there was no point saying anything; it was not important. In fact, perhaps it was even better this way.

'I have changed my will, Edith.' Stanmore felt as though he was speaking underwater, every word an effort. 'You will inherit this house, the manor in Trumpington and the business. Richard will have everything else. He will be pleased – he has never been interested in cloth, and this leaves him rich without the bother of overseeing warehouses.'

Edith blinked. 'You are not going to die! You will feel better in the morning.'

He did not try to argue. 'Richard is not the son I hoped he would be. He is selfish and decadent, and I dislike his dissipated friends. Do not turn to him for help when I am gone. Zachary Steward knows the business, and can be trusted absolutely. Matt will support you with everything else. He is a good man.'

A good man who would be guilt-stricken for being away when he was needed, thought Stanmore sadly. It was a pity. He would have spared him that if he could.

'Stop, Oswald!' cried Edith, distressed. 'This is gloomy talk.'

He managed to grab her hand, but darkness was clawing at the edges of his vision, and he sensed he did not have many moments left. He gazed lovingly at her, then slowly closed his eyes. He did not open them again.

Mid-September 1358

Few foundations had ever been as unpopular as Winwick Hall. The University at Cambridge, a body of ponderous, exacting men, liked to take its time over important decisions, and was dismayed by the speed with which the new College had sprung into existence. One moment it had been a casual suggestion by a wealthy courtier, and the next it was a reality, with buildings flying up and Fellows appointed. Now, it was to receive its charter – the document in which the King formally acknowledged its existence – which would be presented at a grand ceremony in St Mary the Great.

John Winwick, Keeper of the Privy Seal, smiled his satisfaction as the University's senior scholars began to gather outside the church, ready to process inside and begin the rite. Winwick Hall was *his* College, named after him. *He* had bought land on the High Street, *he* had hired masons to raise a magnificent purpose-built hall, and *he* had chosen its first members. He had even worked out the curriculum that would be taught.

It had all been an unholy rush, of course. Indeed, the mortar was still damp in places, and haste had rendered the roof somewhat lopsided, but Winwick was an impatient man who had baulked at the notion of waiting years while the University deliberated about whether to let him proceed. He wanted students to start their studies that term, not in a decade's time.

Unfortunately, his aggressive tactics had earned enemies for the fledgling foundation. The other Colleges felt threatened by it, jealous of its prestigious position on the High Street and its connections to Court, while the hostels envied its luxurious accommodation and elegant library. The townsfolk were a potential source of trouble, too – they hated the University anyway, and were appalled by the notion of yet more scholars enrolling to swell its ranks. Bearing all this in mind, John Winwick had taken measures to safeguard his creation.

First, he had arranged for sturdy walls and stalwart gates to be raised, like the ones that protected the other Colleges, and had employed the most pugnacious porter he could find to oversee its security. Second, he had chosen as Fellows men who knew their way around the dark corridors of power, who would be adept at fighting back should rivals like Bene't, King's Hall or Michaelhouse conspire to do it harm. And third, he had secured an alliance with the Guild of Saints, a masterstroke of which he was inordinately proud.

The Guild of Saints was unusual in that it boasted both townsfolk and scholars as members, although only those who were very wealthy were invited to join. Oswald Stanmore had created it to help the poor, but its objectives had been changed since his death, so it now supported a much wider range of worthy causes. Winwick had persuaded it that his College was one, and had cajoled it into making a substantial donation. This was a clever move on two counts: it eased the pressure on his own

purse – a relief, given that the venture had cost twice what he had anticipated – and it gave the guildsmen a vested interest in the place. They would defend it, should he not be on hand to oblige.

Now all he had to do was sit back and enjoy the fruits of his labour, although he would have to do it from afar. He would be with the King, making himself indispensable in the hope of winning yet more honours and wealth. And in time, clerks from his College – law was the only subject that would be taught at Winwick Hall – would help him in his designs, men who would be grateful for the chance they had been given, and who would repay him with loyal service and favours.

He smiled. Life was good, and he looked forward to it being even better. Smugly, he turned to his scholars, and told them the order in which he wanted them to process into the church. Unfortunately, both the Guild and the academics themselves had other ideas, and an unseemly spat began to blossom. A short distance away, three men watched as tempers grew heated. They were the University's Chancellor and his two proctors.

'I still cannot believe this happened so quickly,' said the Senior Proctor, a plump Benedictine named Brother Michael. 'I go to Peterborough for a few weeks, leaving you two to maintain the status quo, and I return to find Winwick Hall half built and its doors open to students.'

'Its founder has a very devious way with words,' said Chancellor Tynkell defensively. He was a timid, ineffectual man, and it was common knowledge that it was Michael, not he, who ran the University. 'I found myself agreeing to things without realising the consequences.'

'I did suggest you let me deal with him,' said John Felbrigge, a stout, forceful individual who liked being Junior Proctor because it gave him the opportunity to tell other people what to do. 'I would not have been bullied.'

'No,' agreed Michael, not entirely approvingly. Felbrigge

had not been in post for long, but had already managed to alienate an enormous number of people. Moreover, he had designs on the Senior Proctorship, and Michael disliked an ambitious underling snapping at his heels. 'Having a ninth College does make our University stronger, yet I am uneasy about the whole venture.'

'You worry needlessly,' said Tynkell, comfortable in the knowledge that he would retire soon, so any trouble would not be for him to sort out. 'Besides, would you rather John Winwick took his money to Oxford?'

'Of course not!' Michael hated the Other Place with every fibre of his being. 'But I do not like the kind of men who have flocked here, hoping to study in Winwick Hall.'

'True,' agreed Felbrigge. 'There have already been several nasty brawls with the townsfolk.'

'Things will ease once term starts,' said Tynkell, although with more hope than conviction. 'These young men will either become absorbed in their studies, or Winwick Hall will decline to take them and they will leave.'

'You are half right.' Michael eyed him balefully. 'Many *will* leave when their applications are rejected. However, some will win places, and as Winwick Hall is taking only the richest candidates, regardless of their intellectual ability, we shall have a lot of arrogant dimwits strutting around.'

All three looked towards Winwick's Fellows. So far, there were five and a Provost, although provision had been made to add more during the year. They were resplendent in their new livery – blue gowns with pink hoods – a uniform far more striking than the sober colours favoured by the other foundations.

'*Provost* Illesy,' said Michael sourly. 'Why not Master or Warden, like everywhere else? "Provost" implies that he has control of a collegiate church, and as Winwick Hall

is in the parish of St Mary the Great, he might try to take the place over. And *we* work in that church.'

'It *is* a concern,' agreed Felbrigge. He lowered his voice to a gossipy whisper. 'John Winwick said that he chose Illesy as Provost because he is the most talented lawyer in Cambridge. Yet I cannot forget that Illesy has represented some very unsavoury clients in the past – criminals, no less. However, I have taken steps to keep him and his College in their place.'

