

READER'S
DIGEST
CONDENSED
BOOKS

HIDDEN
RICHES

PHOENIX
RISING

ROOMMATES

WHITE
HARVEST



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Hidden Riches

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Phoenix Rising

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White Harvest

Published by Donald I. Fine, Inc.
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ILLUSTRATORS

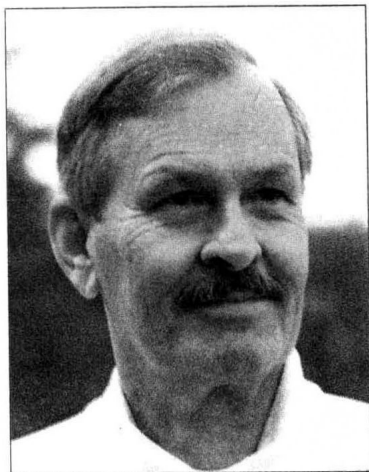
Rick Johnson: *Hidden Riches*
Michael Herring: *Phoenix Rising*
Wendy Popp: *Roommates*
Luke Frazier: *White Harvest*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The destruction of wilderness and wildlife has been a recurring concern in the books of Louis Charbonneau. Condensed Books subscribers will no doubt remember the heroine of *White Harvest*, Kathy McNeely, and her loyal husky, Survivor, from Charbonneau's 1991 subzero thriller, *The Ice*. In that book the author focused on the despoiling of Antarctica. His next book, already in the works, will center on the plight of the Siberian tiger. Ironically enough, the Siberian tiger is no longer protected as it was during the communist era, the author explains. In the former Soviet Union "poaching has become epidemic," he says, "partly because people are hungry and partly because there's no one to control the poachers effectively in the preserves."

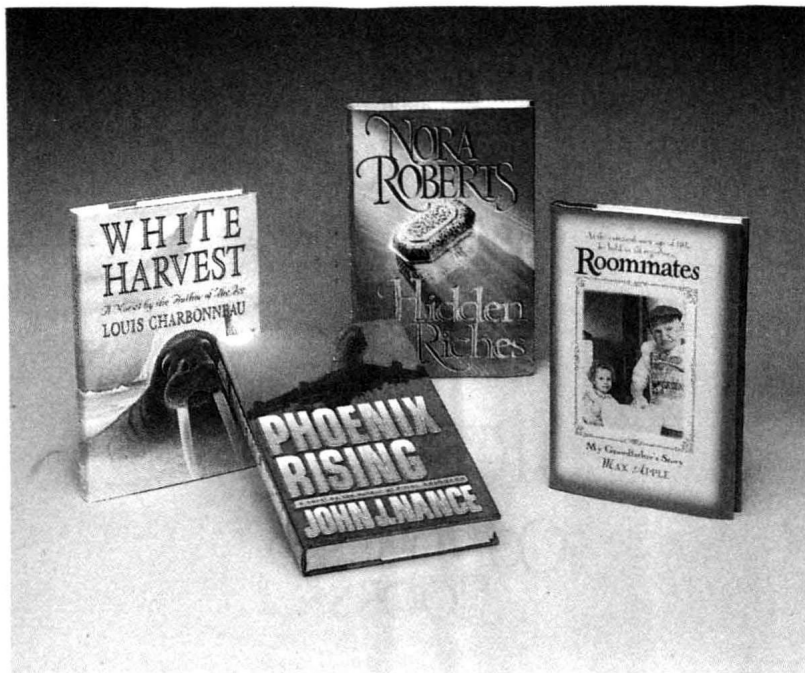
The author's love of animals is not limited to endangered species. At his home in Lomita, California, he has "a number of dogs and cats—two dogs and eight cats, actually," he says, laughing. "We've rescued a cat here and there, and somehow the number has grown."

A World War II veteran and former teacher, columnist, and editor, Charbonneau these days devotes himself full time to fiction writing. Whenever he can, he also travels with his wife, Diane. Most recently they took an extensive tour of Civil War battlefields and Appalachian craft fairs, a distinct pleasure for the author's wife, who is a traditional basketmaker. As for wilderness adventuring, Louis Charbonneau prefers to leave that to Kathy McNeely and his other fictional creations.



Louis Charbonneau

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READER'S DIGEST CONDENSED BOOK

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PUBLISHED BY PUTNAM; DISTRIBUTED BY BEJO

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PUBLISHED BY WARNER; DISTRIBUTED BY H.B. FENN

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WHITE HARVEST

Louis Charbonneau

PUBLISHED BY DONALD I. FINE; DISTRIBUTED BY GENERAL

In this volume



HIDDEN RICHES

by Nora Roberts

Dora Conroy loves a bargain. A young Philadelphia antiques dealer with a taste for the unusual, she's just wrangled a good deal on a collection of novelties at an auction. But she's unnerved when her new assets become a magnet for murder. Before long, Dora and her neighbor, rugged ex-cop Jed Skimmerhorn, find themselves matching wits against an international smuggler. And discovering, too, that there might be more between them than either of them ever bargained for. / Page 7



