BEIV. Do I have to do it now?

Beat.

COLM. Donal says I don't remember what he was like. That he was – harder or darker than I remember him.

BEIV. We're all selective about our dead.

COLM. But was he ever… like did he ever do anything to you that I didn't know about?

BEIV. Like what?

COLM. I don't know. Donal seemed to think he was violent.

BEIV. No.

COLM. He was violent with me.

BEIV. That time you came down here? He was beside himself.

COLM. But was he ever violent with you? You had some almighty rows. He never hit you or hurt you or –

BEIV. Did anything to give me a motive to kill him? No. He did not.

Beat.

He was my very best friend.

COLM. But is there anything I don't know?

BEIV. About Michael? I'm sure there's lots.

COLM. But is there anything I *should* know? I'm getting on a plane in a few days, I might not be back till –

BEIV. I'm dead? You wish.

COLM. I don't know is the point. I don't know when I'll be back. Cos I'll go back to my life there with Bonnie – I hope – and work and that will consume me and this will recede and…

He takes a breath.

You don't know what's it's like when you've lived somewhere else for a long time. The place you came from just stays as it was in your head. Exactly as it was when you left. And you

come back years later thinking it'll all be the same. I mean you know it won't, rationally, but you also think it will. People will be the same, food will be the same, the same shops will be in the same places and when they're not – it's kind of a shock… Sometimes people have died. Sometimes shops have changed or been knocked down and it's stupid cos you were the one who left in the first place, but suddenly you feel – unmoored. Like you don't know who you are any more. Like everyone you love has just gone and moved house and no one has told you. It's like a – a grief. Or something – I fucking dread that feeling… So if there's something that might help me feel – not so left behind, next time, I'd be grateful if you told me. If there's something about Dad I don't know – and I think there is, I really think there is, Beiv… I'd like you to tell me. Now.

BEIV *looks at him for a long time.*

BEIV. He thought he killed someone.

COLM….Dad?

BEIV *nods.*

BEIV. When he was a child.

COLM. He thought – who did he think he killed?

BEIV. Nuala O'Neill's little boy.

COLM (*shocked*). What?

BEIV. I don't remember his name. Isn't that strange?

COLM….how?

BEIV *shrugs.*

BEIV. They were out in some boats one day fishing and the little boy was drowned.

COLM. And Dad thought – he did it?

BEIV. Michael was around twelve I think. The O'Neill boy was a year or so younger. He was a spoiled kid. Only child. Michael and his friends didn't like him. They didn't like the way he tagged on or told tales or squealed or whatever. You know, kids. But they were always made to play with

him by the parents so… one day they were out in a boat and they were out quite far and they – I don't know for a joke or something they must've pushed him into the water. Or they threw something into the water and dared him to jump in and get it, which he did. And when he tried to swim back and get onto the boat, they got this idea to keep pushing him back in. There were five or six of them, one of him, so he was outnumbered. But he kept trying to get back into the boat and the lads kept pushing him back into the water and some of them were pushing his head down. Michael was one of them. He said he distinctly remembered the black of the boy's hair under his hand. And his pale face, coming up and coughing, before someone'd push him back under again. And even when it was clear he was getting tired and they should stop… they didn't want to stop. They were having so much fun, pushing him back and holding him down for longer and longer stretches until eventually… he went limp.

Beat.

Course they pulled him into the boat straight away, tried to give him mouth-to-mouth but he was white as a sheet. They got him back to land and ran for a doctor and Nuala O'Neill was on the beach howling. And the boys all said it was an accident, told anyone who'd listen that he'd swallowed too much water. And the police came and there was a post mortem and the person who did it said – it was to do with his heart. He had a defect or something and it gave out. But Michael and his friends knew the truth. Some of the parents knew it too but they told their kids to shut up, that they'd only get themselves in trouble. There was no appetite locally for punishment. Most of them convinced themselves it *was* his heart. Maybe it was… but Michael didn't think so.

END

A silence.

COLM. Is that true?

BEIV. What do you mean?

COLM. Like – you're not making that up?

BEIV. Of course I'm not making it up.

COLM. So why have you never told me that before?

BEIV. Michael asked me not to.

COLM. But he told you?

BEIV. Yes.

COLM. When?

BEIV. Loads of times.

COLM. But when first?

BEIV. I don't know. When we were going out?

COLM. Before you were married?

BEIV. Yes.

COLM. …And you didn't think he was a fucking disgrace?

BEIV. I didn't think he did what he thought he did. And neither did he back then – he thought it was an accident, like the rest of them. It was only much much later, when you were a – teenager in fact, that it started getting to him.

COLM. When I was a teenager? What are you –

BEIV. The image of the boy's black hair under his hand. And the thrill.

COLM. The thrill?

BEIV. That's what he said… And watching you grow up… he couldn't stop thinking about it. It would flash into his head in the street, or when he was in the middle of talking to someone, it would catch him in his chest and he couldn't breathe…

COLM. Like a panic attack?

BEIV. Yes.

COLM. He started having panic attacks?

BEIV. Went on for years.

COLM. And did he see someone about it?

BEIV. Like who?