Michael was indignant at the presumption. 'What steps?'

'I am a member of the Guild of Saints, as you know,' replied Felbrigge. He smirked superiorly: Michael and Tynkell would never be asked to join, as neither was sufficiently affluent. 'And we have a say in what happens at Winwick Hall, because it could not have been built without our money. So I have used my influence to install one or two safeguards.'

'Such as?' demanded Michael.

'I am afraid I cannot say, Brother. Blabbing about them will undermine their efficacy. But do not worry. Everything is under control.'

'I am sure it is,' said Michael tightly. 'But if it affects my University, I want to know what—'

'*Your* University?' interrupted Felbrigge insolently. 'I thought it belonged to all of us.'

Michael was so unused to anyone challenging his authority that he was startled into silence. Then Winwick's procession began to move, and his belated rejoinder was drowned out by shouts from onlookers – a few cheers, but mostly catcalls and jeers. He heard a hiss and a thump over the clamour, but thought nothing of it until Chancellor Tynkell issued a shrill shriek of horror.

He turned to see Felbrigge on his knees, an arrow protruding from his middle. He glanced around quickly, but the road was so full of buildings and alleys that the

archer might have been anywhere. Pandemonium erupted. Scholars and spectators scrambled for cover, while Felbrigge slumped face-down on the ground. A physician hurried to help him.

'Dead?' asked the monk unsteadily, when the *medicus* sat back on his heels, defeated.

'I am afraid so, Brother.'

Chesterton, the Feast of St Michael and All Angels (29 September) 1358

John Potmoor was a terrible man. He had lied, cheated, bullied and killed to make himself rich, and was hated and feared across an entire region. No crime was beneath him, and as he became increasingly powerful, he recruited more and more like-minded henchmen to aid him in his evil deeds. Yet it was a point of pride to him that he was just as skilled a thief now as he had been in his youth, and to prove it, he regularly went out burgling.

Although by far the richest pickings were in Cambridge, Potmoor did not operate there – he was no fool, and knew better than to take on the combined strength of Sheriff and Senior Proctor. Then an opportunity arose. Sheriff Tulyet was summoned to London to account for an anomaly in the shire's taxes, and Brother Michael went to Peterborough. Potmoor was delighted: their deputies were members of the Guild of Saints, as was Potmoor himself, and guildsmen always looked after each other. He moved quickly to establish himself in fresh pastures, and they turned a blind eye to his activities, just as he expected.

Not every guildsman was happy with his expansion, though: Oswald Stanmore had objected vociferously to Potmoor's men loitering around the quays where his barges unloaded. Then Stanmore died suddenly, and those who supported him were quick to fall silent. By the time Brother Michael returned, Potmoor's hold on the town

was too strong to break, and the felon was assailed with a sense of savage invincibility. But he had woken that morning feeling distinctly unwell.

At first, he thought nothing of it – it was an ague caused by the changing seasons and he would soon shake it off. But he grew worse as the day progressed, and by evening he was forced to concede that he needed a physician. He sent for John Meryfeld, and was alarmed by the grave expression on the man's normally jovial face. A murmured 'oh, dear' was not something anyone liked to hear from his *medicus* either.

At Meryfeld's insistence, Surgeon Holm was called to bleed the patient, but the sawbones' expression was bleak by the time the procedure was finished. Unnerved, Potmoor summoned the town's other medical practitioners – Rougham of Gonville, Lawrence of Winwick Hall and Eyer the apothecary. The physicians asked a number of embarrassingly personal questions, then retreated to consult their astrological tables. When their calculations were complete, more grim looks were exchanged, and the apothecary began to mix ingredients in a bowl, although with such a want of zeal that it was clear he thought he was wasting his time.

A desperate fear gripped Potmoor at that point, and he ordered his son Hugo to fetch Matthew Bartholomew. Although the most talented of the town's *medici*, Potmoor had resisted asking him sooner because he was Stanmore's brother-in-law. Potmoor did not know the physician well enough to say whether he had taken his kinsman's side in the quarrel over the wharves, but he had been unwilling to take the chance. Now, thoroughly frightened, he would have accepted help from the Devil himself had it been offered.

Hugo rode to Cambridge as fast as his stallion would carry him, but heavy rain rendered the roads slick with mud on the way back, and Bartholomew was an abysmal

horseman. Hugo was forced to curtail his speed – the physician would be of no use to anyone if he fell off and brained himself – so the return journey took far longer than it should have done.

They arrived at Chesterton eventually, and the pair hurried into the sickroom. It was eerily quiet. The other *medici* stood in a silent semicircle by the window, while Potmoor's henchmen clustered together in mute consternation.

'You are too late,' said Surgeon Holm spitefully. He did not like Bartholomew, and was maliciously gratified that his colleague had braved the storm for nothing. 'We did all we could.'

Hugo's jaw dropped. 'My father is dead? No!'

'It is God's will,' said Meryfeld gently. 'We shall help you to lay him out.'

'Or better yet, recommend a suitable woman,' said Rougham. It was very late, and he wanted to go home.

'But he was perfectly well yesterday,' wailed Hugo. 'How can he have died so quickly?'

'People do,' said Lawrence, an elderly gentleman with white hair and a kindly smile. 'It happens all the time.'

'How do you *know* he is dead?' demanded Hugo. 'He might just be asleep.'

'He is not breathing,' explained Meryfeld patiently. 'His eyes are glazed, he is cold and he is stiff. All these are sure signs that the life has left him.'

'Declare him dead so we can go,' whispered Rougham to Bartholomew. 'I know it is wrong to speak ill of the departed, but Potmoor was a vicious brute who terrorised an entire county. There are few who will mourn his passing – other than his equally vile helpmeets and Hugo.'

Bartholomew stepped towards the bed, but immediately sensed something odd about the body. He examined it briefly, then groped for his smelling salts in the bag he always wore looped over his shoulder.

'*Sal ammoniac?*' asked Eyer in surprise, when he saw the little pot of minerals and herbs that he himself had prepared. 'That will not work, Matt. Not on a corpse.'

Bartholomew ignored him and waved it under Potmoor's nose. For a moment, nothing happened. Then Potmoor sneezed, his eyes flew open and he sat bolt upright.

'I have just been in Heaven!' the felon exclaimed. 'I saw it quite clearly – angels with harps, bright light, and the face of God himself! Why did you drag me back from such a paradise?'

'That is a good question, Bartholomew,' muttered Rougham sourly. 'Why could you not have left him dead?'

