

# Jade's Journal

## A Partial Excerpt

(purely fictional, by Annie Pearson  
for readers of [Chaos House](#))

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Page 1 – February 15, 1975

I pondered while I was awake all last night about how to stop thinking I've lost you, Sasha. I decided that we're only on hiatus. Is there a Chinese word that's more poetic?

This is the first page of my brand-new journal, where I'll write down what I'm thinking instead of talking to you in my head, though you know I'm shit at writing. No one but you can even read my writing, which looks like a chicken learned block printing in the second grade.

This notion came to me while I was riding back to Boston on the Chinatown bus that runs from NYC. While I was in New York, I ran into your sister Claudia. No, wait, she's not your sister, just an in-law. I'd been doing careful math—well, arithmetic, as you keep correcting me. I'd been simply adding one week to another until it'll be time to fly away on that Fulbright. I've been so sure you'd join me then.

Damn, I could scarcely keep a smile on my face while Claudia ground my head to a pulp with her very high, very sharply pointed high heels. I hadn't fully understood until then. Your actual sister—Wendy, right?—isn't coming back for her kids. I didn't know your mother had been in the hospital half the time since Christmas. And the nanny that Wendy promised can't be found? Claudia was shocked when I asked if she was taking over the care of the twins. You'd think I'd asked if she planned to adopt Alaskan wolves as house pets.

I nearly ground my teeth to powder on the bus ride back to the frozen meat locker that is Boston in the winter. This boy was not made for Boston's kind of cold, where they pile the

shoveled snow into the parks and you have to step over knee-high ridges to reach a sidewalk.

After the bus ride, I didn't make it back to the cockroach palace where I'm staying before some guy stepped into the path of my towering rage. I'd learned soon after I first arrived here that the term for these dudes is Masshole. And it wasn't even me that the dude insulted. I was just passing by and heard, "Candy-ass faggot," which compelled me to bring righteousness to that street in Jamaica Plains.

I broke my big two plus two fingers on my left hand and ended up with what's probably a permanent bite mark on my right bicep. Then I spent the night in a general holding tank for drunk and disorderly. I wasn't drunk, only cold, teed off, and primed to be the stupid farmhand that your mother called me.

Only I come from wildcat logger stock, not farmers.

Christ on a biscuit but I need to talk to you. Like I need oxygen and water.

However, Claudia made it clear: me bitching from my side of the world is the last thing you need, since every adult in your family has called dibs on you being the one to save their sorry asses.

I did listen to Wendy at Christmas. Yeah, I can't imagine what hell her life has been. I could see she was breaking down. And I listened to you rationalize about what must be done, that it's you who must do the golden joinery, the kintsugi, to mend all the pieces with gold.

But, Sasha, I thought you'd be done in time to travel with me, that we'd depart on this Fulbright adventure together. Though Claudia says that even if you were free, you no longer have your trust fund to pay for travel, that you're struggling to

pay your mother's mortgage and take care of the twins' needs. How did that happen?

Okay, tonight I redid the math, uh, the arithmetic. Let's say Wendy doesn't come back, and that your mom doesn't get better. It's damn certain that Claudia won't help. So worst case...

I think we're already there. Your Heavenly Immortals are fucking bastards and all they choose to allow you is worst case. By my careful calculations (I wrote it all down to be sure I got it right), since it's February 1975, then in 113 months the twins graduate high school. You'll be free to travel then, right?

So we'll just pick up from there. Do you agree?

After that arithmetic exercise, I looked at my own family history. My great-grandfather came to Iowa from Norway as an indentured worker. It took him ten years to work off his passage and save enough to bring his brother over. And then they homesteaded together on a half-frozen patch in northern Minnesota, finally carving out their future.

For ten years my progenitor wrote his brother about busting his ass on a total MF's Iowa farm. My mother had those letters, folded up in a metal recipe box. None of us could read Norwegian, but my mother treated them as divinely-revealed scripture. The lesson always began, "He was only fourteen when he came over the Atlantic and traveled alone by train to servitude with a heartless task master."

