Snap

When I snap Bryce’s favorite record, I accidentally slice my hand open on one of the jagged pieces. The gash stretches across my left hand from the base of my ring finger to my thumb. It is thin, but deep, and when it heals, it will leave a scar like a spider web. I was so lost in the photograph that I didn’t even notice the record under my boot until it cracked, but now I can’t forget it.

“Can you bring up a paper towel or something?” I shout down the attic stairs. I press my thumb as hard as I can to the cut, hoping the pressure will stop the bleeding, or at the very least relieve some of the pain. Instead it just starts bleeding harder, a thin ruby stream trickling down my wrist like paint. There’s a rustle and a bang downstairs and I swear Lena’s taking her time just to make me miserable. I stomp on the wooden floor and a cloud of dust coats my pant leg. The stairs sigh and suddenly Lena’s here too. Her black eyebrows are furrowed into a dark v, like some child’s crude depiction of a bird.

“Jesus, Mikey,” she says and hands the roll of paper towels out to me. It hangs there for a second before I take it. For some reason, I thought she was going to help me wrap it, but she’s not even looking at me. She’s just staring at the blood-soaked pile that used to be Nirvana’s Nevermind. As I grab the roll I see the ring on her finger, somehow shining despite the low light of the attic, and I wish I’d never come.

The box she sits on is labeled “Bryce—Music” in faded red sharpie, the c and e blending together like they always did when he tried to sign an autograph. Twisting her ring in little circles, Lena asks, “Did you find anything you wanted before you started breaking things?” She’s looking at me with those eyes, as sharp and golden as a cat’s, and I hand her the photo.
Mike’s Garage, ’92, the back says, again in those smeared red letters. On the other side it’s the two of us. His plaid flannel is drooping off his shoulder and my boxers are peeking out above my jeans, a deliberate attempt to look as careless as our grunge idols. Bryce’s arm is draped around my neck, but his green eyes never leave the camera. I’m looking at that little freckle on his upper jawbone, always hidden by the greasy blond hair he tucks behind his ear. The sharpie ink has bled through to the other side of the photo, pooling into a big red mark in the middle of my shirt.

There are other things in the picture too, things I can’t see as well. My second-hand bass, slung over my shoulders, which is just out of frame. The invisible fingerprints Bryce doesn’t realize he’s leaving on my neck, and the slow breaths I take to keep the blood from rushing to my face.

“Look at that,” Lena smiles. Her fingers graze the photo so lightly, like he might disappear if she presses on the film too hard. “I took this, remember?”

And suddenly Lena’s there too. She’s in Bryce’s unwavering focus, in the whisper of a dimple crinkling his cheek. That hidden freckle isn’t a secret Bryce and I share, because Lena’s seen it too. The room feels like it’s filling up with water and suddenly I can’t breathe.

“You always make everything about yourself,” I say. Or maybe I scream. I can’t hear anything but the rush of waves flowing through my ears. There’s a ringing sound whirling around me and Lena’s breaths are jagged. She takes a step toward me and yelps.

She’s stepped on a piece of the record. A red mark blossoms at the toe of her sock as she curses and sits back down on the box. I hand the paper towels back to her, keeping one to scoop the broken pieces into the plastic trash bag in the corner. I let her squeeze my hand as she applies
pressure to her foot. Her nails dig crescent moons into my skin and her ring bites my knuckles, but I only open my mouth to apologize.

The sky is violet through the attic window when I leave. I take home a tear streaked face, an open wound and a bloody photograph. Lena’s left with about the same.