

# Chapter 22

In Chapter 22 of "The Art Thief," four months after a significant theft, the protagonists, Breitwieser and Anne-Catherine, visit a modest art gallery in Lucerne, Switzerland, during a hot day. Though they usually avoid stealing from commercial galleries, a captivating still life by Willem van Aelst catches Breitwieser's eye, and he feels compelled to take it. Despite Anne-Catherine's warnings, he believes he can manage the theft and confidently tells her, "Trust me." He lifts the painting off the wall and hides it under his arm.

However, just moments later, they are confronted by a gallery employee who accuses Breitwieser of theft. Stunned and unable to formulate a solid excuse, he is quickly seized, and despite Anne-Catherine's pleas for his release, both are arrested and taken to separate holding cells in the police station nearby. Breitwieser experiences intense regret and fear, worrying that Anne-Catherine might confess their past crimes under police pressure.

The next day, both are transported to court in separate cages within a prison van. They manage to exchange words, reassuring each other to maintain their stories. In court, Breitwieser gives a tearful and deceitful confession, claiming it was his first offense and that Anne-Catherine was uninvolved. Their lack of prior criminal records leans in their favor, and they are released on bail after the intervention of Breitwieser's mother, Stengel.

Upon returning home, however, Stengel's initial leniency turns to fury over the shame brought upon her by her son's actions. She hires a Swiss attorney to frame the incident as a youthful mistake, leading to suspended sentences and a ban from Switzerland for three years.

Emotionally, the experience hits Anne-Catherine hard; she fears for their future, especially since she had discovered her pregnancy months prior but refrained from telling Breitwieser. Stengel and Anne-Catherine secretly planned for an abortion, believing the couple was not ready for parenthood. Anne-Catherine feels a glimmer of hope after their ordeal, contemplating the possibility of a future without crime. However, Breitwieser, feeling unpunished and emboldened, thinks they could still continue their reckless lives without immediate consequences, delaying any thoughts of reform or responsibility.