



Hunter's Secret

Wreck of the Carol K

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A Matt Hunter Adventure

Greenstone Publishing
Rapid River, Michigan



Meet the Livingstons

Matt drove the minivan into the Marquette Visitor's Center parking lot at exactly 12:00. There were four other cars in the parking lot: two in front of the log building with Illinois plates and two at the side that looked like nondescript rentals. As Matt pulled next to the plain sedans, their doors began opening, three men came out of the nearest car, the driver and front passenger of the other vehicle moved to rear doors as Matt, Tanya and George vacated the van. Before anyone said a word the back doors of the sedan opened, and the Livingston brothers appeared.

Tall, thin, in dark suits with white shirts that matched their hair, they came around their car, walking to Matt.

The nearest brother, balding with short hair and a semblance of a smile, began, "You are Mr. Hunter?"

"Yes," Matt replied cautiously. "Call me Matt, and this is Tanya and her father George Vega."

No handshakes were offered or taken.

“I am Jud Livingston and this is my brother Jared.” No notice or mention made of the others in their retinue who waited out of ear shot. “We are very interested in your news about the *Carol K*. Do you have some proof of your discovery?”

Matt opened the back of the minivan, the shade of the raised rear hatch formed their meeting area. “Here is a parallel rule we found in the room off the bridge, and here are pictures of a box we found. The name and company are very clear.”

Matt passed the materials to the brothers. He noticed they didn’t wear glasses and handled the materials with care, even some reverence. The brothers moved into the sunlight, two paces from the van. They studiously looked at the pictures and rule for over a minute. Then, looking at each other in silent agreement, they returned to Matt.

Jud reached into his suit, producing a single, folded sheet of paper. His brother also took an envelope from his suit-coat pocket. Jud unfolded the paper and handed it to Matt, explaining, “This is a nondisclosure agreement, it simply prohibits you and anyone listed from disclosing, except to my brother and me, any information or location of the *Carol K*. And for your knowledge and silence we will pay you \$10,000 now and 10 percent of any salvage value realized from the wreck.”

He handed the document to Matt and took the fat envelope from his brother, opening it so Matt could see it was full of \$100 U.S. bills. “The laws of salvage are very complex, most of the time the persons who actually find the wreck get nothing but the thrill of discovery. Governments, bureaucrats, lawyers and plundering thieves are the only ones that make a dime any more. The *Carol K* is part of our family history, we want it respected and not exploited, and we are willing to pay you for your trouble and for keeping a confidence.”

“Who else knows about your find?” added Jared, in the same cold voice Matt had heard over the phone. Jared seemed the older brother, but had more and longer hair. Both brothers were whip thin and moved like men much younger than their ages.

Matt showed the paper to Tanya, George Vega looking over her shoulder. While they read the paper, Matt said, “Just the three of us and Mrs. Vega know about the ship, only Tanya and I know the location.”

And that money would pay for all the carpeting, window coverings and new furniture... thought Matt.

Jud went on, "If you agree with this we can have a dive boat available yet this season. We have many business groups, one includes a salvage firm."

Matt held the paper for Tanya and George to finish reading, looked at Jud and half listened as Jud went on about Livingston activities involving their fleet of ships, their salvage works, the diving boats they controlled. He noticed the effort Jud was expending to be friendly and chatty. Brother Jared just stood there like a pallbearer.

Matt was amazed at their youthful appearance. He knew they must be over 70—but they looked 10 to 15 years younger. Jud seemed the younger and more animated brother. Jared just continued to study the assemblage like they were so many specimens. Their suits were summer wool, perfectly tailored, shoes thin-soled, cordovan wingtips and their silk ties never saw a sale sign. The temperature was in the high 70s, no wind off the lake only a hundred yards away; Matt was warm in a short-sleeved polo shirt—the Livingston Brothers didn't seem to sweat. They had the look of the very, very rich and powerful.

"We need to talk before we can accept your terms," said Matt. "Would you like to have lunch while we chat? There are several good restaurants in Marquette."

Jared spoke, pushing a little warmth into his voice, "We eat a special diet and have lunch available on our helicopter at the airport. You are welcome to join us. We can get to know each other better and hopefully conclude our business. We..."

George Vega uncharacteristically interrupted, the mention of a helicopter sparking his interest, "What kind of craft do you have? I was in the air force most of my life, responsible for many types of prop and rotary machines."

"It is a new Eurocopter Super Puma—less than 100 hours on it, our pilots would be very happy to show it to you." Jud added, "Let's meet at the airport—we have the only large helicopter there, we're parked among the private planes, and you can talk among yourselves as you drive."

Matt and the Livingstons agreed to lunch in the Livingston helicopter. They all returned to their vehicles and headed south toward the Marquette county airport.



In their van, Matt, Tanya and George studied the paper Jud had given them.

“I don’t see anything wrong with this,” said Tanya. “We can’t take anything from the wreck or even hope to get any fame without years of government complexity. The money comes at a good time.”

George added, “Ten thousand dollars is chump change to these men—that helicopter cost millions and hundreds of thousands a year in upkeep. We could hold out for more, or just not agree and see what they do.”

Matt suggested, “Let’s have lunch with them, tell them we’re afraid of legal papers and see what they do. If they get mean, we stonewall them. If they up the ante, we take it and I can pay you back for all the carpentry equipment you bought and the diving equipment you’re shipping up. Also, I’d almost like to see what’s on the ship before we give away any rights—however tenuous.”

Tanya closed the discussion, “Ok, no agreement at first, or if they get mean. If they stay nice, we take an improved second offer, sign the agreement. Oh, doesn’t Mom need to sign it, too? How do we do that?”

Matt spoke, “I think up-front money and a percentage of futures is fair from what I’ve been reading of salvage laws and shipwreck discovery. We’ll get at least one more dive on the ship to see if there is any real value aboard. Anyway, this whole experience is certainly interesting and if we can make it profitable so much the better.”

They rode in silence for the next ten minutes, coming to the entrance of the huge former SAC air base. They found the private-plane area and the large, cream and blue, twin-turbine helicopter. They drove through a guardless gate and parked near the impressive machine.