

Chapter 30

In Chapter 30 of "The Art Thief," the narrative centers around Breitwieser, who finds himself in a new, grim prison in Switzerland. He is escorted to an interview room where he meets Alexandre Von der Mühl, the art-crime detective who has pursued him for six years. Unlike previous encounters with law enforcement, Breitwieser feels an unusual rapport with Von der Mühl, who, rather than intimidating him, uses psychological tactics and flattery to gain his trust. As they converse in French—transitioning to a more informal dynamic—Von der Mühl encourages Breitwieser to confess to his crimes, suggesting that it may lead to a lighter sentence.

Over the course of nearly a month, they meet for hours daily, discussing an extensive range of thefts across Europe. Von der Mühl provides Breitwieser with art-related materials during their sessions and occasionally drives him around, facilitating a sense of camaraderie that disarms the thief. However, Breitwieser is careful to diminish the role of his accomplices, including Anne-Catherine and his mother, in the thefts, repeatedly insisting that he alone is responsible.

Despite Von der Mühl's awareness of their participation through surveillance evidence, he allows Breitwieser to maintain this narrative to keep him cooperative. As their discussions evolve, the detective carefully navigates around the topic of paintings—Breitwieser's principal area of theft—until he is inclined to bring it up directly. When pressed, Breitwieser reluctantly reveals that he has stolen sixty-nine Renaissance paintings.

This admission marks a significant turning point in their discussions, as the detective perceives the potential magnitude of the art crime. The urgency is clear; the more time the paintings remain hidden, the more their condition deteriorates. Breitwieser, however, expresses confusion about their whereabouts, leading to the revelation that he believed they were in the attic, but now has no idea where they might be after the police search.

To aid in recovering the stolen works, Von der Mühl seeks permission for Breitwieser's mother to visit Switzerland with immunity from prosecution. During their meeting, despite the detective's inquiry about the paintings, she adamantly denies knowledge of them, leaving Breitwieser bewildered as she implores him to deny their existence. This moment underscores the tension and secrecy surrounding the art theft, setting the stage for further intrigue as the investigation unfolds .