QUIET

Janice, a young woman in a white t-shirt and jeans rocks a cradle that glows red. Captain, an old man in overalls, smokes a cigar in a rocking chair. Rudd, a young man, and Rusty, his younger brother, both wearing basketball shorts and jerseys, root through a pile of junk.

CAPTAIN
I hear he’s back.

JANICE
Nah.

CAPTAIN
I heard it on the radio.

JANICE
Naah.

CAPTAIN
Been a long time.

JANICE
Been quiet.

CAPTAIN
Uhuh.

JANICE
Been nice. Have time to be with my devil baby.

CAPTAIN
That you have.

JANICE
Watch my soaps.

CAPTAIN
Uhuh.

JANICE
In their soap trays.

CAPTAIN
I got invisible braces.
JANICE
Me too.

CAPTAIN
Aren’t you going to tell me I’m too old for ‘em?

JANICE
No.

CAPTAIN
Sweet of you.

JANICE
Captain?

CAPTAIN
Uhuh?

JANICE
Why do they call you Captain?

CAPTAIN
Because I was the captain of a ship.

JANICE
What was it called?

CAPTAIN
The Spoon.

JANICE
What kind was it?

CAPTAIN
Crab ship.

JANICE
I saw that, on tv. It’s dangerous, right? There’s a whole show about how it’s dangerous that just terrifies me.

CAPTAIN
Very dangerous. My ship blew up. Exploded.

JANICE
How?
CAPTAIN
Caught too many crabs. Blew up just like on tv. Now we’re done talking about it. Makes me too emotional.

RUDD
Copper wire!

RUSTY
Nope.

RUDD
Well then what’s –

RUSTY
I don’t know. Not copper wire though. It would have greened.

RUDD
No. Things sit at the bottom of the dump and they get no oxygen so they don’t green.

RUSTY
Is that what does it?

RUDD
And they don’t call it green it’s called rust, they rust, Rusty.

RUSTY
Oxygen and rust. Huh. See I thought rust was only on silver metals, not gold ones.

RUDD
It’s copper.

RUSTY
Gold color ones. I thought rust was brown.

RUDD
You know if my name were Rusty I would double-check my rust facts.

RUSTY
Would you? I never even thought about doing that. Is a Rudd anything?

RUDD
Ruddy is a word. Ruddy cheeks. Flushed.

RUSTY
Flushed.
RUDD
Rosy.

RUSTY
Rosy?

RUDD
Red cheeks. Healthy looking. Like you.

RUSTY
Have you seen your devil baby yet?

RUDD
No.

CAPTAIN
People say they’re at the dump. He wants to do the trading again.

JANICE
Rusty’s with him?

CAPTAIN
Of course.

JANICE
After all he’s done to him?

CAPTAIN
He’s his brother.

JANICE
So?

CAPTAIN
So Rusty’s his younger brother. You wouldn’t understand you damned only child. All the only children are damned. I was an only child. Damned my whole life. You’re an only child. You’ve got a devil baby.

JANICE
Somebody’s crabby.

CAPTAIN
Huh.

JANICE
Leave the crabs on your crab boat, captain crabby.
CAPTAIN
Oh, crabby. Huh. Listen. I grew up in this house that I’m on the porch of now. This was a proper neighborhood then. If you cursed in public someone would just reach out and slap you. If you needed sugar people gave it to you and it was polite to eat a spoonful right in front of em, to show them you trusted it wasn’t poisoned. And everyone rode donkeys. Now it’s all only children and strip malls with strip joints in em. Used to be it was all brothers. Every family had at least one pair of brothers –

JANICE
You didn’t.

CAPTAIN
I was a sad exception. It goes without saying that you have those. Sad exceptions.

*Rudd holds up a disgusting old teddy bar.*

RUDD
This could work.

*The devil baby starts crying. Janice goes to comfort it.*

RUSTY
You think?

RUDD
Uuh.

CAPTAIN
Brothers everywhere, packs of them. They’d walk in lines by age, each younger brother behind his older staring at them. They all ignored their fathers, even the ones who had fine fathers and humored their mothers. They were like their own little brother families except sooner or later the older ones, they each got pulled away along some curve, just slipped away along the curve of a car, or a ball or a girl, or the earth. One day all the younger brothers just stood in the street, blinking. All their older were gone.

RUSTY
How did you do it before?

RUDD
What?

RUSTY
Something out of nothing. The trades.
RUDD
I bought a can of Smuckers jelly. I scraped the label off, sanded it down a bit to make it look old. And then I said our dead grandma made it, that it was the greatest grape jelly in the world and that it was a family recipe all the way from way back in the day in Finland. Finnish grape jelly. Last jar of it. The first guy gave me a cellphone.

JANICE
Jam for a cellphone?

RUDD
Uhuh. Jam for a cellphone. A cellphone for a foreman grill. A foreman grill for a bit of light in the evening. A bit of light in the evening for a letterman jacket. A letterman jacket for the antidote. The antidote for the poison. The poison for um. Us. Um when I – When I – We call it an emotion when it’s – But I don’t call it that – I call it a sound and I just say oh I’m hearing that sound again. And I just kept trading and trading because maybe if I went fast enough I could get ahead of the objects and – Janice...

JANICE
Yes.

RUDD
It’s just so funny. I love you and Rusty more than I love anything. But it just isn’t that much or – I can do this thing where I stop my blood flowing, if I do my breathing right. And I get this icy feeling.

