

# Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of *The Art Thief* provides an in-depth look into the evolving relationship between Breitwieser and Anne-Catherine, set against the backdrop of their shared love for art and their increasingly dangerous lifestyle. The couple, deeply entwined in both affection and crime, inhabit an attic decorated with Ferrari-red sheets on a grand four-poster bed, symbolizing their escape from the mundane. Their playful moments—captured on video by Breitwieser—are filled with warmth, with Anne-Catherine humorously claiming her domain, while Breitwieser lovingly refers to her as Nena, and she affectionately calls him Steph. Despite the joy and intimacy they share, there is an underlying tension, as they both are acutely aware of the criminal activities that have defined their relationship. This mix of love and lawlessness sets the stage for their complicated and reckless bond, one that thrives in secrecy.

For Breitwieser, art is more than just a passion—it is the cornerstone of his existence. His relationship with art is rooted in a deep emotional connection, manifesting as a *coup de coeur*, a visceral and almost overwhelming desire to possess beautiful objects. This drive is not merely about acquiring wealth, but about owning pieces that stir his soul, a feeling akin to the one he experiences when he first meets Anne-Catherine at a birthday party in 1991. Their attraction is immediate, fueled by an intense chemistry and a shared understanding of the world they wish to inhabit. Anne-Catherine is drawn to him not just by his boldness, but by the world of excitement and passion he offers, a sharp contrast to her more subdued life before they met. Despite warnings from friends and family about the recklessness of their relationship, she remains deeply devoted to him, finding both thrill and escape in their shared escapades. Their contrasting backgrounds—her modest upbringing and his more affluent lifestyle—add complexity to their dynamic, making their connection all the more powerful and transformative.

As their relationship progresses, Anne-Catherine and Breitwieser begin to rely on each other more, particularly after Breitwieser's parents' separation causes him emotional distress. Anne-Catherine's support during this time solidifies their bond, and they start to create a life together in their attic sanctuary. Despite the cramped and unconventional living arrangements, the space becomes a symbol of their shared existence, a private world where they can build their dreams and avoid the pressures of the outside world. Their financial struggles—exemplified by Anne-Catherine's struggles with her nursing studies and Breitwieser's abandonment of law school—only serve to strengthen their reliance on each other. Rather than seeking conventional career success, they pursue a life of freedom, driven by the allure of art and the desire for beauty. This rebellion against societal norms only deepens their connection, as they continue to prioritize their passions and each other over everything else.

One of the pivotal moments in Chapter 5 occurs during a trip to Thann, where Breitwieser's attention is caught by a flintlock pistol displayed in a museum. The pistol, like art, captivates him, evoking the same intense desire he feels when he encounters a masterpiece. However, this theft is more personal than others; Breitwieser views it as an act of rebellion against his father, a chance to assert his autonomy and break free from the constraints imposed on him. With Anne-Catherine's encouragement, he decides to steal the pistol, seeing it not just as a valuable item, but as a symbol of defiance and freedom. The moment they take the pistol marks the beginning of their deeper involvement in criminal activities, solidifying their partnership in theft and rebellion. Their bond grows stronger as they continue down this dangerous path, driven by the thrill of crime, the pursuit of beauty, and the desire to control their own destinies. This pivotal act represents not just the theft of an object, but a further entrenchment into a life they are unwilling to abandon, regardless of the consequences.