THE WOLVES OF SAVERNAKE

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Allison & Busby Limited
11 Wardour Mews
London W1F 8AN
allisonandbusby.com

First published in Great Britain in 1993.
This edition first published by Allison & Busby in 2020.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-0-7490-2534-2

Typeset in 12.25/16.5 pt Adobe Garamond Pro by Allison & Busby Ltd.

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Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Prologue

Savernake Forest trembled in the fading light. A cool breeze came out of nowhere to whistle through its undergrowth, to rustle its leaves, and to make its boughs genuflect fearfully towards the heavens. The sun was falling slowly into the seductive embrace of the horizon and only a few last rays were left to probe through the fretwork of branches and to conjure shapes out of the gathering gloom. When the breeze stiffened, the whole forest shivered with a pale fear. On a warm summer evening with its trees in full leaf, its grass thrusting forth in unchecked profusion, and its shrubs at their most riotous, it stood silhouetted against the watchful quietness of the sky and felt the icy touch of premonition.

The crouching figure who moved quickly and furtively along the riverbank paid no heed when birch and oak and

ash came to life to bend and whisper all around him. He was a creature of the forest and knew its whims and wilfulness of old. When a weeping willow dived angrily downwards to sweep the ground then thresh it with violent malice, the man did not even lift his eyes. Alric Longdon was a miller, one of eight in the area, a low, squat, round-shouldered man of forty or more with a compact strength in his hunched frame and a face as big, white, and plain as a sack of his own flour. He was carrying something in his hand and scurried along with a stealth born of long acquaintance with Savernake. Tied to the river for his livelihood, married indissolubly to the swift current of this tributary of the Kennet, he listened to the restless surge and followed water to his destination.

A noise made him halt in his tracks. It was the resounding hiss of bracken being trampled by heavy feet. Longdon froze. Savernake was a royal forest and subject to forest law. King William protected his hunting grounds with a savagery such as the miller had never known under Saxon rule. Longdon was already trespassing. If he was caught by a keeper or a verderer, he would be beaten or fined or both. If the court decided he was poaching, Longdon could be blinded or castrated. His free hand went to his eyes to guard them against the unthinkable, then it travelled down to his groin to cover it against the unbearable. The miller had a young and beautiful wife who satisfied his lust without complaint and who lay beneath his sweating nakedness with gentle obedience. He would not surrender his manhood for a walk in the forest. Better to kill than to be cut down to such humiliation. His hand tightened on the dagger in his belt.

But his alarm was unnecessary. There was a wild flurry of movement in the bracken, then hooves pummelled the earth. Whatever had been approaching him, it was no forest official with a warrant to enforce the law. The animal was even more frightened than he and took flight as soon as it caught his scent. Alric Longdon continued on his way. He then turned off the river, following to its source a rippling stream that fed into it. As he climbed steadily upwards, he saw the water cut deep into the chalk. It vanished briefly below ground and became a gurgling echo. It surfaced once more and twisted back down towards him through its narrowing banks with playful urgency.

Savernake was not continuous forest. It was a vast acreage to the north of the county, a series of straggling woods and coppices, linked by areas of heath and gorse and downland which might themselves be dappled with timber or criss-crossed with hedgerow. Red and fallow deer were the favoured prey of the king and the herds needed trees in which to hide and open spaces in which to forage. Hunters required paths along which they could gallop, glades where they could rest, and fields where they could run down their quarry. Savernake was a great, rich, rambling, and largely uncultivated wilderness that was teeming with animal life to provide royal sport for the royal personage.

Alric Longdon was now in light woodland, tracing the serpentine writhing of the stream and blending happily with the foliage in the half-darkness. He was safe. No keeper would find him here in his secret territory. He knew his way by instinct. The water swirled capriciously in a semicircle, then it took him farther up the hill before

it disappeared below ground again. Longdon stopped, felt the leather pouch he was holding, then knelt beside a withered yew. Blasted with age and split by lightning, it stooped over the stream at the point where it issued forth from its subterranean cavern. The tree was skirted by moss and swathed in so much bindweed that it looked as if its huge, gaping wound had been bandaged to stop the crevice from widening. The miller stroked the yew as if welcoming an old friend.