JANICE
What should we name the baby?

RUDD
I like calling it the devil baby.

JANICE
Because you hate it?

RUDD
I love it just as much as I love you. Bus leaves soon.

JANICE
I’ll come with you.

RUDD
No, better if you don’t. You stay here with the devil baby. I wouldn’t want to bring a devil baby to Denver. That’d be starting off on the wrong foot. Better if you don’t.
JANICE
Ok.

RUSTY
Janice wasn’t upset?

RUDD
The nature of our relationship was such that. I could tell her something was going to be a certain way. And she’d say ‘ok’, and look down.

RUSTY
You didn’t want her with you?

RUDD
No.

RUSTY
I wouldn’t have wanted her either.

RUDD
I’m going to say this was your bear.

RUSTY
Ok.

RUDD
And that you’re dead.

RUSTY
Ok. Why would that make someone want it? They’re going to think it has ghosts.

Pause. Rudd throws the bear away.

CAPTAIN
Some people, tell a lot of lies. They think to themselves ‘quid pro quo’ because they feel they’ve been deceived, that someone was talking to them right before they were born and their birth interrupted the conversation. That their life interrupted the conversation. Betrayed it, something.

RUSTY
Why didn’t you take me with you? I would have liked to see Denver.

RUDD
Denver’s not for you. Denver’s not for anybody. It’s just like here. You hear water as you approach the city but then you get there and it’s all dried up creek beds and the sound was just people’s soothing ocean noise sleep machines.
CAPTAIN
You take anything anyone does. You take it up and put it on the worktable of your mind, you sweep away the shit and jumble and focus on that one thing a person did, reduce it to bits and you'll find, right in the center of it, like a fortune or a pit, the desire to finish that conversation.

RUSTY
I got in a fight yesterday.

RUDD
No shit.

RUSTY
With Captain.

RUDD
How come?

RUSTY
He was telling lies. He said you hadn't gotten anything on Craigslist. That you made it up.

RUDD
Well look at you, fighting old men.

RUSTY
I wouldn't have cared. If there was no house. You could get one if you wanted, somehow. But I would've come anyway.

RUDD
You wouldn't have been mad?

RUSTY
Yeah. But.

CAPTAIN
I heard a story on the news about a man who killed his mother for telling him to clean out the garage. His brother stuck by him and has him read bed-time stories to his niece over the phone from prison.

RUSTY
I grew while you were away.

RUDD
Are those my shoes?
RUSTY
Yeah. You were away.

CAPTAIN
I also heard a story about a boy who traded an old cellphone on craigslist 27 times until he got a car. A 15 year old boy.

RUDD
I'm leaving town, Captain. Goin to Denver.

CAPTAIN
Uhuh.

RUDD
I traded some old smuckers on craigslist. Got myself a car and the deed to a house out there. I'm starting over.

CAPTAIN
Uhuh.

RUDD
So.

CAPTAIN
So.

RUDD
Look after Rusty.

CAPTAIN
You know why they call me Captain, Rudd?

RUDD
Yeah, you were the captain of your varsity football team. You broke a boys spine making a touchdown.

CAPTAIN
My real name is Adam Lambert. Not too many years ago a boy named Adam Lambert got famous for singing and wearing eye shadow. Everyone I knew made fun of me. Whenever I met someone I had to have a long conversation. The way people said my name changed. The way my wife said my name changed. She stopped looking me in the eye. This devil baby had been born to steal my name. All these devil babies were telling my that my name wasn’t my name. That it belonged to some body of music. I divorced the bitch, rented a house in the next town. Started saying, ‘they call me Captain!’. The world’s not big enough for two of anything.
RUDD
Uhuh.

CAPTAIN
Two boys getting cars through craigslist.

RUDD
Uhuh. Listen. Adam. Lambert. I’m going. I’m not going to watch Rusty rotate through every job in every Wendy's in town. I’m not going to baptize a devil baby with Janice. Between the three of them, between Rusty and Janice and the devil baby they have six enormous eyes between them. Enormous. The biggest eyes in the world. You know my devil baby has black irises? Like tarpits. Huge. I feel like I’m moving through jelly when the watch me, it just swamps out and –

RUSTY
Are you back for good?

RUDD
No.

RUSTY
Going back to Denver?

RUDD
Yeah.

RUSTY
I bet it’s nicer than you say.

RUDD
It is. There’s lots of trees and mountains.

JANICE
Sounds nice.

RUDD
It’s fine.

JANICE
Can we name the baby?

RUDD
You can’t just keep calling it the devil baby?
JANICE
No.

RUDD
You don’t find it just a little bit cute?

JANICE
No. It was cute while you were here. For a bit. Now it just makes me feel like, well I’ve been starting to think maybe it is a devil baby. I’d like to name it. I can’t call a thing something this long and not have it be true. I think it’s true. I think we had a devil baby.

_The crib glows red again. Tar is dripping out of the bottom. Soothing ocean noises._

RUDD
I won’t do it.

JANICE
I can’t do it by myself.

RUDD
Sure you can. Close your eyes.

_Janice closes her eyes._

RUDD
Breath deep. Your mind is a forest. The forest burns down. The ash blows away. It’s infinite white nothing. You don’t know anything, yet. You haven’t ever had a conversation. What’s your baby’s name.

_Janice is silent. Rudd exits. Janice opens her eyes and looks at the baby._

THE END.