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Damage

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CHRISTOPHER MERKNER

Our son has been saying *damage* a lot. He is two. He really throws himself behind the first syllable, and lets the second sort of grumble away at the back of his mouth.

Of course the word he is trying to say is *damnit*. I have been saying *damnit* without restraint recently. Recently, I broke a shoelace, dropped milk, lost my glasses and cheated on my life with a woman who talks to me at the grocery store.

We're in the car. The streets are icy. I tell my wife that I need to get to work early in the coming days.

She says, "Seriously?"

My son says, "Damage."

We turn around and tell our son not to say that word. He's all bound up in his car seat. He's all eyes. He seems blameless. He looks at us. "What word it is," he asks.

We say, "You know what word."

He says, "Damage."

I say, "Right. Don't say that."

"What word it is?"

My wife explains that *damage* is not a nice word. We don't say words that are not nice, she tells him. My wife looks at me. This idea troubles our son into silence. He looks out the window. My wife is still looking at me. I turn to look at her. I say *what* but I know exactly what she's saying.

87