

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of *The Art Thief* follows Breitwieser on a memorable and daring adventure, one that intertwines his birthday celebrations with another art heist. On the morning of his twenty-fourth birthday, October 1, 1995, he embarks on a trip to New Castle in Germany, accompanied by his mother, Anne-Catherine, and her dachshund. The scenic drive through the picturesque Black Forest is a stark contrast to the thrill that awaits him. Their destination, the historic Sotheby's auction preview, is held in a majestic castle with 106 rooms, each filled with auction pieces waiting to be sold. Although Breitwieser's attention is immediately drawn to a specific sixteenth-century portrait of Sibylle of Cleves by Lucas Cranach the Younger, he also feels a subtle tension. This unease stems from the fact that, despite being so close, he and his mother rarely discuss his criminal activities, and their time together often avoids any mention of the art heist world he is so deeply entrenched in.

As they move through the castle, Breitwieser's mind oscillates between the wonder of the artwork before him and the unspoken tension within his family. His relationship with his mother, Mireille Stengel, is strained—though they live under the same roof, emotional distance has grown between them over time. While she avoids public scrutiny and media attention, refusing interviews, it's clear that she remains largely unaware or perhaps chooses to turn a blind eye to her son's illegal endeavors. Outside, she remains with the dog while Breitwieser and Anne-Catherine explore the magnificent exhibition halls. The aura of the painting draws Breitwieser's focus completely—its exquisite details and rich colors pull him in, but the plexiglass dome and vigilant security guards remind him that stealing this work will require precision and a carefully executed plan. As they study the security setup, it becomes evident that taking the painting will not be easy, but Breitwieser's mind begins to strategize, constantly weighing the risks against the rewards of such a daring theft.

Despite the dangers of a high-stakes heist, Breitwieser's pragmatic side always keeps him grounded, and humor helps him cope with the tension. The couple discusses their options, initially deciding that the security measures in place would make it unwise to risk such a high-profile theft. However, as the hours pass, the guards' vigilance seems to wane, and an opportunity begins to take shape. When the exhibition room starts to thin out with fewer people, and the guards appear less attentive, the couple returns for a second visit, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. Breitwieser, driven by a mix of excitement and caution, sees the chance to act and, with swift precision, takes the portrait. He hides it inside his auction catalog, attempting to mask the theft within the chaos of the room.



In his hasty escape, Breitwieser makes a misstep—he knocks over the easel that held the painting, and the loud noise echoes across the room. For a brief moment, he anticipates immediate detection, but to his surprise, the distraction goes unnoticed, and the chatter around them continues without suspicion. Both he and Anne-Catherine quickly regain their composure, walking toward the exit with purposeful strides. Once outside, they reunite with Mireille, who remains blissfully unaware of the crime that has just unfolded. With their prize now secured in their possession, the couple experiences a rush of exhilaration, but also an overwhelming sense of disbelief. What had seemed like an impossible act just moments before has now been completed successfully. As they head home, the normality of family dinner with Breitwieser's grandparents contrasts sharply with the hidden treasure now stashed away, marking the day as one of both personal and criminal significance. Breitwieser's birthday is now forever linked to this daring heist, an event that solidifies his obsession with art theft and the thrill of the chase.