

Chapter 34

In Chapter 34 of *The Art Thief*, the narrative shifts to the legal aftermath of Stéphane Breitwieser's extensive art thefts. The story starts with the legal process, which is completed quickly, with a decision being reached in just two and a half hours. The court primarily focuses on the method used for theft rather than the specific items that were stolen. Despite the high value of the stolen artwork, Breitwieser's crime is categorized as simple theft, as no violence was involved. This leads to a four-year prison sentence for Breitwieser, along with fines amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars owed to the museums that suffered losses. He is frustrated by the outcome, particularly because he had hoped that his cooperation with the authorities would lead to a more lenient sentence, but his efforts to comply seem to have been insufficient in earning him any significant favor in the eyes of the law.

While serving his time in a Swiss detention center, Breitwieser faces the harsh realities of prison life. He spends his days dismantling computers in exchange for a minimal wage, all of which goes directly to paying his fines. Visits from his father provide some comfort, but they are not enough to alleviate the strain of being incarcerated. The media's exaggerated portrayal of his stolen art pieces only adds to his emotional turmoil. Although part of him feels a strange pride in his past crimes being so widely recognized, the rest of the attention leaves him feeling conflicted. Despite the tough circumstances, Breitwieser discovers an unexpected interest in ping-pong, a pastime that offers him some distraction, but his struggles with personal hygiene persist, and he is often embarrassed by his situation. Throughout his time in prison, he contemplates his choices and the irreparable damage they have caused to his life and reputation.

Eventually, Breitwieser is transferred to a more crowded and uncomfortable prison in Strasbourg, France. The living conditions are far worse than those he endured in

Switzerland, and his emotional state worsens as he learns that his mother has lost her job and their family home is being sold. The news of these personal losses only adds to the immense pressure he is feeling. During his time in this new prison, Breitwieser meets with French investigator Michèle Lis-Schaal, who confronts him with contradictions in the testimonies of both himself and Anne-Catherine, his former accomplice. A brief encounter with Anne-Catherine brings up feelings of confusion and pain, as she remains silent during their interaction, and he learns that she is no longer allowed to contact him. The distance between them grows as Anne-Catherine continues with her life, while Breitwieser feels trapped by his past.



The chapter takes an unexpected turn when Anne-Catherine's testimony reveals a shocking detail: she is now the mother of a nineteen-month-old child. The revelation devastates Breitwieser, as the child is not his, but the product of Anne-Catherine's relationship with another man that began after his arrest. This emotional blow immobilizes him, as he contemplates the magnitude of his lost connection with her and the life that could have been. The betrayal cuts deeply, and Breitwieser is forced to confront the painful truth that his actions have led to the dissolution of everything he once held dear. The chapter ends with Breitwieser in a state of confusion and despair, as he is confronted by the harsh reality of his decisions. The repercussions of his past have caught up with him, and the pain of losing his partner, along with the discovery of the child, leaves him struggling to find meaning in a life that seems to be falling apart. This chapter underscores the deep emotional toll of Breitwieser's criminal activities, showing how the consequences of his actions extend far beyond his own life, affecting those he loved and once cared for. The ongoing struggle with guilt, regret, and betrayal becomes a key theme in his journey through the complex aftermath of his art thefts.