

Chapter 26

In Chapter 26 of *The Art Thief*, the tension heightens as Breitwieser returns home, carrying with him a rare and priceless treasure—a four-hundred-year-old bugle that he has successfully stolen. He eagerly recounts the details of the daring heist to Anne-Catherine, his excitement undiminished as he describes his actions in retrieving the stolen item. In his retelling, Breitwieser paints a picture of a well-calculated operation: climbing onto a radiator to reach the sealed display box containing the bugle, using his Swiss Army knife to unscrew the front panel, and taking deliberate steps to avoid detection. To further throw off suspicion, he hopped down several times, creating the appearance of casual distraction, before triumphantly securing the instrument. For Breitwieser, the success of this theft further fuels his belief in his superiority, and he feels an overwhelming sense of pride in his cunning.

However, Anne-Catherine's response is far from what he had hoped for. She quickly reminds him that they already own a more valuable bugle, one that they had stolen together in Germany. Her focus shifts to the fact that this new heist, which he had been so eager to share, doesn't measure up to their past exploits. In a tense moment, she questions whether he had adhered to the rules they had set for their criminal activities, specifically asking whether he had worn gloves during the theft. This moment of accountability cuts through Breitwieser's initial excitement, as he suddenly realizes that he has broken one of their most sacred rules—stealing from the very city where they had been caught before. With the discovery that his fingerprints are now connected to another crime scene, he begins to feel the weight of impending trouble, and Anne-Catherine's fear for their future becomes palpable. The tension between them rises as her anger, fueled by both his carelessness and the new dangers they face, becomes undeniable.

Desperate to make things right, Breitwieser suggests an audacious plan: he offers to erase his fingerprints from the scene, but Anne-Catherine quickly rejects the idea, deeming it too risky. She decides that she will handle it the following morning, and he reluctantly agrees, trusting in her ability to control the situation. As the day progresses, Breitwieser finds himself in a state of unease, feeling the isolation of his actions and realizing the depth of the rift they now face. Anne-Catherine, in her usual calm, meticulous manner, assures him that she can take care of the situation, but the damage to their bond is already evident. He is left to grapple with his growing sense of guilt, while she silently bears the responsibility of cleaning up his mess. Their relationship, once filled with the thrill of their shared exploits, now seems to be on the brink of unraveling.

The next morning, they drive to the Wagner Museum, and the atmosphere between them is heavy with unspoken tension. As they approach the museum, Anne-Catherine tells him to stay in the car while she handles the situation. The stillness between them grows, and Breitwieser, seeking some form of distraction, steps out of the car and takes a brief walk around the picturesque grounds. In these fleeting moments, he tries to regain some emotional grounding, though his thoughts are clouded with uncertainty about the future. As he walks, he can't help but watch Anne-Catherine through the windows of the museum, hoping for some sign that things will return to the way they were before the chaos of their criminal actions caught up with them.

His sense of fleeting hope is shattered when Anne-Catherine suddenly rushes toward him, her face full of anxiety and urgency. The sight of her distress sends a chill through him, and before he can understand what is happening, two police officers approach him. Despite having no stolen goods on him, Breitwieser is handcuffed and taken into custody, his worst fears now realized. As he is escorted away, Anne-Catherine stands helplessly at a distance, her expression one of shock and disbelief. The weight of the situation hits Breitwieser hard: his once carefully constructed world of crime, art theft, and manipulation has now fallen apart. Their relationship, built on shared secrets and illegal deeds, is now hanging by a fragile thread. The arrest marks a dramatic turning point in Breitwieser's life, one where the consequences of his actions finally catch up

with him, forcing him to face the reality of his choices.

