

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 begins in February 1997, with Stéphane Breitwieser and his girlfriend, Anne-Catherine Kleinklaus, embarking on a visit to the Rubens House in Antwerp, Belgium. At first glance, they appear to be typical tourists enjoying the art and history surrounding them, but their true intentions lie far beyond mere admiration. The couple moves seamlessly through the museum, taking in the beautiful works on display while Breitwieser focuses on his primary goal: an ivory sculpture of Adam and Eve. This piece, which had captivated his attention during a solo reconnaissance visit, was now the object of his meticulously planned heist.

The sculpture, encased in a plexiglass display case, is securely fastened to a sturdy base, making it appear impenetrable. However, Breitwieser, ever the observant planner, has identified a crucial vulnerability. The back of the display case is held together by two tricky screws, hidden from the casual observer, but easily accessible with the right tools. The museum staff, though attentive, follow a predictable routine, leaving brief windows of opportunity where their supervision lapses. These moments, particularly during busy lunchtimes when many visitors are distracted by their own activities, provide the perfect cover for Breitwieser to act. As the couple moves through the gallery, they blend in effortlessly, seeming like any other visitors while secretly preparing for the heist that will unfold in the next few minutes.

With the museum space slowly clearing as lunchtime approaches, the time for action is imminent. Breitwieser takes out a Swiss Army knife, carefully positioning himself behind the sculpture's display case. His every movement is calculated, working quickly to unscrew the two hidden screws that will release the precious artifact from its containment. His heartbeat quickens, but his composure remains steady as he continues to operate in the role of a casual art lover, feigning interest in the displays while secretly preparing to make his move. Anne-Catherine stands watch, keeping a

careful eye on the hallway and the museum staff as they patrol, ensuring that no one walks into their path at the critical moment. With every turn of the screw, Breitwieser's excitement builds, feeling the tension of the heist and the rush of adrenaline surge through him.

Once both screws are removed, the plexiglass case is no longer holding the sculpture in place. Breitwieser swiftly lifts the ivory Adam and Eve, careful not to make any noise that would draw attention. He slips the piece into the waistband of his pants, skillfully covering it with his coat. The entire operation has been conducted with such precision that, even though he now holds a stolen artifact, he remains calm and composed. He knows that lingering too long in the museum could attract unwanted attention, so he takes the opportunity to leave the display area as quickly as possible. The hustle and bustle of the museum, combined with the natural distractions of lunchtime, allows him to move undisturbed through the gallery and out the door.

Outside, the couple walks to their parked car, a midnight blue Opel Tigra, parked a short distance away from the museum's entrance. As they climb into the car, the weight of the stolen sculpture is momentarily forgotten, replaced by the euphoria of their success. Their hearts race with excitement, as they both feel a rush of victory at pulling off such a daring heist. They drive away into the night, exhilarated by their crime but still processing the magnitude of their actions. The world outside feels momentarily still, as if time has slowed for them to savor their moment of triumph. They know that what they have just accomplished is a dangerous game, but for now, they are free—young, in love, and reveling in the thrill of their successful theft.

This moment, however, is fleeting. The stolen sculpture, now safely hidden from the world, becomes more than just an object—it is a symbol of their escape, their rebellion against the ordinary. For Breitwieser, this theft is more than an act of crime; it represents a moment of freedom, a chance to seize control over something beyond the constraints of his everyday life. For Anne-Catherine, too, the thrill of participating in such an audacious act creates a bond with Breitwieser, one built on shared secrecy and excitement. The night is young, and for the couple, it feels as if they have crossed

a line from which there is no return.

As the car drives further from the museum, the rush of their accomplishment slowly begins to settle into a quiet sense of satisfaction. Yet, both know that this is just the beginning. What started as a single, calculated theft will lead to a series of events that will challenge their relationship, their ideals, and their futures. The stolen sculpture may be in their possession for now, but the consequences of their actions have only just begun to unfold. The real test lies ahead: Can they continue to live with the weight of their crime, or will their thrill-seeking ways eventually catch up with them?