Another sound disturbed him and caused him to look up. But it was only a bird, startled by his presence and taking to the air through the branches with a vigorous flapping of its wings. Alric Longdon laughed silently. He thought of his mill, his wife, his welcoming bed. He thought of his cunning scheme and his hopes of good fortune. He thought of Savernake and its eternal mysteries. He thought of his most favourite place in the whole forest. His lips were still curled in a smile when the bushes nearby parted abruptly.

Black eyes glared at him, teeth glinted, and a low growl set his hair on end. Longdon tried to scramble up, but he was far too slow. Before the first scream of horror could reach his mouth, he was knocked over backwards and his throat was eaten away in one vicious, all-consuming bite. His head, his shoulders, and his leather bag were submerged in the stream that had led him to his death. Blood gushed out of him and darkened the water, forming a long red slick that was carried along with increasing force through the woodland. As it joined the river and met the main current, it was borne along on the surface like a stain on Nature itself. Alric Longdon lay dead beside a yew tree

in Savernake Forest while a part of his being raced towards the biggest mill in the valley.

His soft-eyed young wife was sitting patiently in her kitchen, awaiting the return of her husband. There was food on the table for him and submission in her heart. The mill was a clamorous homestead. As the massive wooden wheel went on its ear-splitting round over and over again, dipping and rising endlessly through the foaming water, it never occurred to her that the man she had married was helping to turn it with his lifeblood.

Chapter One

They had travelled well over ten miles before the madness seized him. One minute, he was riding at the head of the little cavalcade, talking amiably with his companions and enjoying the unhurried progress across Salisbury Plain; the next, he went completely berserk. Letting out a blood-curdling cry, he dug his heels into the flank of his mount and rode hell for leather up the grassy incline ahead. Mantle streaming behind him and one hand aloft with a sword in its grasp, he charged at an invisible enemy and terrified them into immobility with the fury of his attack. Ralph Delchard was half a mile away before he reined in his horse on the crest of the rise. He gazed at something in the distance and waved his sword in salute. A Norman lord with position and age that should bring dignity was behaving like an impetuous young soldier

in his first battle. As the others trotted slowly in his wake, they could hear his ripe laughter echoing across the plain. Was this drunkenness or sheer lunacy?

Gervase Bret was the first to catch him up. His honest face was crumpled with apprehension. Ralph was a friend, a mentor, almost a father to him. A son does not expect such wild abandon in a revered parent. Perhaps it was the fault of the animal. It had taken its master unawares and bolted. One glance at the grinning Ralph Delchard disposed of this theory. He was one of the supreme horsemen in the service of the Conqueror. Not for him the small, sturdy, compliant English mounts that most of them rode. Certainly not the braying donkey that Canon Hubert sat astride. Ralph was in the saddle of his destrier, a Norman steed with a high Norman temper, a big, fiery warhorse which had been trained for action in the field and which would gallop on command through the mouth of hell itself without losing its stride.

'What ails you, Ralph?' asked Gervase.

'I wanted to feel the blood race in my veins.'

'You frightened us.'

'We needed some exercise,' said Ralph, slapping the neck of his stallion with an affectionate palm. 'And we wanted to see it first.'

'See what?'

'Wait for the others, Gervase.'

'But what did you see?'

'Wait, wait . . .'

Canon Hubert coaxed a final spurt out of the donkey with his chubby legs and joined the two men. Like Gervase, he was some yards short of the summit and his view ahead

was blocked by the ample frame of Ralph Delchard. Righteous indignation turned the prelate's fat cheeks to the colour of plums. He waved an admonitory finger and put severe reproach into his voice.

'Have you run mad?' he demanded.

'Only with joy,' said Ralph.

'You are here to guide and protect me, not to desert me in open country where thieves might lurk.'

'No man would dare to lift a hand against you, Canon Hubert,' said Ralph with amusement. 'Seated upon that fine beast, you look like Christ Himself riding into Jerusalem.'

'That is blasphemy!'

'It is a compliment.'

'Beware of a wicked tongue.'

'I speak but as I find. Besides,' added Ralph, 'you had no need to fear. With one man gone, you still had six left to throw a ring of steel around you.' He indicated the other riders, who had now reached them. 'Seven of you in all, Canon Hubert. That is a good, round, comforting Biblical number.'

The prelate blustered, the donkey brayed, Ralph chuckled. Gervase Bret found smooth words once more to calm the upset. It was not the first time that Ralph Delchard had teased the short, plump, pompous canon, and it fell to the youngest member of the group to reconcile them. A sense of duty was finally restored to the expedition. An uneasy companionship was resumed.

