

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 of *The Art Thief* further explores Breitwieser's obsession with art, focusing on his belief that paintings must be framed to be truly appreciated. He perceives frames as a crucial part of art's dignity, akin to clothing on a figure; without them, paintings seem "undressed" and incomplete. This fascination with framing leads him to discover a small, charming artisan framing shop in Mulhouse run by Christian Meichler. Meichler, an enthusiastic art lover, immediately strikes up a connection with Breitwieser, who finds comfort in the camaraderie and shared passion for fine art. As they converse about their mutual admiration for various works, Breitwieser begins to form a deeper bond with Meichler, feeling a sense of refuge from his personal struggles, especially the emotional chaos caused by his parents' separation. Through their shared enthusiasm for art, Breitwieser sees in Meichler someone who understands his need for beauty and creativity, providing a subtle escape from the anxieties of his life.

Meichler's insights into Breitwieser are a blend of admiration and concern. He views Breitwieser as a sensitive, discerning individual with a refined aesthetic taste, qualities that are also recognized by the psychotherapist Schmidt, who perceives Breitwieser's love for beautiful objects as indicative of his big heart. At the same time, Schmidt and another psychologist, Lucienne Schneider, diagnose Breitwieser with narcissism and obsessive behavior, recognizing that these traits stem from deeper emotional issues linked to his attachment to art. Schneider's evaluation suggests that Breitwieser's criminal acts are not driven by greed alone, but by a need to compensate for his emotional distress. She argues that his obsession with art is a coping mechanism for the underlying psychological pain he experiences, making his art thefts not just an expression of desire, but also a way to escape from his unresolved emotional conflicts. The complexity of Breitwieser's character is thus revealed, making his actions more

understandable while still deeply troubling.

As their relationship deepens, Breitwieser and Meichler share a profound admiration for European oil paintings, especially those from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Meichler considers these works to be more than mere objects—they represent dreams, poetic ideals, and aspirations that transcend time and place. Breitwieser, while initially reserved, opens up about his love for these paintings, revealing his genuine passion for their craftsmanship and aesthetic beauty. However, Breitwieser's fascination with art goes beyond a mere appreciation for creativity; he becomes obsessed with acquiring it, even at the cost of his integrity. He initially lies to Meichler about his connection to the works, claiming they were bought at auctions, rather than admitting that they were stolen. Despite these small deceptions, Breitwieser's genuine enthusiasm for art shines through, and the two men form a bond over their shared understanding of art's value, not just financially but emotionally. However, the friendship starts to become increasingly complicated as Breitwieser brings in stolen pieces for framing, including an elderly woman's portrait. Meichler's trust in Breitwieser grows, but so does the underlying danger, as Breitwieser's deceit begins to spiral, and his criminal behavior escalates.

As the relationship between Breitwieser and Meichler deepens, the tension begins to mount. Breitwieser starts to lie more frequently, covering up the truth of his actions to maintain the fragile friendship he has with Meichler. He claims to be too nervous to transport paintings, playing on Meichler's trust to conceal his thefts. Meanwhile, Meichler remains blissfully unaware of the full extent of Breitwieser's criminal activities, finding only the love of art in his young friend. This deceptive dynamic continues, highlighting the complex nature of their relationship. Breitwieser, feeling more comfortable with Meichler, starts to take greater risks, testing the limits of his new friendship. However, Meichler's warnings about the dangers of becoming too obsessed with art begin to ring true. While Meichler senses the mounting risks involved in Breitwieser's behavior, he cannot fully grasp the extent of the trouble that lies ahead. The chapter underscores the fragile balance between their friendship and the impending consequences of Breitwieser's actions. As their connection grows, so does

the tension, as Meichler remains unaware of the illicit nature of the art that Breitwieser continues to acquire.