CHAPTER 1

Cambridge, early October 1358

It was an inauspicious start for a new College. Geoffrey de Elvesmere of Winwick Hall lay dead in the latrine, sprawled inelegantly with his clothes in disarray around him. Matthew Bartholomew was sorry. Elvesmere had been a fastidious, private man, who would have hated the indignity of the spectacle he was providing – three of his colleagues had come to gawp while his body was being inspected. Establishing why he had died was a task that fell to Bartholomew, who was not only a physician and a Doctor of Medicine at Michaelhouse, but also the University's Corpse Examiner – the man responsible for providing official cause of death for any scholar who shed the mortal coil.

'Our first fatality,' sighed Provost William Illesy. He was tall, suave, sly-eyed and wore more rings than was practical for a mere eight fingers and two thumbs. 'I knew we would lose members eventually, but I was not expecting it to be quite so soon.'

'It will look bad in our records,' agreed a small, sharp-faced Fellow named Ratclyf. His expression turned thoughtful. 'So perhaps we should pretend he never enrolled. Officially, we are not part of the University until term starts next week, so there is no reason why—'

'You do not mean that,' interrupted the last of the trio sharply. Master Lawrence was unusual in that he was not only a *medicus*, but a lawyer as well. His long white hair and matching beard made him distinctive, and although he had not been in Cambridge long, he was already noted

for his compassion and sweetness of manner. 'It is shock speaking. Elvesmere was a lovely man, and we should be proud to count him as a colleague.'

Bartholomew kept his eyes on the corpse, lest Lawrence should read the disbelief in his face. He had only met Elvesmere twice, but had considered him rude, officious and haughty. A long way from being 'lovely' in any respect.

'I suppose he suffered a seizure,' mused Illesy. 'He was very excited about the beginning of term ceremony, and I said only last night that he should calm himself.'

Bartholomew blinked. 'What ceremony? There is nothing to mark the occasion except a long queue to sign the register and a short service in St Mary the Great.'

'This year will be different, because of us,' explained Ratclyf smugly. 'We are to be formally incorporated into the University, so there will be a grand procession.'

But Bartholomew's attention had returned to the body, and he was no longer listening. Elvesmere was in an odd position, one he was sure the man could not have managed by himself. 'Has he been moved?'

'No,' replied Illesy, pursing his lips in disapproval. 'Although he should have been. It is disrespectful for an outsider like you to see him in such an embarrassing situation.'

'But Lawrence would not let us,' added Ratclyf, treating his colleague to a cool glance. 'Even though we are not quite members of the University, he said its Corpse Examiner would still need to inspect Elvesmere *in situ*.'

There was a distinct sneer in Ratclyf's voice as he spoke Bartholomew's title, but the physician chose to ignore it. The post had been created by the Senior Proctor as a way to secure help with the many suspicious deaths that occurred in the town – when Brother Michael had first started calling on his expertise, Bartholomew had vehemently objected, feeling his duty lay with the living. Now he earned three pennies for every case, he was happy to

oblige, as he needed the money to supply medicine for his enormous practice of paupers.

There was another reason why his objections had diminished, too: familiarity with cadavers had taught him that there was much to be learned from them. He felt this knowledge made him a better physician, and he was sorry the study of anatomy was frowned upon in England. He had watched several dissections at the University in Salerno, and it was obvious to him that they should form part of every *medicus*'s training.

'Lawrence doubtless hopes that you will do for Elvesmere what you did for Potmoor,' Ratclyf went on. 'Namely raise him from the dead.'

'Potmoor was not dead,' said Bartholomew shortly. Reviving such an infamous criminal had earned him almost universal condemnation, and he was tired of people berating him for it. 'He would have woken on his own eventually.'

'So you say,' harrumphed Ratclyf. 'But you should have let him—'

'Enough, Ratclyf,' interrupted Provost Illesy irritably. 'Potmoor has been very generous to our new College, and it is ungracious to cast aspersions on the way he earns his living.'

'I am not casting aspersions on him, I am casting them on Bartholomew. If he had not used magic potions, Potmoor would have stayed dead. It was witchcraft that brought him back.'

'Actually, it was smelling salts,' corrected Lawrence with one of his genial smiles. 'We call them *sal ammoniac*. Like me, Matthew buys them from Eyer the apothecary, whose shop is next door.' He gestured down the High Street with an amiable wave.

'Well, he should have left them in his bag,' grumbled Ratclyf. 'Potmoor might give us princely donations, but that does not make him respectable. It was God's will that

he should perish that night, and Bartholomew had no right to interfere.'

'Certain ailments produce corpse-like symptoms,' began Bartholomew. He knew he was wasting his time by trying to explain, just as he had with the many others who had demanded to know what he thought he had been doing. 'One is catalepsia, which is rare but fairly well documented. Potmoor was suffering from that.'

'I came across a case once,' said Lawrence conversationally. 'In a page of Queen Isabella's. They were lowering him into his grave, when he started banging on the lid of his coffin.'

'Yes, but *he* was not a vicious criminal,' sniffed Ratclyf. 'Bartholomew should have found a way to keep Potmoor dead.'

Bartholomew disliked people thinking that physicians had the right to decide their patients' fates. 'I swore an oath to—'

'You saved one of the greatest scoundrels who ever lived,' interrupted Ratclyf. 'And if that is not bad enough, Potmoor believes that his glimpse of Heaven means he is favoured by God. Now his wickedness will know no bounds.'

'How can you call him wicked when he gave us money to build a buttress when our hall developed that worrying crack last week?' asked Illesy reproachfully. 'There is much good in him.'

'You *would* think so,' sneered Ratclyf. 'You were his favourite lawyer, and it was your skill that kept him out of prison for so many years.'

'How dare you!' flashed Illesy, irritated at last by his Fellow's bile. 'You had better watch your tongue if you want to continue being a Fellow here.'

Bartholomew was embarrassed. Most halls kept their spats private, and he did not like witnessing rifts in Winwick. Lawrence saw it, and hastened to change the subject.

'I was probably the last person to see Elvesmere alive,' he

told his fellow physician. 'It was late last night. He said he felt unwell, so I made him a tonic. He was not in his room when I visited at dawn, so I assumed he was better and had gone to church, but I found him here a little later.'

'He is cold and stiff,' remarked Bartholomew. 'Which means he probably died hours ago. Why was he not discovered sooner? Latrines are seldom empty for long, even at night.'

'Because no one uses this one except him and me,' explained Lawrence. 'The seats are not fixed yet, you see, and have a nasty habit of tipping sideways when you least expect it.'

'The rest of us prefer the safety of a bucket behind the kitchen,' elaborated Ratclyf. He addressed his Provost archly. 'Do you think Potmoor will pay to remedy *that* problem, or is it beneath his dignity as a member of the Guild of Saints and an upright citizen?'

'Is something wrong, Bartholomew?' asked Lawrence quickly, thus preventing the Provost from making a tart reply. 'You seem puzzled.'