They were eight in number. Ralph Delchard was leader of the commission, a proud, sometimes arrogant, and always strong-willed character with the rough handsomeness of a man of action. The adipose Canon Hubert of Winchester,

a solemn soul with an acute mind, gave the company its spiritual weight, and his emaciated assistant, Brother Simon, a white wraith in a black cowl, lent his own spectral religiosity. Gervase Bret was the real force in the party, a shrewd and brilliant lawyer of little more than five and twenty who had risen to a high position as a Chancery clerk and who had been selected for this assignment by the king himself. Slight of build and of medium height, Gervase had a studious air that belied his capacity to defend himself against physical attack. His short dark hair framed a face that had a boyish appeal behind its keen intelligence. Four men-at-arms accompanied the commissioners, picked by Ralph from his own retinue to provide good humour on the journey as well as to enforce its purpose. Two packhorses were towed in the rear. Ralph Delchard wore mantle, tunic, and cap of a cut and quality which marked his status, but his soldiers were in matching helm and hauberk. All of them were skilled with a sword and two of them proficient with the bows that were slung across their backs. Safety had been ensured on the journey. Any robbers would be deterred by the sight of so much expertise.

Canon Hubert had recovered his composure.

'Have you taken leave of your senses?' he enquired.

Ralph shook his head. 'My senses bid me ride off.'

'But why?'

'He wanted to see something,' explained Gervase.

'See what? See where?'

Ralph Delchard tugged on his reins to pull his horse out of their line of vision. He flung out an arm to gesture at the landscape ahead and drank in its marvel anew.

'Come forward,' he beckoned. 'And behold!'

They nudged their animals the last few yards up the incline so that they were able to survey the prospect below. Then they gaped. Gervase Bret was frankly astonished. Canon Hubert was just as frankly horrified. Brother Simon blanched with apprehension and began to mumble a prayer. The soldiers had seen it before, but they were still impressed and bemused afresh. Even the donkey was cowed into silence.

What they saw was so stirring and remarkable that it shook them to the core. They were in the presence of sheer magic. Salisbury Plain stretched away before them in its crushing enormity, but it was no flat and featureless expanse of land. It rose and fell like the waves of the sea, surging and retreating, billowing and dying, forever changing shape and colour as the clouds scudded across the sky to obscure the sun before allowing it to filter through again and paint its vivid hues upon the earth once more. As a gust of wind set the grass and the scrub in motion, it seemed as if the waves were dancing with crazed delight.

But there in the middle, unmoved and majestic, awesome in its scope and unnerving in its certainty, was an island of defiance. Concentric circles of gigantic stones were enclosed within a much wider circle of chalk rubble which was banked up to a height of six feet or more and fronted by a deep ditch. The earthwork was broken by a broad gap on the north-east side and there were smaller gashes elsewhere. A hundred feet inside this rampart was the first circle of stones, some thirty in total, massive uprights which were topped by an almost continuous line of lintels. A few had been displaced and had crashed to the ground, gouging out a new home for their troublesome bulk. The huge blocks

were carved from natural sandstone and all dressed to shape.

Within this imposing circle was a smaller, tighter bluestone circle, incomplete and largely in ruin. Uprights lay at curious angles. Discarded lintels burrowed into the ground. Some of the rock looked as if it had just been hewn from its source and not yet cut to shape. There was also a horseshoe of even bigger sandstone blocks, inside which a bluestone horseshoe had been erected with uprights that increased in height towards the centre. It was a sight so unexpected in such a setting, a sign of life in a seeming void, a mysterious order in a place of chaos. Time had attacked it viciously, but its primitive power remained. What hit the onlookers most was this sense of hideous permanence.

Canon Hubert could bear to view it no longer.

'Let us ride on,' he insisted.

'But I had to show you Stonehenge,' said Ralph.

'It is the work of the Devil.'

'So is our king,' reminded the other mischievously. 'His father, the duke, was of that name: Robert the Devil. If we serve William, we serve the Devil through him.'

'Take us away from here,' said Hubert querulously. 'It is a place of damnation.'

'No,' said Gervase, still excited, still absorbed, still running an eye to count the stones and trace their patterns. 'Truly, it is a place of worship.'

'Worship!'

'Yes, Canon Hubert. Worship of what and by whom I may not tell. But there is purpose down there on the plain. There is homage. There is sacrifice.'

