

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of *The Art Thief* explores the intense tension between Breitwieser and Anne-Catherine as their criminal activities spiral further out of control. Four months after their last heist, the couple visits a small art gallery in Lucerne, Switzerland, during a hot summer day, where they are drawn to a beautiful still life by the renowned artist Willem van Aelst. Despite their usual avoidance of stealing from commercial galleries, the painting calls to Breitwieser, and he decides to steal it. Anne-Catherine, who has grown increasingly uneasy about their criminal path, urges him to reconsider, but Breitwieser's determination to possess the artwork overpowers her concerns. He moves quickly, using his Swiss Army knife to carefully extract the painting from the wall, hiding it under his arm as he prepares to make his escape.

Their plan begins to unravel almost immediately. As they approach the exit, a gallery employee notices Breitwieser and accuses him of stealing the painting. Shocked by the sudden confrontation, Breitwieser cannot offer a convincing excuse, and soon both he and Anne-Catherine are detained by the authorities. Anne-Catherine desperately pleads for their release, but despite her best efforts, they are both arrested and taken to separate holding cells. The fear of being caught for their past crimes weighs heavily on Breitwieser, who now faces the possibility of their entire criminal history being exposed. His worry grows even more intense as he fears that Anne-Catherine, under the pressure of interrogation, might confess to their past thefts.

The following morning, both are transported to court in separate cages, the gravity of the situation becoming more real with each passing moment. They manage to exchange a few words during the ride, reassuring each other to stick to the story they've created. In the courtroom, Breitwieser becomes emotional and gives a false confession, claiming it was his first offense and asserting that Anne-Catherine had no involvement. Their clean records and lack of previous criminal activity play in their

favor, and they are granted release on bail after the intervention of Breitwieser's mother, Stengel. However, when they return home, Stengel's initial relief turns into anger and frustration. She is devastated by the shame Breitwieser has brought upon the family, and she hires a Swiss attorney to minimize the damage. The lawyer frames the theft as a youthful mistake, and as a result, the couple receives suspended sentences, though they are banned from Switzerland for three years.

As the aftermath of their ordeal sinks in, Anne-Catherine is hit by a wave of emotional turmoil. She has been hiding a secret from Breitwieser—she is pregnant with his child. After much contemplation, and with Stengel's support, Anne-Catherine decides that an abortion is the best course of action. They believe that they are not in a position to raise a child amidst their chaotic lives. Though the decision is difficult, Anne-Catherine holds onto a small flicker of hope that, with the end of the pregnancy, they might also find a way out of their criminal lifestyle. However, Breitwieser remains unshaken by their legal troubles and the implications of their actions. He feels emboldened by the lack of real consequences for his behavior, and this only deepens the rift between him and Anne-Catherine. She begins to question whether she can continue down this path with him, realizing that while her hope for a future free from crime lingers, Breitwieser is more consumed by the thrill of stealing than by the possibility of change. The future of their relationship hangs in the balance, marked by emotional disconnect and an increasing sense of inevitability about the trajectory of their criminal lives.