

Jordan Freeman

CRWR 210 Section 4

Van Haecke

25 Oct 2012

### Of Art and Time

The smell of oil paints and canvas hung in the cold, still air. It was nine at night, the sun was setting, the stars were starting to wake up, and Piper Jones was painting. About an hour ago she had popped the screen off of her second story window and crawled out onto the blue tiled roof of her house. The yellow light from her bedside lamp poured out the window, mixing with the white light of a flashlight she had propped up to see her canvas. From her spot, she could watch the sky turn in color the way leaves turn in autumn. Slowly, yet bright and demanding, as if it was on aflame.

That was why, for the past week and a half, Piper had been crawling out her window. She was determined to get the exact blend of colors that made the sky look like it was burning onto her canvas. It had become her favorite two hours in the day.

A small breeze past her, cold and sharp and slowly. Pulling her long red hair off to one shoulder, Piper pulled the hood of her sweatshirt over her head. It was yet another reminder that summer was ending, fall was coming, and that she had graduated high school a semester early and had done nothing important with her time in the last year and half. The second day out of school, Piper had gone into town determined not to come home without a job. She came back with two. Two part times that were equally boring and paying minimum wage. Her parents weren't proud, instead, they kept repeating that she had pasted up a full ride scholarship to any

art school she wanted, and then they kept asking her why. She had an answer, but she could never find the words that would describe it fully.

Instead of an exciting art school, Piper spent every day, of every week, of every month, doing the same thing she had done the day before. Go to work, come home and watch her younger brother and her even younger sister, go to her next job, and come home again (and, for the last week and a half, crawl out her window to paint the burning sky). It was the same thing, same routine, same conversations, every single day.

Until tonight. Tonight, there was a knock from the direction of the back door.

Piper froze, and slowly turned her head in the direction of the back of the house. Who in the world would be knocking on the back door at nine at night? She thought, if it was one of Jensen's little friends trying to sneak in again . . . She got up, and instead of entering back into the house, walked around the roof of the house until she stood above the back porch. It was not one of her little brother's friends.

He looked, from what she could tell in the fading sunset light, to be around her own age, probably a little older. He had a mess of black hair on his head, and he was bobbing as he waited for someone to answer the door. Piper crossed her arms and frowned, what do you say to a stranger who knocks on your back door at nine in the night? She considered going back to her canvas, but he looked like he was waiting patiently, and despite the fact that she thought she could leave him out in the cold, she could not.

"You might want to try the front door." Her voice, despite the fact that she tried to hide it, sounded amused. The stranger looked up, and from her spot on the blue tiled roof she could see the excited surprise in his eyes and his smile, as he looked up to find her.

"You're on the roof," He said. His voice was cheery, friendly, and had an edge. It was the kind, Piper decided, that could be very unthreatening one moment, and very threatening the next.

"It's my roof." She answered.

He just smiled up at her. It was the sort of smile that makes your heart hit your chest.

Piper pressed the ball of her foot deeper into the tiles of the house.

"You might want to try the front door, my parents are watching TV, so they can't hear you knocking from back here," She said.

"I don't suppose you could just help me?" He said. "I'm looking for my backpack, I think a little boy, around the age of eight, took off with it. About this tall-" he made a gesture "-and had curly brown hair -" another gesture.

"You think my brother stole your backpack?" Piper felt her arms tighten around her chest.

"Yeah," He nodded, "Could you check?"

". . . Sure, I'll be right back." She turned and started walking back around the house to her window. Just as she was about to crawl back into her bedroom, a shadow moved in the corner of her eye. She jumped, turning around so fast that her hair flung around to the other shoulder and her hood came down from her head. She slipped a little, and in a moment that lasted less than a second, many things happened at once. Piper's canvas started to slip down off the roof, she lost her footing, and she took a large inhale of breath as she anticipated hitting the ground.

A moment past, then another. The sudden warmth of an arm around her ribs and the steady feeling of her feet on a solid surface registered in her mind, and she opened her eyes. She was looking down at the grassy yard from the edge of roof. She exhaled, and as she did so the arm around her pulled her back towards the wall of the house and away from the edge.

