

# Chapter 24

Chapter 24 of *The Art Thief* explores the shifting dynamics between Anne-Catherine and Breitwieser, as they navigate the complexities of their relationship. Anne-Catherine, after gaining her driver's license, buys a raspberry-red Ford Ka, a small but meaningful purchase that signifies her newfound independence. With her car, she starts commuting to work and gradually distances herself from the chaotic world of art theft, setting up a life in a modest studio apartment on the outskirts of Mulhouse. This marks a significant transition as she moves away from her parents' home and starts to build her own future. On the other hand, Breitwieser's life takes a downturn as he is left to deal with the emotional fallout from Anne-Catherine's departure. For four months, he refrains from stealing, his feelings of emptiness growing as he struggles with the isolation that follows her absence. During this time, he takes on menial jobs to occupy his time, yet he cannot shake the overwhelming sense of loss and aimlessness. This emotional void leads him to reach out to Anne-Catherine, hoping to reconnect and perhaps repair their fractured relationship.

When they finally speak again, Breitwieser reveals his remorse and regret, acknowledging his past mistakes and the damage his obsession with art and theft caused. He admits that he has learned from his past behavior, promising to let go of his anger, especially regarding the abortion, and to move forward with a more genuine love for Anne-Catherine. He expresses that, despite everything, she is the only woman he truly cares for, and her absence has helped him realize the depth of his addiction to art theft. Meanwhile, Anne-Catherine, though leading a stable life, finds herself unable to entirely shake off the thrill that she once shared with Breitwieser. She confesses that the excitement of their heists, which had once brought them so close, still calls to her. However, despite this craving for adventure, she is no longer willing to fully engage in the illicit activities that once defined their relationship. Instead, she insists

on keeping her space free of stolen art, but agrees to reconnect with him in the attic, where their past crimes were stored, indicating her willingness to take a step back into their shared history.

Despite Anne-Catherine's attempts to maintain some boundaries, Breitwieser's criminal urges are reignited. His desire for art and theft proves impossible to resist, and soon, he begins stealing once more, initially visiting local museums to fuel his obsession. By late 1999, Breitwieser has accumulated an impressive collection of around 250 stolen items, though he makes an effort to avoid churches due to Anne-Catherine's earlier objections. However, the temptation of these easily accessible and valuable pieces proves too strong, and he eventually returns to targeting churches, justifying it by the simplicity of the thefts. The once pristine attic, where their love of art had once been stored in a more innocent light, becomes a chaotic repository for his growing collection. As the stolen pieces accumulate, so does the strain on their relationship, with Anne-Catherine growing increasingly dissatisfied with the life they are leading. Despite this, Breitwieser secures a high-paying job in Switzerland, trying to stabilize his life and divert Anne-Catherine's attention from his continued thievery. To keep her interested and provide an escape from the criminal world, he arranges a romantic trip to the Dominican Republic. During the trip, Breitwieser refrains from stealing, trying to prove to her that he can control his impulses. However, despite his attempts to convince her that he has changed, Anne-Catherine remains skeptical, particularly about his job in Switzerland. She fears that he might be arrested again, knowing that their previous lucky escape from the law was an unlikely fluke. Breitwieser agrees to her caution in principle but finds himself battling the temptation every time he passes a museum on his way to work. The unresolved tension between his desires and Anne-Catherine's concerns continues to pull them in opposing directions, making their future together uncertain.