'I am. You say Elvesmere has not been moved, yet I doubt he died in this position.'

'He must have done,' said Illesy. 'You heard Lawrence: he and Elvesmere are the only ones who ever come here. And Lawrence is the one who insisted that nothing be touched until you came, so you can be sure that *he* has not rearranged anything.'

'His position looks natural to me,' said Lawrence, frowning. 'The fatal seizure caused him to snatch at his clothes in his final agony, which is why they are awry.'

'His final agony was not the result of a seizure,' said Bartholomew. He eased the body forward to reveal a dark patch of red. 'It was because he was stabbed.'

Provost Illesy turned so pale after Bartholomew's announcement that the physician was afraid he might faint, so he

asked Lawrence to take him somewhere to sit down. Then, with Ratclyf watching his every move with discomfiting intensity, he finished his examination. Afterwards, they wrapped the body and carried it to St Mary the Great, where it would lie until it was buried.

'Come to our *parlura* and tell us what you have deduced,' instructed Ratclyf, once they were outside. A *parlura*, or place to talk, was Winwick Hall's name for the Fellows' common room; other Colleges used the rather less pretentious term 'conclave'. 'It is only right that we should hear your conclusions before you report them to the Senior Proctor.'

Bartholomew was frantically busy. He had more patients than he could properly manage, and if he did not prepare lectures, reading lists and exercises for his students before the beginning of term, he would sink beneath the demands of a ridiculously heavy teaching load. Moreover, his sister was still in mourning, so any free moments he did have were spent with her. Thus he did not have time to linger in Winwick Hall. Yet he knew *he* would want details, if one of his colleagues had been murdered, so he nodded assent and followed Ratclyf across the yard.

He looked around him as he went, studying for the first time the place that would soon become the University's latest addition. Like all Cambridge Colleges, it was protected by high walls and a stalwart gatehouse. Set in the exact centre of the enclosure was the hall. This was a magnificent building on three floors, perfectly symmetrical, with a large arched doorway in the middle. The ground floor comprised the *parlura* to the left, and a library to the right. The first floor was a huge room for teaching and dining, with imposing oriel windows and a hearth at either end, while the top floor was a spacious dormitory for students.

In addition to the hall, Winwick boasted living quarters for the Provost and his Fellows, a kitchen block with

accommodation for servants, several stables, and sheds for storage. Most were new, and workmen still swarmed over the parts that were not quite completed. Some of the labourers were Bartholomew's patients, and nearly all had called on him to tend cuts, bruises and even broken bones as a result of the speed with which the founder had compelled them to work.

'I hear Brother Michael is no further forward with solving the murder of his Junior Proctor,' said Ratclyf as they walked. 'Why should we trust him to keep us safe, when he cannot catch his own deputy's killer? Personally, I think he should resign.'

'It only happened two weeks ago,' objected Bartholomew. 'Give him time.'

'Yet I cannot say I was surprised when Felbrigge was shot,' Ratclyf went on. 'He antagonised not only half the University with his hubris, but most of the town, too.'

'You exaggerate,' said Bartholomew curtly. He had not particularly liked Felbrigge, but he detested gossip, especially from someone like Ratclyf, who was hardly a paragon of virtue himself.

'I do not! And had he lived, there would have been trouble. He had a heavy hand with students, and they would have rebelled. Michael is well rid of him.'

'How many pupils have enrolled at Winwick Hall?' asked Bartholomew, pointedly changing the subject to something less contentious.

'Twelve. But we shall have ten times that number by the beginning of term. Men flock to apply for places, and I anticipate that we shall be bursting at the seams in no time at all.'

Bartholomew was sure of it, as the town was currently full of men who had come in the hope of being offered a place. It was always a dangerous time of year, because the applicants did not officially become students until they had matriculated – registered with a College or a

hostel – and so were outside the University's jurisdiction. *Ergo*, there was nothing the Senior Proctor or his beadles could do about their boisterous high spirits, and the town resented them. Affrays were frequent and sometimes serious.

The discussion ended as Ratclyf led the way into the *parlura*, a pleasant chamber that smelled of wet plaster and new wood. Its walls were plain, still to be covered with tapestries or murals, and its floorboards had not yet been stained or waxed. When it was finished, it would be a delightful place to sit of an evening.

Illesy was by the hearth, with his Fellows clustered around him, so Ratclyf began to make introductions. First he indicated Master Lawrence.

'As you know, our lawyer-*medicus* was the late Queen Isabella's personal physician. But most of us are distinguished in our fields, so his appointment is in keeping with the high standards we at Winwick Hall aim to promote.' Ratclyf turned to his Provost, and suddenly his voice was far less friendly. 'And you have met Illesy, of course. Legal adviser to the villainous Potmoor.'

'And plenty of other clients,' added Lawrence quickly, when Illesy began to scowl. 'No one knows more about criminal law than he, and we are lucky to have him. When they graduate, most of our students will be bound for Court, so such knowledge will be very useful.'

He beamed affably, although Bartholomew was disconcerted to learn that the men who ran his country might need to call upon someone who possessed the same kind of sly skills that had kept Potmoor from the noose.

'I am not the only member of Winwick with links to Potmoor,' said Illesy tightly. 'Lawrence is his physician, a post he took when the last *medicus* was dismissed for failing to save him. I understand the honour was offered to you, Bartholomew, but you declined it.'

Bartholomew had, because he had no wish to be at the

beck and call of wealthy criminals, although the excuse he had given was that he had too many patients already.

'I *like* Potmoor,' said Lawrence. 'And I have seen nothing but generosity and kindness in him.'

'And here are our last two Fellows,' Ratclyf went on, treating the claim with the contempt he felt it deserved by ignoring it. 'Albizzo di Nerli is from Florence, and is an expert in civil law. He has a string of degrees from the University at Salerno, and will certainly attract the best students.'

Nerli was a darkly handsome man with long black hair, an olive complexion and hooded eyes. He did not smile when Bartholomew bowed, and there was something cold and predatory about his manner. He stood apart from the others, as if he did not consider them sufficiently worthy company.

'I have been a scholar all my life,' he said. The others had been speaking French, but Nerli used Latin, which he pronounced with a strong Florentine accent. 'But only in the country of my birth. Thus I am delighted with the opportunity to ply my skills farther afield.'

'And finally, William Bon will teach our students how to be notaries public,' finished Ratclyf.

Bon had a sharp, narrow face and wispy fair hair. The pupils of both eyes were white, and a student had been detailed to stay with him to ensure he did not fall. He moved confidently across the *parlura* to greet Bartholomew, though, and the physician suspected he would fare better still once the College was not strewn with workmen's tools and building materials.

'So now we all know each other,' said Illesy snappishly. He turned to Bartholomew. 'What have you learned from examining our unfortunate colleague?'