"You okay?"

The stranger was standing on the roof beside her, acting as guard between her and the ledge. He handed her the canvas, and she took it slowly. It was unharmed. Carefully, she placed it down on her windowsill. As she gently let go, she could feel emotions boiling up to the surface of her skin. She turned and shoved the stranger's sternum.

"What the hell are you doing!" She said, shoving him again, despite the fact that he had not yet flinched. "You can't just climb onto the roof of someone's house! You almost killed me!"

"You'd only fall from the second level, I doubt you would die. Just seriously injure." He said. Piper shoved his chest again. "All right! All right!" He held his hands up in surrender. "I did save you though, so you should forgive me about scaring you. And in my defense, I had to fallow you, you took off before I could tell you what my backpack looked like."

Piper shoved him once more, but it was less violent than before. "This is my house, I would know a stranger's backpack when I saw it. And I don't like the fact that you are accusing my brother of stealing."

"I just put your life at risk and then saved it," He said, jumping through the window into her bedroom, "We aren't strangers anymore. I'm Warrin." He held out his hand to help her in. It did not surpass her that he had ignored half of what she had said. She pushed his hand away and crawled into her bedroom by herself.

"Get out!" She said, thumb pointing back towards her window. He ignored her again, and instead picked up her canvas.

"You are a gifted painter." He said.

"I . . . thanks?"

He handed her the canvas and climbed gracefully out the window to sit on the roof outside and turn towards her. "It's made of leather." Piper just stared at him. "My backpack." He added.

"Right." Piper moved towards her door, as she opened it she looked back. "Just, just stay there, I'll be back in a moment."

Piper slipped down the hall towards Jensen's door and knocked softly, when he didn't answer, she opened the door and peered inside. He was asleep on top of his covers, a book open by his face. Piper pulled a throw blanket from his desk chair and covered him up. Then it caught her eye, the leather backpack. It was almost black, but it was unclear whether that was from age or style. There weren't any zippers, just worn straps. She sighed and looked at her sleeping brother. She had thought his stealing streak was over. She'd have to talk to him in the morning, he was sleeping gently, and that rarely happened. Quietly, she pulled on the backpack.

*Thump.*

A thick wool material had fallen out of the backpack and onto the floor. Frowning, Piper picked it up. Originally, she had thought it had been a blanket, but as she held it up she noticed that it had a hood. It was a cloak. It felt worn in her fingers, and the smell of forest drifted into her nose.

Wrapped inside the cloak was what had made the thumping noise. Round and gold and heavy and jeweled. Dear Lord, Piper thought as she turned the object around in her hands, this is a crown; I'm holding a crown and my brother stole and there is a weirdo outside my window.

It must be real gold, was the thought that came next. Real gold and jewels. The shine of the crown was wearing off around the edges, turning a more bronze color, but it was smooth and smelled like polish. Gently placing the crown and the cloak back into the leather pack, Piper tip-

toed back out of Jensen's room and down the hallway. The backpack was heavy, and Piper was starting to get the feeling that everything he owned was inside.

Warrin was still waiting for her outside her window. She patted him the pack.

"Do you . . . um . . . live in it?" She knew her question was unclear, but she had never asked someone if they were homeless before.

"Yeah, I do," He said. "Because I'm traveling, not because I'm homeless."

"Are you?"

"Am I what?" Now he was frowning at her.

"Homeless?"

"I'm traveling." He said, pulling the backpack onto his shoulders.

"What kind of traveling?"

"Time travel."

For a second, she almost said "Of course you are." but what came out was ". . . and your crown?"

"Stole it. From a King. He was getting a new one and didn't want it, figured I'd sell it to a museum." He said. Piper found herself staring at him as he waited for her to say something else. She was just starting to realize that there was a stranger who lived in a backpack outside her window who was claiming to have stolen a crown from a King because he could travel through time. She wasn't quite sure whether to make him leave or ask if he needed any help.

"Are you alright?" He asked.

"Yes?" She answered, although she did not know if that was necessary true. Shouldn't she be asking him that question?

Warrin frowned at her, "What's your name again?"