It's how I understood what brothers did for each other, though I didn't have a brother of my own or anything remotely like it until I met you. Well, dammit, I'm twenty-four, and I'm not committed to ten years under a cruel taskmaster. I'm my own master, overseer, and owner, and it's only 113 months until you're free to join me.

Therefore, I will keep doing as I have: get up every day and do what must be done. Smile and do the work. Eat each day like bitter melon.

I'm committed to more than just doing the work, but to do the effing best work I can.

To help me, I've added this new notebook to the pile I carry with me.

There's my lab journal, with formulas for glazes and firing temperatures and times. Plus notes on the sources and natures of the clays I work with, and descriptions of what succeeds and what fails.

You've seen my collection of sketchbooks. I'm also keeping an official journal to document my teaching and scholarly gigs, so I don't have to rely on memory for final reports. At the back of that journal, I keep my accounts. I suffered a giant kick in the ass once you weren't around to manage all the details for room and board, MTA passes, and logistics. Good lord, I've been far more dependent on you to figure shit out than is good for a grown-ass man.

In this new notebook, I'll scratch notes about what I'm saying in my head that I wish I could say to you. I'll describe what I wish you could see—like the nature of the muck on the path between the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. We had mud in Seattle, but not like the muck in that path. Maybe they add glue?

## Türkiye

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### June 1, 1975 - Evocation (sensory): Hellenistic Bronze

It's quite late after my first day in Türkiye (that's how it's spelled— who knew?), and I'm jet-lagged all to hell. Whenever I'm in town at this university, I'll be housed in a shared room in this small hotel that's more like a hostel. I should sleep in my narrow bottom bunk, but I have to tell you this story.

We were taken to visit a museum this afternoon (my body thought it was 5 am after a sleepless night). The welcoming professor was excited to show me the kinds of artifacts they've unearthed and preserved at the excavation site where I'll be working.

He pointed my attention away from the ceramic ware to a bronze statuette, about eleven inches high, from 200 BCE and labeled as local Hellenistic art. It was a bronze runner who looked so much like you that I stopped, breathless, as if I'd been punched in the solar plexus. I almost touched it before I got hold of myself. In fact, I got a hold of myself because my fingers came far too close and set off the proximity alarm. Instantly, three guards who'd previously seemed deeply bored descended on me, such that I understood the ferocity of Trojan warriors. I should only blame myself, but I also blame you for having gluteus maximus muscles like a Greek sprinter from back when Alexander (the other Sasha) conquered Persia.

It's our birthday in a couple of days. I hope you'll know that I'm thinking of you. I still haven't gotten certain obsessive habits under control.

### June 2 – June 25, Notes on this gig

[redacted from this extract for being utterly pedantic and unconscionably self-absorbed]

## July 1 - Notes on a Rainy Night

I'm disorganized enough (as you know) that I buried this new journal for a week and only found it when I was searching for a pair of socks that hadn't ossified in layers of sweat and Turkish dust.

It's raining today and we can't work. I'm in my tent at the dig site with a Bic pen and a nagging desire to talk to you. I must wrestle that desire into submission before it again grows from a kitten to a wild beast that finds people to pound on in dark alleys. However, as an aside, I must proudly declare that I've convinced everyone I work with that I'm a nice guy with an easy-going personality and good manners. This has been possible in part because before I left Boston, I found people to tell me how to get along in Türkiye:

- How to not stick out as a massive American a-hole.
- How to show proper manners for meeting and collaborating with professors and other professionals at the dig site.
- How to be properly respectful of people who serve food and clean our quarters at the dig site and in town.

Did you guess that we'd have servants like you did in Hong Kong? I'm still not comfortable. It's similar but not the same as wishing my mother wouldn't come into my bedroom during high school years. Well, it sort of is, but at least the extremely young man who tends my tent doesn't scold me for laziness.