'Very little,' replied Bartholomew. 'Except that I suspect he was stabbed elsewhere and was brought to the latrine after he died, perhaps to delay his discovery.'

'So he was definitely murdered?' asked Lawrence in a small voice.

'Yes. However, the wound would not have been instantly fatal, so I fail to understand why he did not call for help.'

'Perhaps he did,' suggested Ratclyf. 'But starting a new College is exhausting work, and we all sleep very soundly.'

'The killer will be a member of another foundation,' said Bon unpleasantly. He had a shrill, nasal voice, and its tone was acidic. 'King's Hall, Gonville, Valence Marie, Michaelhouse – they all resent us, and would love us tainted by scandal.'

Before Bartholomew could object to the claim, the door opened and the porter entered. His name was Jekelyn, a surly, belligerent man who was not above greeting visitors with torrents of unprovoked abuse. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

'Visitor,' he announced sourly. 'John Knyt, Secretary of the Guild of Saints, who is probably here to make sure the donations it has given us are not being squandered. Although it is none of his business if they are.'

Bartholomew had always liked Knyt, a principled, compassionate man who was generous to the poor. He had been the obvious choice to lead an organisation that was committed to doing good works, a task he had inherited in August after the sudden death of Oswald Stanmore.

'Knyt!' cried Illesy gushingly, indicating with a sweep of his arm that the visitor was to enter. 'You have caught us at a bad moment, I am afraid. Poor Elvesmere has been murdered.'

'Murdered?' echoed Knyt, shocked. 'I heard he was dead – servants gossip, and one of yours told one of mine – but no one said anything about murder. What happened?'

'He was stabbed,' replied Ratclyf. 'I imagine it was Potmoor's doing.'

'It was not,' snapped Illesy. 'Why would he do such a thing?'

'I am inclined to agree,' said Lawrence, as Ratclyf drew breath to argue. 'There is a tendency to blame everything on him these days, and he cannot be guilty of *every* crime.'

'No,' said Ratclyf flatly. 'Of course not.'

There was no more Bartholomew could tell the Provost and his Fellows, so he took his leave. Knyt went with him, murmuring that the College should be left to grieve in peace. He and the physician walked across the yard, where the great gates that led to the High Street were detached from their posts and stood propped against a wall – the carpenter had ordered the wrong hinges, so they were waiting for a set that would fit.

'How is Edith?' asked Knyt. 'I see her at Guild meetings, and she is always so very sad.'

Bartholomew knew this all too well. Although his sister's marriage had been arranged, she had loved her husband dearly, and his death had left her grief-stricken and lonely. Bartholomew hated seeing her so low, but was acutely aware that there was nothing he could do to help.

'She buries herself in work,' he replied. 'Running Oswald's business.'

'He was wise to have left it to her,' said Knyt. 'Not only because it gives her life purpose while she mourns, but because I doubt your nephew would make a good clothier. Two dozen people rely on that venture for their livelihoods, and it is safer with Edith than with Richard.'

Bartholomew nodded, although he feared that Edith's increasing familiarity with the work might teach her things about it that she would rather not know. Like most successful merchants, Stanmore had not always been gentle or honest, a fact he had carefully concealed from his wife and son. Bartholomew might have remained in ignorance, too, were it not for patients who had complained to him. Thus every time Edith spoke with a customer or opened a ledger, he braced himself for her

dismay at discovering something upsetting. Ten weeks had passed without incident, but this only meant that the shock would be all the greater when she did find something amiss.

'I am surprised Richard is still here,' Knyt went on. 'His father's death left him a very rich man. I thought he would have dashed straight back to London to make the most of it.'

Bartholomew was also bemused by Richard's disinclination to leave, as his lawyer-nephew had always professed to find Cambridge dull after the heady delights of the city. Unfortunately, rather than being a comfort to his mother, Richard was a strain. She could pretend he was sober and hard-working when he was away, but it was difficult to maintain the illusion when he was living under her roof.

'Poor Stanmore,' sighed Knyt. 'His death was a great shock to us all. It was so sudden.'

It had certainly been a nasty blow for Bartholomew. Stanmore and Edith had raised him after the early loss of his parents, so his brother-in-law had been part of his life for as long as he could remember. He might have deplored Stanmore's shabby antics in commerce on occasion, but he had loved him as a kinsman, and his death left a hole that would never be filled.

'The University's students are returning, I see,' remarked Knyt, as they stepped on to a High Street that teemed with people. 'Is it my imagination, or are there more of them than usual?'

'There *are* more,' replied Bartholomew. 'Most have come to apply to Winwick Hall. I did not realise that law was such a popular subject.'

Knyt laughed. 'Stanmore always said you were unworldly, and that remark proves it. Everyone knows that law is the most lucrative of professions.'

'Is it?' Bartholomew had never cared about money. He

could have made a princely living if he had confined himself to calculating horoscopes for affluent townsmen, but he was more interested in genuine diseases, which meant that most of his clients were poor and unable to pay.

'Oh, yes. We have several lawyers in the Guild, and they are by far our richest members. And look at the clerk who founded Winwick Hall – one of the wealthiest men in the country.'

'So I have heard.'

'Yet I would not trade places with him for the world. He might have power and pots of money, but *I* live in a town I love, surrounded by friends and family. And as Secretary of the Guild, I spend a lot of time helping people in need. What could be more rewarding than that?'

They stepped aside to let a gaggle of young men strut past. Bartholomew supposed a senior member of the University and the Secretary of the Guild of Saints should have stood their ground, but he disliked pointless confrontation, and was glad Knyt did, too. Unfortunately, they were seen by several apprentices, who scoffed at their pusillanimity. He grimaced, suspecting there would be serious trouble between the newcomers and the town before long.

'Have you heard about the recent increase in burglaries?' asked Knyt, as they resumed their journey. 'They coincide with Potmoor's resurrection.'

Bartholomew groaned. 'Potmoor was *not* dead – he had catalepsia. And it is not my fault that he has decided to indulge in a crime spree either.'

'I quite agree,' said Knyt soothingly. 'Personally, I do not believe that Potmoor is the culprit, and I spoke not to rebuke you, but to warn you – there *are* folk who think you are to blame, so be on your guard. We cannot afford to lose the only physician who helps the poor.'

'Lawrence helps the poor.'

'Yes,' conceded Knyt. 'But not to the same extent. Still, he is better than the other *medici*, who do nothing at all. Especially Surgeon Holm, who refuses point blank when I ask him to tend deserving cases. Incidentally, he seems to have taken a rather violent dislike to you.'

Bartholomew blushed. Holm's antipathy stemmed from the fact that Bartholomew was in love with his wife. The surgeon was naturally indignant, but his homosexuality meant he was not in a strong position to win her back. The couple had reached an understanding about the friendships each wished to pursue, but that did not mean that Holm was happy about being cuckolded.