For a split second, the idea of giving a fake name ran through Piper's head, but at the same second she opened her mouth and told him before she could come up with a false one.

"Well, Piper Jones, I couldn't help but noticing that on your desk is a scholarship that would let you go to any art school you wanted. But it's dated from a year ago, and there isn't an art school here, so you must of declined the scholarship."

Piper just nodded.

"Why?" He asked. Piper just shrugged. It was the same question, over and over again. Why decline such an amazing opportunity? Why not go? Yet she could never find the words to explain.

"You're good enough, you know. Never seen a sunset as real as the one on your canvas," Warrin said, and then he disappeared from her window. Piper ran towards the window and looked out, but he was gone. As was the sunset. She locked the window.

Three sunsets had pasted since Warrin had knocked on the back door, and Piper hadn't painted a single one of them. Instead, she had broken out an old sketch book and had been drawing at her desk, window open, small sketches of Warrin. She had only wanted one. One drawing, just to get him out of her mind, but there was always something wrong about them. It's the eyes, she decided one night, she hadn't gotten a good enough look at them because of the dark lighting he had been in. Or maybe it was his jaw. Or maybe . . .

The truth was, Piper Jones didn't really care what he looked like besides the fact that she had somehow started to symbolize him as time travel. As if, if time travel had a symbol, it was him.

Beside her sketch book, her laptop was open. On the screen was a long list explaining how time travel was impossible. And yet . . . the look on his face as he had talked about the crown . . . that expression was so clear that she had been able to draw it every single time she had taken out a pencil.

Whether or not time travel was real, he believed it was. It was a strong belief, and those were hard to find.

Jensen was in the kitchen, making a mess as he made chocolate chip cookies, when Piper found him. Aria, who was barely tall enough to lean on the counter even though she was sitting on a high stool, was coloring and licking a spoon of cookie dough.

"Where did you steal that backpack from three days ago?" Piper asked, when she was pretty sure that Aria wasn't paying attention. "You know, the leather one that ending up in your room the other night?"

Jensen had frozen, and turned to her with a shy smile. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"There was a crown inside," Piper said, turning them so that their back's faces little Aria.

"I know! Wasn't it awesome!" Jensen said, excitement lighting his face.

Piper put both hands on his shoulders and leaned down. "Jensen, you stole it."

Guilt replaced excitement. He just nodded. Piper glanced over at Aria to make sure she was still distracted before turning back towards her brother.

"I'm going to need you to steal it again."

Piper watched as her little brother opened his mouth, shut it, and opened it again.

"What?" He said.

Piper pulled him across the house, up the stairs, into her bedroom, and over to her desk. She took one of the drawings of Warrin and handed it to her brother, then told him everything. When she had finished, Jensen was very frowning and still. Which was unusual behavior. Finally, he turned the drawing around and pointed to his eyes.

"You have the eyes wrong. They're dark, almost black." Was what he said.

"You see him a lot?" Piper asked. Jensen, to her relief, shook his head.

"No," he said, "but he was at your graduation. He was that random guy who came up to you when we were outside waiting for Dad to bring the car up."

Piper took the drawing back. "You think?"

"I know," Jensen said. "I wouldn't forget him, he said something really weird. He said something to you about being glade that he meet you on the roof, or something. Then smiled and walked off. Remember?"

In all honesty, Piper barely remembered her graduation. It had been a stressful day of trying to explain to her family why she wasn't going to art school next fall. But she knew Jensen had a good memory.

"So you think you can hunt down the backpack again?" She asked. Jensen just grinned.

"Just so you know," She said, turning him back towards the kitchen. "This is going to be the last time I hear about you stealing."

Jensen nodded. "Yeah, okay."

Ten sunsets later, Piper's canvas was finished. The oil paint still needed to dry before she put a finish over it, but as she placed it in the air so that it was side-by-side the real sky, it looked almost like a picture.

"Very successful."

Piper smiled and turned her head to watch as Warrin sat down beside her on the blue tiled roof outside her bedroom window.

"Thanks," she said. "My brother doesn't have your backpack. Although not from lack of trying."

Warrin just grinned and patted the leather backpack beside him. "I know. He almost got me a couple of times. Honestly, I'm surprised he was able to find me at all, let alone five whole different times. Usually I'm hard to keep track of."