This Fulbright is a cooperative venture. The university (and maybe the government?) hopes that this lost Hellenistic city might become a World Heritage site. I'm supposed to be some kind of expert to help with preservation/restoration of a

mosaic floor and to work with students to recreate the pottery techniques shown in artifacts found at the dig site.

However, as it turns out, the excavation of the mosaic floor isn't complete yet, so instead of restoration, I'm digging in the dirt with visiting archeology students who, as far as I can tell, are all rich as fuck and came here on a lark. No, that's unkind and betrays what I've been told is my nasty class prejudice. People on the dig are quite serious about their work, except for one girl (I'll tell you about her later) who hates it here. She made me her best friend after I politely asked her to stop bitching: "You can leave any time, Angela. Me, I'm a wandering scholar with no other home, so don't piss on it." (Late at night, I dream I have a home to go back to, the one where you'll be, but I won't know that for sure for 107 months...Oh, see how fast we're counting down from 113!?)

For everyone on this archeological lark, it's the kind where you get a second-degree sunburn, lose twenty pounds, have your nostrils permanently lined with dust, and treat eyewash and soap as precious necessities worth a significant portion of your stipend. No, only my stipend. I seem to be the only one here living solely on a stipend. Though everyone has sweaty, dust-crusting socks and sunburned ears.

That little bit of my own bitching aside, I find it's delightful to do the ceramic reproduction work with local university students. Most are history majors with a devotion to the preserving deep past, hoping for future work teaching or doing conservation in museums. I feel inspired to match their compulsion to discover and preserve.

The downside of working with them? I'm not learning as much Turkish as I'd hoped, because they want to practice their English. I'd had this idiotic fantasy that I'd come back to you



with new talents, so that every time you forgot and ranted in Chinese, I'd respond in Turkish. I need to learn many more and longer phrases if I'm going to match you.

When the rain goes back to the mountain and we're dry again, two of the local students will help me finish a side project we started. We're making rubbings of the mosaic, which has delivered a truckload of insights, bringing me closer to the artists from 2300 years ago who laid the original stones. I'm also often impatient with the artisans from 1700 years ago who attempted repairs.

When I'm out at the site with a camelhair brush and I let the work carry me into the heat of the day, after the others have retreated to midday shelter, I can imagine—don't laugh when I tell you this, Sasha—that it was you and me in earlier incarnations who did the original work. After the walls of Troy had been knocked flat and the stones carried off to build fences for goat pens, a slaveholding wine-and-goat-trader became rich enough to summon us to build an ornate floor for his dining room. I can see you calculating whether we have enough glass tesserae for the sea creatures. I hear you saying: "I warned you that we'd need more, especially the shades of blue." And I'd say: "You saw my design. You could have fixed my math before now."

Okay, this conversation in my head proves it, doesn't it? That you like to quibble with me, and—admit it, Sasha—you especially like to win the argument when your arithmetic is better than mine. Which is every single time.

Do you think when you and I first laid this floor together that we were darker, more resistant to sunburn? Or would you be out trying to trade with the goatherders, offering a portion of the bread and bitter wine the owner allotted us for wool wax

to treat our sunburn? Or do you think we had slaves to do that for us? There's a dark thought.

The rain isn't letting up, so I have time to confess more to you. On a sad note, it seems I've broken the habit I first got at Fermat's Last House of sleeping on the left side of the bed. The cot in my tent on site is too narrow to have sides. My shoulders rub on the metal rails that hold the canvas slung across them. The bunk in the pseudo-hostel at the university isn't much wider. My shoulders got to be too used to rubbing on your frame which, skinny as it is, is far more comfortable than metal rails.

Also, I should tell you that there is one place where I have the chance to learn more Turkish, when the students take me to meet their fathers and uncles in coffeehouses. However, I'm betting you will frown when you learn that I smoke harsh roll-your-own cigarettes there. Didn't you tell me nine out of ten men in Hong Kong smoke incessantly? Here, the smoke becomes so thick as the night progresses that I'd be smoking even if I didn't have my own Turkish tobacco to stain my fingers yellow.