'To Satan himself!'

The prelate now took refuge in prayer and the donkey shifted restlessly beneath his holy burden. Brother Simon was torn between fear and fascination, joining his master in appealing to heaven while sneaking an occasional glance back at this miracle in stone. The soldiers were intrigued but warily so, as if sensing a hostility in the weird formations below them. When Ralph and Gervase elected to take a closer look at the phenomenon, none of the men was keen to go with them. Ignoring the loud protests of Canon Hubert and the feeble bleating of Brother Simon, the two friends set off at a canter across almost a mile of undulating plain.

Stonehenge was even more daunting at close quarters, but the couple rode right into the heart of it. They noted the pits in the ground at regular intervals and the small white circles on its surface where the chalk had been exposed. But it was the stones themselves which intrigued them. Ralph Delchard and Gervase Bret felt like insects walking through a range of mountains. Solid rock dwarfed them to insignificance. When they had set out from Winchester, they had seen masons swarming over the half-built cathedral and hoisting up their stone with strong ropes. At Salisbury, too, they had witnessed much activity on the castle walls as they were extended and strengthened with Norman thoroughness. Nothing seen then could compare with this. The largest blocks used in cathedral or castle were only a fraction of the size and weight of the colossal uprights.

Gervase Bret still felt it was consecrated ground.

'We are in a temple,' he said simply. 'An ancient temple. But who built it, Ralph? And *why*?'

'That is not my question, Gervase. I ask only – *how*?'

'How?'

'These sarsens are sandstone,' said Ralph, pointing to the uprights. 'They come from the Marlborough Downs some twenty miles north at least. What hands could lift such boulders? What beasts could drag them all the way here?'

'And that bluestone,' observed Gervase. 'It varies in colour. I have seen nothing like it before.'

'They say there are mountains of that hue in Wales. And how far distant is that? It would take a week to bring back a bag of pebbles from that wilderness. To drag just one of these bluestones would take a lifetime.' He turned to look up at the six figures on the distant ridge and picked out the one on the donkey. 'Canon Hubert may be right. The Devil may have been the stonemason here.'

'No,' said his friend. 'I feel a power here, but it is not unfriendly. It carries a blessing.'

'Then let it wish us Godspeed!' Ralph's mood changed abruptly. 'There is no more time to linger. We must collect the others and ride north towards Bedwyn. They expect us.'

Expectation did not put a smile on the face of the town. Rather did it spread doubt, suspicion, and quiet panic. The commissioners had already visited Bedwyn once and subjected it to such a rigorous examination that its citizens felt they were facing the Last Judgement itself. Here, as throughout the whole realm, the investigation which had been decreed by King William probed so remorselessly into what everyone owned, for how long they had owned it, and from whom they had first acquired it, that it took on the

character of the final reckoning. The Conqueror himself might call it a description of all England, but the name which was muttered with cold irony in the shires was the Domesday Book.

Bedwyn was a prosperous community with well over seven hundred inhabitants living in or close to the town. Its verdant meadow was strung along the water-fed valley floor and its crops usually flourished even in periods of drought. Trades thrived and commerce was developing. Situated close to the northern border of the old kingdom of Wessex, it had been sufficiently important in Saxon times to be chosen as the site for a royal mint. Savernake Forest enveloped it on three sides, but that brought advantage as well as setback. Bedwyn was an attractive town in which to live until the dark shadow of the Domesday Book fell across it.

'When will they arrive?'

'This evening, Father Abbot.'

'How long will they stay?'

'Until they have concluded their business.'

'What is its nature?'

'We do not know.'

'Why did they choose Bedwyn?'

'We can but guess, Father Abbot.'

'Where else have they visited?'

'This town is the sole object of their journey.'

Abbot Serlo sighed. He did not like this disturbing news. A man who heard angels sing whenever he knelt to pray did not want the sound of discord in his ears. Advanced in years and destined for sainthood, Abbot Serlo and his life of piety would so soon be recorded in the celestial ledger

and they needed no overzealous clerk to set them down once more in its earthly counterpart. Serlo was a big man of generous proportions with an unforced holiness. He had a kind, round face and a high forehead, but his most arresting feature was a pair of eyes that seemed to start out of their sockets like two eggs about to leave matching ovipositors. Whatever he had seen on the road to his personal Damascus, it had clearly made a deep and lasting impression.

