

# Chapter 32

In mid-May 2002, the shocking news of Breitwieser's illicit activities in the art world is broadcasted on television while he is incarcerated in a Swiss jail. The sensational tale reaches the public following his mother's police interrogation, during which she admits to destroying the paintings, leading to a media frenzy over the unprecedented crime involving a mother-son-girlfriend dynamic. As Breitwieser learns the extent of the situation through TV reports, he grapples with his mother's vague admissions about their destruction, particularly her cryptic statement that "there are no paintings, and there never were."

Various media outlets estimate the value of the stolen artwork, with figures ranging from \$1 billion to over \$2 billion, a number that overwhelms him considering he had always minimized his collection's worth to under thirty million dollars. He feels doomed by the possibility of needing to reimburse such an insurmountable amount. In jail, he chooses to decline all interview requests, remaining silent about his ordeal. While his mother faces imprisonment, his girlfriend, Anne-Catherine, is still free but has a trial ahead, adding to his despair.

Overwhelmed with sadness and feeling the crushing weight of solitude, Breitwieser attempts to take his own life using dental floss. Fortunately, a guard intervenes, placing him on suicide watch and prescribing antidepressants. Despite this, thoughts of Anne-Catherine begin to occupy his mind, igniting a desire to rekindle their romantic connection as a reason to keep living. Unable to communicate directly due to restrictions imposed by the authorities, he mails her letters packed with apologies and declarations of love, but he receives no reply.

In a surprising turn, Breitwieser's father reaches out, breaking an eight-year silence with a heartfelt letter of support. This rekindles a relationship that had long been lost, and his father's visits become a source of comfort, helping him adjust to prison life. Inmates introduce him to new skills, and he finds himself growing increasingly acclimated to his situation. As preparations for his trial begin, it becomes evident that the consequences of his actions will extend beyond the Swiss borders, leading to potential trials in multiple countries. On February 4, 2003, he is escorted to the courtroom in Gruyères, where he faces the daunting task of defending himself against a backdrop of public scrutiny.