'Will you be at the Cambridge Debate tomorrow?' asked Knyt when there was no reply to his observation. 'The Guild has agreed to sponsor the refreshments afterwards.'

'I will not,' said Bartholomew vehemently. 'The topic is apostolic poverty, with monks arguing that friars should denounce all property and privileges, and friars arguing that they should be allowed to keep them. I am neither a friar nor a monk, and do not want to be drawn into it.'

'The monks have a point: friars are meant to live like Christ, simply and modestly. They are not supposed to lounge in luxurious convents, eating and drinking like princes. Monks, however, live contemplative lives, which you cannot do effectively with a growling stomach.'

Bartholomew laughed, amused by the simplification of a row that was threatening to tear the Church apart. 'I would not repeat that to a friar if I were you. You would never hear the end of it.'

Michaelhouse was the third College to be founded at Cambridge, and had recently celebrated its thirty-fourth birthday, although opinions were divided as to whether

it would see its thirty-fifth. Its founder had endowed it with a pleasant hall, land in the centre of town, several houses and a church, not to mention the tithes of four parishes. Unfortunately, mismanagement and a series of unwise investments meant it was currently on the brink of ruin.

Bartholomew opened the gate and paused for a moment to survey the place that had been his home for more years than he could remember, and that he would miss horribly should the pessimists be right about the seriousness of its financial problems.

The courtyard had once been grassed, but was now an expanse of mud. On the far side was the hall, a large but shabby building with kitchens below and two large chambers above. The bigger room was the refectory, which boasted a pretty but glassless oriel window and a sizeable hearth; trestle tables were set out for meals, then stacked away when it was time for lessons. The other room was the conclave, exclusive domain of the Master and his Fellows.

At right angles to the hall were the two accommodation blocks. Bartholomew lived in the older, more dilapidated wing, where he had been allocated two rooms. He shared one with his students, while the second, no more than a cupboard, was used for storing medicines. He sometimes slept there, as the other was a tight fit at night when all the students unrolled their mattresses.

He arrived to find his pupils involved in an angry-voiced discussion that stopped the moment he opened the door. His current senior student, a red-haired, merry-faced lad named Aungel, quickly began to read aloud from the copy of Theophilus's *De urinis* that lay on his knees, although his guilty expression suggested the quarrel had been about something else entirely – probably the results of their illicit gambling ring, or the proscribed delights of the town's prostitutes.

'I do not see why we should study before term begins,' said John Goodwyn, a haughty newcomer who was older than the rest. Bartholomew had not chosen to teach him – indeed, he would have rejected the lad had he interviewed him himself – but the Master had been bribed with the offer of double fees. Bartholomew was not pleased: Goodwyn was a disruptive influence, leading the others to grumble when they normally would have been compliant.

'Sitting in a tavern would be much more fun,' agreed Aungel wistfully.

'Taverns are forbidden to scholars.' Bartholomew raised his hand to quell the immediate objection that Goodwyn started to make. 'And do not say you will not be a scholar until next week, because you became one when you signed our register.'

Goodwyn fell silent, although he shot his teacher a resentful glare. Bartholomew ignored it, and set the class an exercise that would keep them busy for the rest of the day. He knew he drove them hard, but the country was still desperately short of qualified physicians after the plague, and he was determined that the ones he trained would be worthy to replace those who had died.

When he was sure they had understood his instructions, he left Aungel to supervise, and retreated to the storeroom. He closed the door to block out the sound of Goodwyn's whine, and slumped on a stool. He was exhausted. Lawrence had taken on some of his patients, but he still had far too many, and he was not sure how he would cope when teaching began the following week.

He glanced at the treatise on fevers he had been writing for the past few years, originally intended to be a brief guide for students, but now extending to several volumes. He could not remember when he had last added to it. Admittedly, some of his spare time had gone on trying to invent a decent lamp for night-time

consultations – experiments from which he was now banned after they had gone disastrously wrong – but how much longer would he have to struggle against increasingly impossible workloads?

Sighing wearily, he pulled Galen's *Prognostica* towards him and started to write the commentary he would need to provide as his students slogged their way through it. He had only been working a few moments when the door opened and Brother Michael stepped in. The monk was his closest friend, but Bartholomew still felt a surge of annoyance at the interruption.

'Where is your wine?' Michael demanded. 'I need a drink.'

He snatched the flask from the shelf before Bartholomew could reply, and poured himself a generous measure. It was the cheapest claret available, used in medicines where its taste was irrelevant, and he winced as it went down. The sour flavour did not prevent him from taking a second swig, though. Then he plumped himself down on a bench, where an ominous creak made both scholars tense in alarm – Bartholomew afraid for furniture he could not afford to replace, and Michael worried for his dignity. But the joints held, and the two of them relaxed.

Besides being a Benedictine theologian of some renown, Michael was also Senior Proctor, and his years in post – he stubbornly refused to allow an election that might allow someone else a turn – had made him the most powerful man in the University. The Chancellor, who should have been in charge, was a mere figurehead, there to take the blame when things went wrong.

'Well?' Michael asked.

Bartholomew regarded him blankly. 'Well, what?'

'Well, what can you tell me about Elvesmere? It was I who sent you to Winwick Hall, if you recall, and who will pay you threepence for it.'

'Oh, yes. He was stabbed at some unknown location,

then dragged to the College latrine. Poor Elvesmere. He would have been mortified to know what had been done to him.'

Michael stared at him in horror. '*Stabbed?* You mean murdered? And it did not occur to you to tell me immediately?' He waved away Bartholomew's sheepish apology. 'Stabbed by whom?'

'The killer left nothing to incriminate himself, Brother. All I can say is that the wound would not have been instantly fatal.'

'Could you have saved him, had you been called at once?'

Bartholomew shook his head. 'The blade punctured a lung. At least, I assume it did. It is impossible to be sure without looking inside him.'

'Then we shall accept your educated guess,' said Michael briskly, well aware of his friend's controversial views on the art of anatomy. 'Could you deduce anything else? Such as whether Elvesmere knew his assailant?'

'Of course not! However, there were no signs of a struggle, which means that either his killer attacked without warning, or Elvesmere did not consider him a threat.'

'Poor Winwick Hall! A murder on the eve of its entry into the University will do its reputation no good whatsoever. Did you meet the other Fellows while you were there? And perhaps observe their reactions when you told them that one of their number had been unlawfully slain?'

'Illesy was shocked, but I think it was more fear of the harm it might do his College than dismay for the victim. Lawrence had to take him to sit down. Ratclyf seemed more indignant than distressed, and the other two – Nerli and Bon – had heard the news before I went to their *parlura*, so I have no idea how they responded. Why? Do you suspect one of them of the crime?'

