

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 of *The Art Thief* explores a significant moment in the story where the unraveling of Breitwieser's criminal life becomes apparent. The scene is set in an interrogation room, where detective Meier presents Breitwieser with a photograph of a stolen gold-plated medallion from the seventeenth century. This photograph acts as the catalyst for Breitwieser's confessions, despite the minimal evidence that was initially found during the police search of his residence. The sense of pressure mounts as Breitwieser, cut off from any contact with his family, feels increasingly isolated, leading him to admit to stealing the medallion. The weight of his actions is beginning to sink in, and his previously confident demeanor is replaced with guilt and fear, as the magnitude of the situation becomes clear. This moment marks the beginning of his eventual unraveling, where no further attempts at evasion will work, and the truth starts to come to light.

After admitting to the theft of the medallion, the pressure intensifies when Meier presents more photographs. One such image reveals a gold tobacco box, which Breitwieser had stolen from a Swiss castle alongside his accomplice, Anne-Catherine. In an attempt to mitigate the situation and escape the grim reality of his high-security confinement, Breitwieser admits to this crime as well. The discovery of these items leads Meier to present a series of photos, each showcasing other stolen treasures, including an ivory flute and several pieces of silver. With each photograph, Breitwieser realizes the true extent of his thefts, feeling trapped as the evidence piles up. He begins to feel overwhelmed by the gravity of his actions and is forced to admit to all 107 thefts depicted in the images. It becomes clear that Breitwieser had not anticipated the extent of the police investigation and feels betrayed by his own inability to outsmart law enforcement.

Meier, despite the emotional weight of the situation, maintains his composure throughout the interrogation. As Breitwieser provides his confessions, a police report left open on the desk reveals an unexpected breakthrough. The report details how an elderly man named James Lance discovered numerous stolen items while raking through the Rhône-Rhine Canal, sparking a police operation. Over three days, thirty officers conducted an extensive investigation and recovered an array of stolen treasures, including silver chalices and intricately carved ivory pieces. These items, once discarded by Breitwieser and Anne-Catherine, are valued at an astonishing fifty million dollars. The recovery of these goods is a pivotal moment in the investigation, as it links the two thieves to a much larger operation, ultimately exposing the scale of their crimes. The discovery of these treasures marks a significant turning point in the case, shifting the momentum firmly in favor of the authorities.

Breitwieser's downfall continues as he is moved from his high-security confinement in Switzerland to a prison in France. The transition is marked by the heavy weight of his previous life crumbling down around him. He is dressed in his former clothing and escorted by guards along with other inmates, a far cry from the life he once knew as a confident art thief. Once filled with a sense of superiority and control, Breitwieser is now consumed by vulnerability and fear as he contemplates his uncertain future. The reality of his situation settles in as he realizes the magnitude of the consequences that await him. What once felt like a game of evasion and art theft has now become a matter of survival within the brutal confines of the prison system. Breitwieser's journey has taken a dark turn, from the world of stolen treasures to a grim fate in prison, where he is left to reflect on his past choices.