It's a disguise. When I'm with these men, I want to be a chameleon, though I'm too tall, too broad, too sun-bleached blond. Despite these personal limitations, I've learned to laugh and tell stories in the different ways the local students and coffeehouse denizens do.

See, Sasha? My chameleon disguise leaves others thinking I'm jolly and optimistic. Our hosting professor says I'm the glue that keeps the dig-crew together, which is a fantastic complement.

Yet I see you over on the sidelines, your lips twitching into a smile, whispering, "Of course you are. You always are,"

though only I can hear it. Which leaves me feeling lonely, half raw, like a gingerbread boy that didn't get fully baked before he ran away.

Oh look, the rain's stopped. I should see if there's work we can do on the site, at least to help make sure the site is draining and quickly drying.

[July – November 1975 entries](#)

[redacted for pointless pedantry; see lab and gig journals for details]

[December 15—After the last night in Türkiye](#)

It's almost Christmas, nearly a year since we last talked. I'm writing this on the flight back to the U.S. And you and I are already down to 101 months left, give or take a couple of weeks.

They don't celebrate Christmas here, except in a couple of Christian neighborhoods I haven't visited. What the date really marks is the end of my time here. To celebrate, I got beat up last night and got into a relationship with a woman.

Ha! I can see the look on your face, Sasha. You are always so gullible. It's so effing endearing.

The Anglo-European scholars who've been working on the dig site came into town for a farewell dinner (and decent showers). Two of us are leaving, me and Angela, the only one of the visiting anthropologists that I feel any connection to. By that, I mean a close connection, the kind that you and I talk about. Where you'd recognize the person sixty years later and know immediately what's important to say. Or how easy it is to sit and say nothing.

The others left after dinner to go down to the waterfront to find the impromptu disco that happens when a touring yacht docks for the night. Six months here, and I have never gone out

dancing late at night with them. Too busy smoking truly foul cigarettes with old men, especially in conversation with Doğukan Aydın, a distinguished ceramicist who taught me a great deal about finding and using local clays and making glazes. Oh, I can see your eyes glazing over (ha!) as I get excited about those details. I'll stop. Those details are preserved in my lab notebook, where I've kept notes since I first met him. I'll only describe him here.

#### **Add turkist ceramicist description**

You'll see for yourself when we come back here together. I've preserved location details in my lab notebook, so I can take you there when we're both free. And there are photos of my dear friend Doğukan in the photographic archives for this trip.

Okay, I started to tell you about last night and didn't finish. Now I will answer at length the questions I'm sure you'll ask.

Is your first question: what music is played at an impromptu Turkish disco? It was heavy on the Rolling Stones, because one night in May, Mick Jagger arrived on one of the touring yachts, so then the Stones went into heavy rotation, as if the locals sought to conjure Mick's return. And yes, I can see you laughing at that notion.

Sasha, I don't mean to scold, but for someone who's always calling on the Heavenly Immortals, you've never shown one spark of interest in anyone else's spiritual obsessions. If I claimed to see the appeal of polytheism, when the dose of acid was greater than 10 micrograms, you'd start expostulating on Gödel's Uncertainty Theorems.

No matter. Last night, we didn't have LSD after dinner. Instead, Angela and I were drinking a local brew that reminds

me of siphoning gasoline from my dad's tractor on nights when I felt an irresistible need to escape from our tiny farmhouse.

I watered my drinks; Angela took hers straight. She soon confessed everything she'd hidden from our dig crew since she'd first arrived at the site.

"My anthropology degree was a massive fucking waste of time," she began.

"And money?" (Yes, I retain a plebian sense that "a degree costs money," even though the State of Washington and Social Security kindly helped with my tuition.)

"Money never fucking matters," she said, slapping the table. (Such a claim tends to raise my plebian hackles.) "It's only a matter of whether you can or cannot do what you want."

First, all the use of fucking as an adjective came from an elf-sized blond girl and was spoken in that East Coast accent they use in movies to indicate a character is third-generation stinking rich. I was privately nursing how her disregard for the importance of money offended me, but I said, "*It was* dirty and hot most days."

