

**The following extract is from the opening of the novel “The Da Vinci Code” by Dan Brown. In this section of the novel, Jacques Saunière is murdered in the Louvre Museum in Paris.**

1 **Prologue**

2 **Louvre Museum, Paris 10:46 P.M.**

3 Renowned curator Jacques Saunière staggered through the vaulted archway of the museum's Grand  
4 Gallery. He lunged for the nearest painting he could see, a Caravaggio. Grabbing the gilded frame,  
5 the seventy-six-year-old man heaved the masterpiece toward himself until it tore from the wall and  
6 Saunière collapsed backward in a heap beneath the canvas.

7 As he had anticipated, a thundering iron gate fell nearby, barricading the entrance to the suite. The  
8 parquet floor shook. Far off, an alarm began to ring.

9 The curator lay a moment, gasping for breath, taking stock. I am still alive. He crawled out from  
10 under the canvas and scanned the cavernous space for someplace to hide.

11 A voice spoke, chillingly close. "Do not move."

12 On his hands and knees, the curator froze, turning his head slowly.

13 Only fifteen feet away, outside the sealed gate, the mountainous silhouette of his attacker stared  
14 through the iron bars. He was broad and tall, with ghost pale skin and thinning white hair. His irises  
15 were pink with dark red pupils. The albino drew a pistol from his coat and aimed the barrel through  
16 the bars, directly at the curator. "You should not have run." His accent was not easy to place. "Now  
17 tell me where it is."

18 "I told you already," the curator stammered, kneeling defenceless on the floor of the gallery. "I have  
19 no idea what you are talking about!"

20 "You are lying." The man stared at him, perfectly immobile except for the glint in his ghostly eyes.

21 "You and your brethren possess something that is not yours."

22 The curator felt a surge of adrenaline. How could he possibly know this?

23 "Tonight the rightful guardians will be restored. Tell me where it is hidden, and you will live." The  
24 man levelled his gun at the curator's head. "Is it a secret you will die for?"

25 Saunière could not breathe.

26 The man tilted his head, peering down the barrel of his gun.

27 Saunière held up his hands in defence. "Wait," he said slowly. "I will tell you what you need to  
28 know." The curator spoke his next words carefully. The lie he told was one he had rehearsed many  
29 times... each time praying he would never have to use it.

30 When the curator had finished speaking, his assailant smiled smugly. "Yes. This is exactly what the  
31 others told me."

32 Saunière recoiled. The others?

33 "I found them, too," the huge man taunted. "All three of them. They confirmed what you have just  
34 said."

35 It cannot be! The curator's true identity, along with the identities of his three sénéchaux, was almost  
36 as sacred as the ancient secret they protected. Saunière now realized his sénéchaux, following strict  
37 procedure, had told the same lie before their own deaths. It was part of the protocol.

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- 38 The attacker aimed his gun again. "When you are gone, I will be the only one who knows the truth."
- 39 The truth. In an instant, the curator grasped the true horror of the situation. If I die, the truth will be  
40 lost forever. Instinctively, he tried to scramble for cover.
- 41 The gun roared, and the curator felt a searing heat as the bullet lodged in his stomach. He fell  
42 forward... struggling against the pain. Slowly, Saunière rolled over and stared back through the bars  
43 at his attacker.