'Prior Baldwin . . .'

'Yes, Father Abbot?'

'I have need of your help.'

'It is always at your disposal.'

'Meet with the commissioners.'

'I will know their purpose as soon as I may.'

'Inform them that I have important duties here in the abbey and not much time left in which to fulfil them. I hope to survive for another year – *Deo volente* – and there is much that will be left unattempted.'

'You have been a beacon to us all, Father Abbot.'

'I think that I have done my duty.'

'It has been a mission, accomplished with Christian love and dedication. Bedwyn Abbey will forever be in your debt. Such service can never be repaid in human coinage. Your reward awaits you in heaven.'

Prior Baldwin bowed gently. A tall, spare, ascetic man, he was ten years younger than Abbot Serlo and several stone lighter. Both of them had been plucked from the Abbey of Caen at the express wish of the Conqueror. The Battle of Hastings had not just replaced a Saxon king with a Duke of Normandy. It had given England a new nobility and a

new church. In 1066, there had been thirty-five independent Benedictine houses in the country, all with Saxon abbots and Saxon monks. William steadily supplanted the higher reaches of the monastic and the secular clergy with Norman prelates. Abbot Serlo was amongst the first to be translated to his new ministry because his predecessor, Abbot Godric, always an impulsive man, had rashly answered King Harold's call to arms and been cut down at Hastings in the first charge.

Serlo was a wise choice for Bedwyn Abbey. His high learning and his administrative skills soon won the respect of his house. He not only rebuilt the abbey church, he kindled a new spirit, of devotion among his obedientiaries. Other foundations were less fortunate in their new abbots. Turold from Fécamp was a combative soldier of God who subjected the monks at Malmesbury, then at Peterborough, to a regime of military harshness. Abbot Thurstan of Glastonbury had been a contemporary of Serlo at Caen, but he brought nothing like the same moral probity to bear on his actions. So cruelly and tyrannically did Thurstan treat his poor monks that he provoked a scandal. The community over which Serlo presided could make no such complaint. Their abbot was universally honoured and loved.

'I have had my victories, modest though they be,' said Abbot Serlo, 'but I know my limitations. My work is God's work. I would be spared interruption.'

'And so you shall, Father Abbot.'

'You know how to be politic, Prior Baldwin. Tell them what has to be told. Show them what has to be shown.'

'I will represent you in this matter.'

'My faith in you is unquestioning.'

'You flatter my poor abilities.'

'I have appreciated them these thirty years,' said Abbot Serlo, leaning forward to turn the full beam of his protruding eyes upon the prior. 'Give them only what they ask. Send them quickly on their way. We want no more taxes to cripple our house and its good offices.'

Prior Baldwin bowed again and turned to leave the abbot's lodging. The audience was over and he had been given the instructions he sought. His shrewd and agile mind had dealt with the first commissioners. A second visitation posed no problems for someone so well versed in his duties and so well informed about every aspect of the monastic income. He remembered a last question and turned once more to face the startling blue eyes, but the words never even formed in his mouth. Before he could even begin to raise the matter of the cellarer's accounts, there was a thunderous knocking on the door and it was flung wide open without invitation. A young novice came hurtling into the room and slid to a halt before his abbot. The boy's anxious face was positively glistening with sweat and his breathing was laboured. Evidently, he had run very far and very fast and his bare ankles were spattered with mud.

'Brother Luke!' scolded the prior.

'I beg . . . apology,' gulped the novice.

'This is most unseemly conduct.'

'It must have a reason,' said Abbot Serlo indulgently. 'Do not rush, my son. Catch your breath and tell me what that reason is when you are able to recall it.'

The novice wrestled with his exhaustion and put enough air into his lungs to gabble out his news.

'Alric Longdon has been found in the forest. They are bringing him back now.'

Serlo was alarmed. 'Is the miller injured?'

'How stands it, Brother Luke?' asked the prior eagerly.

The boy burst into tears at the misery of his tale.

'Alric Longdon is dead. He was killed by a wolf.'

They arrived in Bedwyn as the sky was beginning to darken. The long ride had been tiring, but it offered beauties of nature at every stage. They ascended the pleasant river valley of the Avon until they reached the small town of Pewsey, where they broke for refreshment. Climbing up onto a plateau that was marked by chalk hills which rose to a height of a thousand feet, they proceeded on their way until they came down into another fertile river valley. Villagers along the route were not pleased to see them. The sight of Norman soldiers always produced hatred and resentment. After twenty years of rule, King William and his men were still regarded by native Saxons as usurping foreigners.