Piper smiled. "Because of time travel?"

Warrin shrugged.

"You were at my graduation," Piper said. "Or, at least Jensen swears it was you. He must be right too, considered he claims you said you were glade that you meet me on a roof."

Warrin looked away from her and said nothing.

"Jensen's telling the truth, right?" Piper said as she tried to catch his eyes again. Jensen was right, because he had been right about Warrin's eyes being almost black.

Warrin shrugged again. "It's a possibility. It just hasn't happened to me, yet."

There was something in her voice that now sounded sad. Piper tried to change the subject.

"So, we aren't holding your backpack hostage, was there something else that had been stolen from you?" Piper said, and Warrin smiled again.

"I wanted to ask you a question," he said.

"Only if I ask you one first," Piper replied. She took his grin as consent. "How exactly, do you believe you can time travel?"

"You like strong beliefs?"

"I do."

Warrin nodded. Then told her, and this was his claim:

Humans like to believe that time goes in a straight line, because then they can either believe in fate or freewill, but time doesn't travel in a straight line at all. Instead, she should think of it like this ("although it's not like this at all"), that there are three separate circles. One is the Past, one is the Presence, and one is the Future.

"Now," he said, "your free will, and your choices, lead you from your Past circle, to your Presence circle. The free will decisions you make in the Presence will lead you to your Future circle. That is how it would work if time was in a line. It is not. Take those three circles, filled up with your free will and decisions, and pile them up. Overlap them. So that you can see that time is not a line, but that one circle with your Past, Presence, and Future is happening at the exact same time. You fate comes from your free will."

Then he spoke about the archways. Arches that work as a flux in time. Pass threw the archway and you pass into a different time. Not anyone can just come across an archway though, only people in Warrin's family can see them. So others can only see the archways if Warrin personally takes them to one. Also, only people in his family have control over the archways. Walk through an archway without him, and you would either be lost within the archway for all of time, or come out somewhere without him and then never be able to find the archway again.

When he had finished, he was quiet as he let Piper think. The sun had set, the stars were out, the only warm air was the air coming from her open window.

"You really believe that." Was what she said to him. He just nodded.

"No, I mean, you actually really believe that," She stood up. "Do you know how crazy that is. Archways that let you travel in time! But you really believe it. Your eyes believe it, your voice believes it, your body language. Why in the world would you believe in such a thing?"

Warrin just smiled at her. "Why won't you go to art school?"

"Why won't I go to art school?" She repeated, then started to pace the roof in front of her window. "Why in the world would I want to go to an art school? That's what people should be asking me!"

"When I was little I was influenced by my parents to love the written language. When I was older I was influenced to love children. I'd go to school for either of those things! I'd go to college for an English degree, or a Elementary Education degree! I'd go in a heartbeat! I love both of those things! But I didn't get a scholarship for those things, I got a scholarship for art.

"No one influenced my love for art. No one placed crayons in my hands, or gave me lessons, or bought me supplies. Art came into my life without any outside influence. It developed itself. It's part of the purest part of me. The part that, had I grown up somewhere else, sometimes else, would be the same. Other things, my love for English and Education, I don't think I would have them had I been born somewhere else. But my love for art comes from me.

"That doesn't mean I don't love all three things the same. I do! I love all three things the same! But I will never let my love for art become what gives me money. Art developed within me because of my soul, and I'm not going to let it be tainted by currency."

Piper had never before let the words out, she had never before know how to say them. But now that she had it felt like a weight had been lifted from her lungs.

"Piper Jones," Warrin said. "It seems like you have some pretty strong beliefs."

Piper just nodded. "Yeah, I guess I do."

Warrin was still grinning. "There is an archway on the outskirts of town." He held out his hand. "I only take people with strong beliefs. What do you say? How would you like to see all of time? The art of it."

Piper smiled. "The art of time?"

He nodded. "The art of time."

"I can't just leave my family."

Warrin looked like he was trying very hard not to laugh. "It's time travel. You could leave tonight, be gone for years, and be back ten minutes from now."

Piper took his hand.