'Well, they are the ones with access to the place where the victim died,' Michael pointed out.

'Not so, Brother. The gates are off their hinges, which means that anyone can wander in and out. Jekelyn has been hired as a porter, but he is not very conscientious.'

'True.' Michael's green eyes were wide in his chubby face. 'How am I supposed to find a culprit when there is so little in the way of clues? Moreover, I am still busy with the murder of my Junior Proctor, not to mention struggling to keep the peace between the townsmen and the new *matriculands* who are flocking to enrol in the University.'

'Felbrigge,' mused Bartholomew. 'How is that enquiry progressing?'

'Slowly. But I will catch his killer if it is the last thing I do. I must, or the culprit may set murderous eyes on another University official.'

When the bell rang to announce the midday meal, Bartholomew and Michael started to walk towards the hall, joining the streams of scholars emerging from the accommodation wings and gardens. Meals in College were obligatory, and no one could absent himself without the Master's permission. Fortunately for Bartholomew and Michael, the Master was a pragmatic soul who appreciated that physicians and senior proctors sometimes needed to obey more urgent summons, and rarely took them to task if they were missing.

His name was Ralph de Langelee, a tall, barrel-chested individual who had been a henchman of the Archbishop of York before deciding that the University was a better place to ply his range of dubious skills. He knew little of the philosophy he was supposed to teach, but he was an able administrator, and his Fellows were mostly satisfied with his rule. He spotted Michael and Bartholomew as he came out of his quarters, and changed direction to intercept them.

'You know the College statutes, Brother,' he said shortly. 'Is there anything in them that I can use to stop Father William and Thelnetham from sniping at each other? Their feud has lasted for months now, and I am heartily sick of it. It is even worse now that Hemmysby is back.'

'Is it?' asked Bartholomew, startled. Simon Hemmysby was a diffident theologian, who spent half his time teaching in Cambridge, and the other half as a canon in Waltham Abbey. Bartholomew could not imagine him aggravating spats.

'William preached a sermon saying that Waltham is home to the Devil,' explained Langelee. 'So now Hemmysby joins with Thelnetham in deploring William's excesses, and clamours at me to dismiss him on the grounds of bigotry. Can I, Brother? I would do anything for peace.'

Michael considered; he loved the minutiae of College rules. 'Unfortunately, William has been a Fellow too long for us to object to his character now. If we dismiss him for extremism, he will appeal the decision and will probably be reinstated – after which he will be more insufferable than ever. However, there is a statute that says all disputes are to be adjudicated by the Master—'

'I know,' said Langelee acidly. 'You were rash enough to mention it in front of them once, and I have been plagued by demands to arbitrate ever since. I have better things to do than sort out their quarrels. They come to me two or three times a day, and I am at the end of my tether.'

'What do they argue about?' asked Bartholomew.

Langelee regarded him askance. 'That is a question only a man with his head in a corpse would pose! They squabble about everything – who should have which part of the hall for teaching, who should stand where in church, who should have first loan of a book from the library—'

'How many students should be admitted next term.' Michael took up the list, having also been dragged into their rows. 'Whether we should use white tablecloths on

Sundays. Whether we should apologise to Ovyng Hostel for the racket made by our porter's pet peacock. Whether Hemmysby should be a member of the Guild of Saints—'

'Why should he not?' interrupted Bartholomew. 'It is a body of people committed to worthy causes. It is good for us to be associated with it, and all the Fellows of Winwick have joined.'

'William claims it is only open to very wealthy folk, and he disapproves of elitism,' explained Langelee. 'Hemmysby is rich, what with his stipend here and what he earns at Waltham. I suppose Winwick's Fellows must be similarly affluent.'

'Actually, they were admitted because their founder wants as close a connection between the Guild and his new College as possible,' said Michael. 'They are members by default, although I doubt they mind – its functions are very lavish. But the real reason why William objects to Hemmysby's involvement is because *he* was not invited to join – he is jealous.'

'He is not a man to rejoice in the good fortune of others,' sighed Langelee. 'However, what worries me more are his mad views on apostolic poverty, which is a deeply contentious subject.'

Michael agreed. 'Have you heard what is happening in Oxford because of it? The debate has inspired so many fanatical theologians to air their opinions that some bishops refuse to let men from their dioceses study there. The King has been forced to issue an edict forbidding anyone from discussing it, but too late – the whole *studium generale* is already seen as a hotbed of heresy.'

'Yet apostolic poverty has been chosen as the subject for tomorrow's Cambridge Debate,' remarked Bartholomew.

'It is a calculated gamble on my part,' explained Michael. 'We get the matter out in the open, but in strictly controlled conditions and before most of our students arrive back. Then it will become a banned topic until further notice.'

'Do you think Oxford's current reputation for dissent is why John Winwick chose to found his new College here?' asked Langelee.

'I am sure of it,' replied Michael. 'Especially after what happened to Linton Hall.'

'And what was that?' asked Bartholomew, when Michael pursed his lips in disapproval.

'You have not heard? Its members defied the King's edict and wrote a tract challenging the most recent papal bull on apostolic poverty. In response, His Majesty dissolved their hostel, and His Holiness excommunicated all its scholars.'

Bartholomew blinked. 'That seems harsh!'

'Pope and King have decreed that other foundations will suffer the same fate if they follow Linton's example. I do not want *my* University sullied by that sort of thing, so the subject will be off limits once term starts, and anyone who does not like it can go and study somewhere else.'

'You had better tell William, then,' said Langelee. 'Because his beliefs will be just as radical as those of Linton Hall. Personally, I fail to understand why a subject so tedious can excite such fervour. I am sick of hearing about it.'

'You will not be at St Mary the Great to hear us discuss it, then?' asked Michael wryly. 'I shall speak myself, of course. I cannot wait to put those uppity friars in their place.'

'If you do, William will never forgive you,' warned Bartholomew. 'While Thelnetham will be intolerable if he thinks he has your support.'

'He is right, Brother. Please watch what you say.' Langelee sighed wearily. 'Incidentally, the trustees of the Stanton Hutch – namely me, William and Thelnetham – are due to meet after dinner.'

Hutches were chests containing money that could be borrowed by College members. In return for coins, they could leave something of equal or greater value, such as a book or jewellery, and if the loan was not repaid by a

specified date, the hutch kept whatever had been deposited. Michaelhouse had several, although the Stanton was by far the richest.

'They will quarrel,' the Master went on. 'And I need some excuse to keep them apart, or I shall be hard-pressed not to run them through. Can you think of anything?'

'How about attending the meeting unarmed?' joked Bartholomew.