There was another reason why the embassy was despised.

'God has punished them hard already,' explained Gervase Bret in tones of sympathy. 'They are afraid that we have come to tax them even more.'

'We have,' said Ralph Delchard crisply.

'Last year, the harvest was ruined. This year, there have been famine and starvation. Wiltshire has not fared as badly as some shires, but there are still many empty bellies here.' Gervase glanced over his shoulder at the portly Canon Hubert and lowered his voice. 'A well-fed Norman prelate with soldiers at his back will not win friends among the hungry.'

'Hubert will not win friends anywhere!' said Ralph with a hearty laugh, then he leant across to clap his friend on the back. 'You talk like a Saxon. Remember your station and how you came to reach it, Gervase. If you are paid to crack the whip, do not feel sorry for the horse. His pain is not yours. Serve the king and earn his money honestly.'

'Why, so I do, Ralph.'

None of the Chancery clerks was more diligent in his work than Gervase Bret, but there were times when he was forcibly reminded of the fact that he was not a true-born Norman. His father had been a Breton mercenary who came to England to fight for King Edward against the Danes. His mother had been a Saxon girl from a village near London. When the future of England was at stake, the mercenary put money before natural inclination and chose to serve in the invading army. He fought well at Hastings but was so badly wounded that he died soon after. Brought up by his mother but cherishing the memory of his father, Gervase thus had complex loyalties and they caused him many pangs of regret. Norman scholars had educated and elevated him, but he still shared a fellow feeling for Saxons under the yoke.

'So this is Bedwyn!' said Ralph as they entered the town and searched for their lodging. 'A goodly place.'

'The Lord be thanked!' said Canon Hubert, sighing. 'We would have been here an hour ago if you had not taken us to that hellish pile of stones.'

'Know your enemy, Canon,' said Ralph jovially. 'If that was the Devil back there on Salisbury Plain, stout Christians should have the courage to stare him in the face.'

'Do not mock the Church,' warned the other.

'Then do not invite mockery.'

They were into the main street now, a short but broad thoroughfare that climbed up the hill towards Savernake Forest. Rows of low, shapeless, half-timbered houses ran down either side of them, with glimpses of more dwellings, some of them mere hovels, in the occasional side street. The cobbles were strewn with filth and the country smells were just as pungent here. Accommodation for the party had been prepared at the hunting lodge that was used by the king and his entourage, but Canon Hubert refused to stay under its roof. He insisted on being taken to the abbey so that his reverend bones could lie on a more suitable and sacred bed. Abbot and monks had already retired for the night, but the Hospitaller was there to receive both Canon Hubert and Brother Simon and to conduct them to their quarters.

Having bestowed their cargo within the enclave, the others were free to leave, but Ralph Delchard first took the opportunity to chat with the porter at the gate. Such men saw everyone who came and went and knew all the gossip of the establishment. The death of the miller was the main item of news and the porter talked freely about it. He described how the man's wife had raised the alarm when he failed to return at nightfall and how a search party had gone out at daybreak to comb the forest. It took hours to find the corpse in its watery grave. A novice from the abbey had first seen it. When he had summoned his fellows, he used his young legs to bring the sad tidings back to the abbot.

Ralph listened to it all with growing curiosity, but Gervase seemed not to be engaged by the story. As soon as the two

of them left the gatehouse, however, the latter showed that he had heard every word and noted a significance that had escaped his colleague.

'Did you catch his name?' asked Gervase.

'Brother Porter?'

'The miller who was savaged by the wolf.'

'Why, yes,' said Ralph. 'It was Alric Longdon.'

'Does that name not sound familiar to you?'

'No.'

'Think again.'

Ralph bridled slightly. 'I do not consort with millers.'

'We should both have consorted with his one.'

'What say you?'

'Alric Longdon is the man who has drawn us to Bedwyn. He wrote letters to Winchester and made protest against the earlier survey. This miller was a testy lawyer with claims that will cause a flutter in both abbey and town.'

'Longdon was a principal witness?'

'Witness and informer. His death is very convenient.'

Ralph considered the matter, then reached a decision.

'Even dead men can talk if you know how to listen,' he said. 'We will converse with this miller tomorrow.'