"It's not that." She dismissed the notion with a wave. "I can live with that. My parents dragged me to digs over five continents. It's that I am unable to contribute one useful thing. The local boys who sweep our tents and wash the dishes have contributed more to the dig than I have. The entire field of anthropology is too narrow to allow any hope that I can make a difference in the world."

That perked up my interest, especially since she said it with so much passion. My weak answer: "But you just got next year's funding for your team with your detailed proposal."

"Which I could have done while sitting in my girlfriend's loft in SoHo. Which is where I want to be."

“But the photos you took contributed so much. And the delicately worded description of progress, future challenges, and potential for gains in deep knowledge?”

“And my artfully contrived budget? I could do that in the loft, then take Saturday strolls through the SoHo markets. Most of my ‘work’ has been to keep track of what you and others said. The only fun I had here was to help with your charcoal rubbings. The only real contribution I made to that was—”

“To figure out how to jury-rig a fixative so that rolling up the rubbings didn’t destroy them.”

“My father would be so proud.”

Angela has a dry wit—I can hear you saying that. So dry, it’d suck the moisture out of the air, though there’s scarcely any moisture at the dig site, save for the six days a year that it rains. Oh, and human sweat. Lots of that.

“What’s next for you then?” I tipped my glass of watered-down gasoline to her.

“You didn’t meet Franklin, the artist who was here on a Fulbright before you came.”

“No.” And if I had, I’d like to knock his arrogant block off for the erroneous path he’d led the crew down over preservation methods. “Ignorant twat. How’d he end up here? And who hired him next? I should warn them.”

“He was teaching in Greece, and now he’s got a gig in Barcelona.”

“Who does his mother blow to get that for him?”

“Oh, you bad boy? He just spends his mother’s money on an agent.”

“Didn’t you say a moment ago that money never fucking matters?”

“It doesn’t, for me. But I see how it matters for real artists—like you—when I see what it buys the Franklins of this world. So I’m going to stay comfortably in SoHo. Though maybe I’ll endure summer escapes to places by the sea. I intend to play money fairy to artists whose mothers can’t buy gigs for them. Want to be the first *enfant terrible* I bring to the art world?”

“I don’t think I’m the shocking sort.”

She laughed, then stood and walked out of the café. I followed but had to duck where the vines over the pergola left a narrow opening. That walk proved to be almost as wonderful as the first night when you and I talked all night. I mean, it was similar to, in being life changing, but not as marvelous.

You must have guessed that this story about making a connection doesn’t result in a connection like you and I have. It’s more like a marriage of convenience between a pair of marginal figures who must hide their true selves.

Me: a country boy with no connections and slim notions about how this particular world works.

Angela: pushed by her parents to live in the world of famous artists (I’m quoting her) “without a hen’s knowledge of how to do more than scratch in the dust.”

All of that would make more sense to you if I revealed who her parents are, and the world she grew up in.

But no, I’ll tell you just before you meet her, so I can watch that trick you do, like when you dragged me to the reception for M—, the year he won that enormous grant from the Ford Foundation. You just spent the evening cool as can be, chatting with his Chinese wife and making her comfortable and happy, while I got steamrolled into a limelight I did not like one bit, with all the alpha male artists and their hyper-ambitious wives.

Don't think that I'm trying to scare you off meeting my dig buddy. You're nice. She's not. She's a rather lazy lesbian with a highly evolved aesthetic sense who, in the course of a walk down a Turkish waterfront, outlined the next three gigs she intended to scope for me.

"I'm thinking a Fulbright, or such, only now and then because I see you growing as a teacher. But let's focus on finding rich people who want their name attached to manifestations of your genius."

Seriously, she talks like that, and was saying pretty much those very words when we arrived at the outdoor disco, with fairy lights strung to show the outline of the dance floor, a goddamn strobe, a skinny British DJ, and shipping crates where dancers swayed who couldn't squeeze onto the creaking wooden floor.