'Perhaps I had better,' sighed Langelee without the flicker of a smile, causing Bartholomew and Michael to regard him in alarm. Weapons were forbidden to scholars, and although Langelee had always ignored this particular stricture, he was at least usually discreet about it. 'I do not want to be arrested for murder, although they would try the patience of a saint.'

'Is the Stanton Hutch doing well?' asked Michael, after a short silence during which he decided that he was not equal to disarming the head of his College that day. 'Matt and I manage the Illeigh Chest, but that is virtually dead. We have dozens of useless baubles, but no coins at all.'

'The Stanton is loaded with money,' said Langelee gloomily. 'Because if William supports an application, Thelnetham vetoes it, and vice versa. We have not made a loan in months. They will not even let me have one, and a few marks would help enormously with the expenses we always incur at the beginning of the academic year.'

'The statutes forbid its use for that sort of thing,' preached Michael. 'And rightly so. If we did not have the facility to lend our students money, some would never pay their tuition fees.'

Langelee waved the remark away and turned to Bartholomew. 'I understand you make remedies for Thelnetham's biliousness. How well do you know your toxins?'

'I sincerely hope you are jesting,' said Bartholomew,

although looking at Langelee's disagreeable expression, he suspected not.

Langelee scowled when he saw he was not going to be rid of the problem so easily. 'I do not want William *or* Thelnetham in my College. Now I know how Henry the Second felt when *he* had to manage turbulent clerics.'

'So Langelee views himself as a beleaguered monarch,' mused Michael when the Master had gone. 'No wonder he walks around armed to the teeth and wants you to poison his enemies.'

Bartholomew had always liked Michaelhouse's hall, although it was more pleasant in summer than in winter. The windows had once contained glass, but that had been broken over the years, and the scholars were now faced with the choice of a warm but dark environment with the shutters closed, or a bright but chilly one with them ajar. As the weather was mild that morning, they were thrown wide open, and sunlight streamed in, bright and cheering.

He stood behind his seat at the high table, and watched his colleagues take their places. The Master was in the centre, with Father William on one side and Michael on the other. Bartholomew was next to Michael, with the College's Dominican, John Clippesby, next to him. Clippesby was generally deemed to be insane, because he talked to animals and claimed they answered back. Yet he was gentle, honest and patient with his students. Hemmysby was at the end, quiet, priestly and in desperate need of a haircut – his normally neat curls had been allowed to blossom into a thick thatch that was faintly ridiculous.

Unfortunately, the rules of seniority put Thelnetham next to William, something that might have been avoided if Suttone the Carmelite had been willing to move. Suttone refused, on the grounds that he had no wish to have one adversary on either side of him, predicting – probably

justifiably – that they would just continue to argue across him.

With eight days still to go before the start of term, the hall was only half full, as many students had yet to return. Bartholomew was the only Fellow who insisted that his pupils begin studying the moment they arrived, although Michael's sombre theologians were hard at work of their own volition, as were a number of youthful first-years, eager to make a good impression.

When everyone was standing behind his seat and the clatter of conversation had died away, Langelee intoned one of his peculiar graces, which comprised half-remembered clips from other prayers, all jumbled together without reference to content or meaning. He spoke with a booming confidence that impressed anyone who had no Latin but bemused those who did, after which everyone sat, and waited for the servants to bring the food.

Meals were supposed to be taken in silence at Michaelhouse, the only voice that of the Bible Scholar reading the scriptures. In reality, Fellows were a talkative horde, and rarely paid heed to this particular rule. The students followed their example, so it was not long before the hall was full of animated banter. At the high table, Michael began to list all the Colleges, hostels and houses that had been burgled of late – cleverly executed crimes that neither he nor the Deputy Sheriff had been able to solve. Thelnetham cut across him.

'I really must complain, Master. William has stolen the ale I bought for the paupers in the choir. It is a disgusting act of selfishness.'

Thelnetham – refined, fastidious and with a penchant for enlivening the plain habit of his Order with outrageously colourful accessories; there were yellow bows on his shoes that day – was one of the most able scholars in the University, and it was inevitable that he and the grubby, dim-witted William should fall out.

'I thought it was there for everyone, and I was thirsty,' objected William, using the loud, hectoring tones he reserved for spats with Thelnetham. He had originally been with the Inquisition, but had been ousted because his cronies had deemed him too zealous. Bartholomew and Michael were used to his idiosyncrasies, but the newer Fellows found him difficult to take. He was physically repellent, too: his Franciscan habit rarely saw the laundry, and he had thick, greasy hair that sprouted untidily around a lopsided tonsure.

'We shall observe silence today,' declared Langelee promptly. 'It is the Feast Day of Saint Gratinule, and we should all reflect on his martyrdom.'

'Saint who?' Thelnetham narrowed his eyes. 'I hope you have not invented him, because you decline to address my complaint.'

'How did he die?' asked William ghoulishly.

'He choked on a walnut,' replied Langelee, seeing a bowl of them on the table in front of him.

'That is hardly martyrdom, Master,' said William, doubtfully. 'And—'

'He perished while giving the Host to the King of Rome,' elaborated Langelee. 'He was very devout, and we must all contemplate his great holiness.'

'Why was he eating walnuts while celebrating Mass?' asked William suspiciously. 'And I was not aware that Rome went in for kings.'

'It was a long time ago,' stated Langelee, the curt tone of his voice indicating that the discussion was over. 'When things were different. Now let us pray.'

He bowed his head and clasped his hands in an entirely uncharacteristic pose of piety, forcing those who were in holy orders to do likewise. As this was all the Fellows except Bartholomew, there was blessed peace, broken only by the rattle of spoons on pewter bowls.

The fare was dismal as usual, comprising a watery stew

laced with gristle and undercooked onion – fuel was expensive, and one economy was not lighting the kitchen fire until later in the day, which meant that food was often served semi-raw. There was nothing else except a few late nuts from the orchard, so it had to be eaten, but Fellows and students alike grimaced their distaste. Langelee was about to say a final grace when Cynric, Bartholomew's book-bearer, appeared. Bartholomew started to stand, assuming he had come with a summons from a patient, but Cynric went to the Master instead.

'I cannot find the Stanton Hutch,' he said, perturbed. 'You asked me to collect it from the cellar and put it in the conclave, ready for your meeting. But it is not there.'

Langelee turned to William and Thelnetham. 'Have either of you taken it?'

Both Fellows shook their heads. 'However, I can tell you that it contains fifty marks and five pence,' said William.

'Fifty marks and *nine* pence,' corrected Thelnetham crisply.

'More,' gulped Langelee, speaking in a low voice so that the students would not hear. 'A *lot* more. A couple of weeks ago, I discovered that rats had attacked the box where we keep the College's valuables. I put them in the Stanton Hutch instead, as it is thicker and I thought they would be safer. If the chest has gone, then it means the College is penniless. Literally!'