God, the blotter, she thought

Anjela knew better than to give the full weight of her head to the bus's plexiglass window; the more weight you give it, the more you feel the bumps in the road. But sometimes, maybe because she was tired, maybe because she was distracted, she couldn't help it. Her mom and her teachers - everyone it seemed - had been criticizing her for being "unfocused" and "out of touch". "You're so smart, but you don't use your gifts" was the refrain. The 226 was stuck in traffic and, like most days, Anjela stared out of its window to see if anything had been added to the memorial, which seemed to change as naturally as the clouds above it.

The memorial's foundation was a tree on the northwest end of Ukrainian Triangle. That was the name that Google Maps used for it. There was probably a formal name for that type of triangular structure, a paved area that sits between three converging streets; seemed like the kind of thing Turk would've known. Ukrainian was a misnomer. Anjela had lived in the neighborhood her whole life and didn't know any Ukrainians. Names were too permanent. They really didn't allow for change, too static to capture life's movement. She was pretty sure that she would legally change hers within the next few years.

Every time Anjela observed the memorial from the bus, she saw it from the same angles. Her eyes scanned from the top of the scene to the bottom, each time storing the visual like a file. Sometimes, when she fell asleep in class, one of these 'files' would show statically, as a still memory, rather than an animated dream. Over the years, Anjela had spent time loitering around Ukrainian Triangle, but riding past it on the bus was strictly visual. In every other way, she sensed the inside of the bus. The 226 always smelled stale.

The city probably used a few different buses to service the route, but they all smelled like a thrift store. Smelling its staleness everyday for three years of high school, though, had reduced the odor. It made the staleness itself stale. Occasionally someone would be shouting about something, or be playing music too loudly on their phone, but most human sounds blended into the bus's plastic hum. Anjela preferred white noise to anything else, at least during her commute. It let her escape.

The tallest structure around Ukrainian Triangle was a public housing unit, probably thirty stories. From Anjela's perspective, it was the memorial's backdrop. It was at least twice as tall as every other building in the neighborhood, rectangular, and wide but not deep, the shape of stacked Lego blocks. The building was the color of her khakis. That was where Turk had lived, and where his family still lived. Its broad side was full of windows, gridded from roof to pavement. As with all public housing, the building's designer had maximized its potential occupancy. Each window was evident but invisible, sunken into the building's cheap framing like eyes into deep sockets. Viewed at an angle, the building's contents were only implied, as a prison cell's are. Until you can look straight at it, you infer the prisoner, as Anjela had learned visiting her father. And equally with the building, you could infer small, hardly livable units. Anjela had been to Turk's apartment often, and it was indeed hardly livable, given his mom and four siblings.

If names adapted to life, Ukrainian Triangle would have made sense as Pigeon Shit Triangle. Pigeons were everywhere, and Anjela watched a few descend from Turk's building. She followed them downward, until the tops of other buildings came into view. A check cashing store. The Pavluk Theater, which had a fresh sign out front but which no one

ever went into. A non-chain shoe store that occupied the space of a now-dead bank. A now-dead State Farm; she actually couldn't remember it being an active State Farm, but its logo removal had left a silhouette of clean glass against an otherwise filthy, unused storefront.

Apparently Turk's death was an accident. It actually wasn't that big of a surprise - Anjela had seen classmates go - but it was somehow still shocking, still surreal. And it still hurt. She figured it hurt so much because it was accidental. *All* things, positive or negative, seemed emphasized as accidents. Intentional things were human, but accidents, pointless things, could be something larger and non-human, something that no one could control or anticipate.

The bus had moved only slightly and was caught at a streetlight adjacent to the triangle, so Anjela had a clean look at the full scene.

At the triangle's center was a dry, massive stone fountain. It had always been encrusted in pigeon shit. City pigeons were mangled - casually missing legs and eyes, and many with disfigured wings - but she was impressed by how they still peacocked around shamelessly. Sometimes Anjela wished for that ignorant confidence, like some of her friends had, but she figured her self-consciousness was a 'greatest strength, greatest weakness'-type of trait. It helped and hurt her at once, and she was fine with that.

The bus inched forward.

It was autumn, and little dry and brown leaves swirled around the triangle. It was actually Turk who taught her that the trees on the triangle were called Eastern Redbuds. He was the smartest dumb person she knew, and when people lectured her on wasted

potential, all she could think of was Turk. Today it seemed like the grounded leaves had formed a path from the fountain to his memorial.