Then, just seconds after we arrive, I broke my left little finger *again*, when a guy from the visiting yacht grabbed Angela by her camp shirt and pulled it half off.

I know I told you in Seattle that I'd stopped getting so angry. I swore I'd stop after getting into it with that Masshole so that I spent a night in the tank for being *not* drunk, only disorderly.

Like a fuckwitted Viking, I had to defend the fair maiden's honor. I need to find one of the kung fu masters you admire and learn how to land a punch without breaking a finger. Or maybe learn how to do the de-escalation thingy that you're good at.

At least it's the left hand, so I could still write all this for you on the flight home. I did have to ask the stewardess for ice twice. But Angela says they're called flight attendants now, and



I don't have more than a day to learn how to stop acting like a Neanderthal lumberjack.

February – 100 months to go!

Angela insists that if I call her anything other than “my agent,” it must be grants-fairy.

We flew back to the U.S. together. Then I slept in a narrow space behind the sofa in her girlfriend’s loft for a few weeks while we rebuilt my portfolio, rewrote my artist’s statement, got a few pieces into a gallery owned by the girlfriend’s carefree aunt, and wrote grants as if my life depended on it—well, that was Angela’s basic idea for the entire effort: putting in effort for life-changing advances. We also went to parties hosted by her parents’ friends, who wanted to know what Angela was up to since University of Chicago, and wasn’t she happy to be back in civilization?

The same aunt let me rent storage space for my brand-new archives. Her girlfriend, who’s called Onyx, taught me how to find super-cheap redeye flights to Seattle, so I could retrieve pieces from Fermat’s Last House for the gallery show.

As an aside and speaking from my new vantage point in New York, you and I did quite good work that last year in Seattle when I finished my MFA. I say “we,” because the best works we did together. I know, you insist you were just a kiln jockey, but someday I’ll get you to admit you contributed more than beast of burden tasks.

Out of our pressure-cooked work, I got my first funded solo-artist gig. Angela got two more clients, so she truly became an artists’ agent and not just my grants-fairy. She threw a party in her aunt’s gallery and introduced her clients to critics, photographers, and—as a newborn arts baby, I hadn’t been

thinking of this at all—rich guys and their wives who were willing to add a zero onto the prices I'd put on my work earlier.

And more than one of her guests invited me to come home with them. No reason to be shocked. Angela threw the party to let the world know we were for sale. Her other clients were—still are—handsome beyond where I'd rank myself. She'd coaxed me into a tuxedo that seemed too tight and then pinned a Chanel brooch on my lapel.

But I hadn't yet learned to feign sophistication the way you can. At the first invitation, I excused myself and then waited until Angela turned away from a conversation she'd been having with an editor from *ArtForum* magazine.

"Am I for sale?"

"That's up to you," she said. "You know your relationship with money and whether you want it united with other aspects of your life?"

"Did you think I want that?"

I had to ask because, as you were once nice to point out, Sasha, Scio High School left me disadvantaged in certain circumstances.

Angela got this funny look. "If I understand you, as I thought I heard from you the first week we met at the dig-from-hell, you got run over by a Rome plow—like they used in Vietnam but with a vanity license plate that says 'unrequited love.' I never believed you'd get up to even admire the view here."

"Unattainable," I said. "*Not* unrequited. And it's only temporary."

She flicked her hand. "Go practice flirting. It's a useful skill for a grown man. It doesn't commit you to anything."

I'm right, aren't I, Sasha? It's only unattainable at this moment? It's not unrequited?

I'll take you to NYC. I'll put you in a tux, and see how you like it.

No, wait. You're too pretty. I'm not sure that's a good idea, even to tease. I can just tell you how uncomfortable I was that night. I won't drag you into it. Besides, I'm getting used to it. Onyx, Angela's girlfriend, says I'm developing a solid "international man of mystery" air. Sometimes it's women, usually married, who hit on me. But I learned how to deal with that while we were still in Seattle.