

Father fidgeted on his mattress and glanced at the bedroom door. 'Don't be ridiculous, Tomas,' he said, glaring at his son. 'Even if they bother with a post-mortem, last thing on their minds will be murder.' He smoothed the striped quilt cover, underlining his decision.

Tom, standing with his back to the window, stared down at Father's best Persian rug.

'For God's sake, boy.' The old man fluffed at the room's stale air. 'It's not like I'm asking you to overdose me on your mother's sleeping tablets.' He lowered his voice. 'No one will suspect.' And leaned forward. The clock ticked. 'Not even your mother.'

The thought of killing Father had, of course, crossed Tom's mind over the years. But being confronted with the real thing was not what he'd envisaged. He ran a finger over his jeans pocket, feeling for the square of his emergency antacid tablet. 'Thing is, Father, I—'

Father slammed his fist onto the bedside table, making the lamp wobble. A whimper escaped Tom's lips. He was ten years old again, about to get the slipper.

The old man sighed, patting the air as though calming someone else. 'Look, Doc Patten said I've weeks 'til the end.' He drew the quilt higher up his chest. 'And I refuse to drown in my own juices.' Grunting with effort, he leaned across to the bedside table's drawer and retrieved a long, thin box. 'Can't have them finding bits of pillow fluff in my mouth.'

Tom imagined tearing the stubborn clingfilm. Holding a pillow over... *Oh, God.*

Father breathed onto his spectacles and wiped. 'It'll make a man of you,' he said. 'Anyhow, the state my heart's in, one decent dose of stress is all it'll take.'

Tom rubbed at his sweaty palm, fumbling for words. Once Father's mind was set (be it boarding school, extra Latin on Saturdays, or that boys must play rugger), that was that.

Beneath his wildly hairy brows, Father's eyes narrowed. 'I deserve to choose my own end.' He wagged the clingfilm box at Tom. 'For once in your life, don't mess this up for me.'

'I, Father, it's just that—'

The old man folded his arms. 'Are you, Tomas? Are you going to mess it up?'