The memorial was homemade. This was what people did in the city. Anjela thought of the old bikes, spray-painted white, that marked the site of a cyclist's death. To Anjela, they looked angelic. That if angels were objects, here they were, chained to stop signs and dressed in the sentiments of those left behind. She liked that strangers would add things - and never distastefully - to the city's homemade memorials. She liked the show of solidarity. It was sort of weird, kind, and beautiful at once. And the lack of vandalization, too, suggested a kind of humanity and respect. She guessed it was respect for the dead, though nothing else in the city seemed to be sacred. Turk was on foot, standing still, when he was shot, so there wasn't one of these angelic white bikes, but Turk's family had built his memorial at the base of one of the triangle's redbuds. The top half of the tree looked like all the others, with leafless branches reaching out like veins, then ending abruptly in mid-air. The memorial began about two feet from the top of the trunk. Two scarves, one purple and one baby blue, wrapped around and knotted like bow ties. Another six inches down, the top of what looked to be a walking stick, rested on the tree's trunk. Hard to tell if it was part of the memorial or not. Partly slid onto the top of the walking stick was a single, robin's egg blue, kid-sized winter glove, the cheap kind that you'd get at a CVS. Its fingers hung limp, like a deflated balloon. It wasn't part of the memorial, Anjela didn't think. Another foot or so down began chemical-green spray-paint, which covered the bottom three feet of the trunk. It was just as bright as something the city would spray on a tree, but no other trees on the triangle were painted. Anjela liked to think that every detail was dedicated to Turk by

people who loved him. Maybe one of his brothers. Like the rest of the trees in the triangle, Turk's tree was surrounded by a short metal guard rail. The triangle's floor was laid brick, but inside of the guard rail, around the tree, was a layer of small silver rocks and dirt-colored rubble.

The heart of the memorial, the intentional contributions, were modest. No one in the neighborhood had much money. To Anjela, the naivete of the offerings was charming, as if mourning disarmed people. People just added to the memorial whatever was meaningful to them, the purest gifts, without anxiety of perception. As if, briefly, they'd forgotten their own genius and talents. If anything could eternalize Turk, this was it: people, for a moment, not fearing one another.

Three dried out wildflower-looking plants sat next to the tree in cheap plastic pots, barcode stickers still visible. The walking stick split Anjela's view of the offerings in half. On the left, an empty Hennessy bottle, cap loose, with a small, neon orange price sticker on it. Anjela had to squint to make out the wooden cross tucked behind the base of the walking stick. To the right were two of the dead, potted plants, and an empty bottle of Remy Martin, now playing vase for two flower stalks, each with petals as blue as the water in pictures of Greece.

But suddenly she noticed something new, something she was sure hadn't been there yesterday. A votive candle. She noticed it because her mom kept at least half a dozen votives on their fireplace mantle, always. The candle was branded with two stickers, a big one of Jesus, doing something virtuous, and another small, bright-orange price sticker, like the one on the Hennessy bottle, partly covering Jesus's face.

The 226 rocked and made its right turn but still ran adjacent to the triangle. Anjela's perspective shifted about 120 degrees. She continued to stare, now at an area familiar to her: the actual spot where Turk was shot, only a few feet behind the memorial. Two days ago, she'd gotten off the bus to walk the area. There were still faint, burgundy bloodstains on the brick, like carelessly splattered paint, as if a painter, with a furious brushstroke, had accidentally speckled dark red on the bottom corner of the canvas. Specks that a painter might later claim were intentional but clearly weren't. These blood specks disturbed Anjela. They were real chaos, a token of helplessness. She remembered her art teacher saying something about deliberate mistakes. She looked at her phone, and with only her right thumb, Googled *deliberate mistakes in art*. After a bit of tapping and thumb-dragging and reading, she saw a name she remembered: Victor Hugo. A writer and an amateur blotter. Someone online said that his mistakes made his art.

Anjela put her phone down. She thought of her parents and their religion. Her family dealt with every hard thing, all of life's sadness, with a single credo: "It's all part of God's plan." The first and only time she heard them doubt God was when her baby brother, only weeks after birth, needed open-heart surgery. A congenital heart defect. But all it took was his successful recovery to restore their faith. When she'd told Turk about it, he said confidently, "God's great when he's not stupid." Anjela stared at the bricks that she knew were still blotted with Turk's blood. She thought of her family's faith and of their belief in God as The Creator. The ultimate painter, she thought. He painted this world and would probably claim those specks of Turk's blood as intentional. But Turk's death was a mistake. Anjela had never been more certain of anything. She felt foolish anytime she tried to take

meaning from Turk's blotted stain. She told herself that none of it was to be interpreted. That no matter how much she intellectualized it, there was no secret sign, no secret inscription. Turk's blood was as random and beautiful as a pen dropped on paper, leaving its mark.

The bus accelerated, Anjela glimpsed the votive once more, and Turk's memorial disappeared.

God, the blotter, she thought, then let her head fall, ever so softly, on the bus's window.