

The crisp April air whipped through the open window of the Citroën ZX as it skimmed south past the Opera House and crossed Place Vendôme. In the passenger seat, Robert Langdon felt the city tear past him as he tried to clear his thoughts. His quick shower and shave had left him looking reasonably presentable but had done little to ease his anxiety. The frightening image of the curator's body remained locked in his mind.

*Jacques Saunière is dead.*

Langdon could not help but feel a deep sense of loss at the curator's death. Despite Saunière's reputation for being reclusive, his recognition for dedication to the arts made him an easy man to revere. His books on the secret codes hidden in the paintings of Poussin and Teniers were some of Langdon's favorite classroom texts. Tonight's meeting had been one Langdon was very much looking forward to, and he was disappointed when the curator had not shown.

Again the image of the curator's body flashed in his mind. *Jacques Saunière did that to himself?* Langdon turned and looked out the window, forcing the picture from his mind. Outside, the city was just now winding down—street vendors wheeling carts of candied *amandes*, waiters carrying bags of garbage to the curb, a pair of late night lovers cuddling to stay warm in a breeze scented with juniper blossom. The Citroën navigated the chaos with authority, its dissonant two-tone siren parting the traffic like a knife.

"*Le capitaine* was pleased to discover you were still in Paris tonight," the agent said, speaking for the first time since they'd left the hotel. "A fortunate coincidence."

Langdon was feeling anything but fortunate, and coincidence was a concept he did not entirely trust. As someone who had spent his life exploring the hidden interconnectivity of disparate emblems and ideologies, Langdon viewed the world as a web of profoundly intertwined histories and events.