PHOENIX RISING

by John J. Nance

Like the legendary phoenix—the bird reborn from its ashes—a new luxury airline has just begun flying under the old Pan Am name. But sinister forces are conspiring to clip the fledgling's wings. Promised financing disappears, and the company's airplanes become targets of sabotage. Can Elizabeth Sterling, Pan Am's bright financial officer, and Brian Murphy, its chief pilot, stop the plotters in time? Or will their dreams for Pan Am, like the phoenix, go down in flames? A riveting new thriller with an unmistakable ring of authenticity. / Page 157



ROOMMATES

My Grandfather's Story

by Max Apple

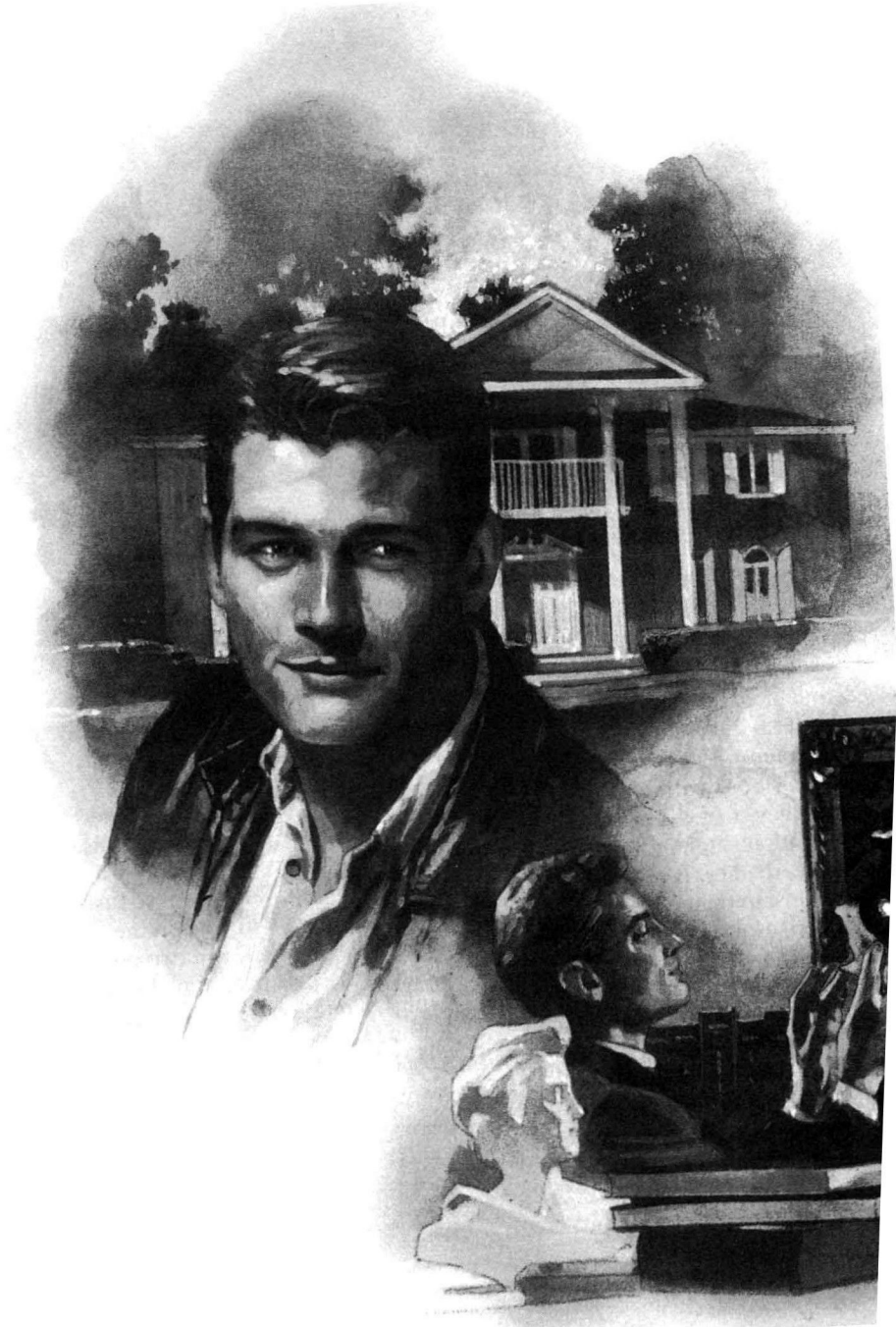
A touching, true story about the oddest of odd couples: Rocky, the scrappy old baker, and Max, his bookworm grandson. For years they shared a household—not to mention laughter, tears, battles, and heartaches. It was often a closer relationship than either of them wanted, especially when a new friend came into young Max's life. But it was a bond that strengthened them both. And when tragedy struck, a very old man discovered he had a new job: holding a family together. / Page 321



WHITE HARVEST

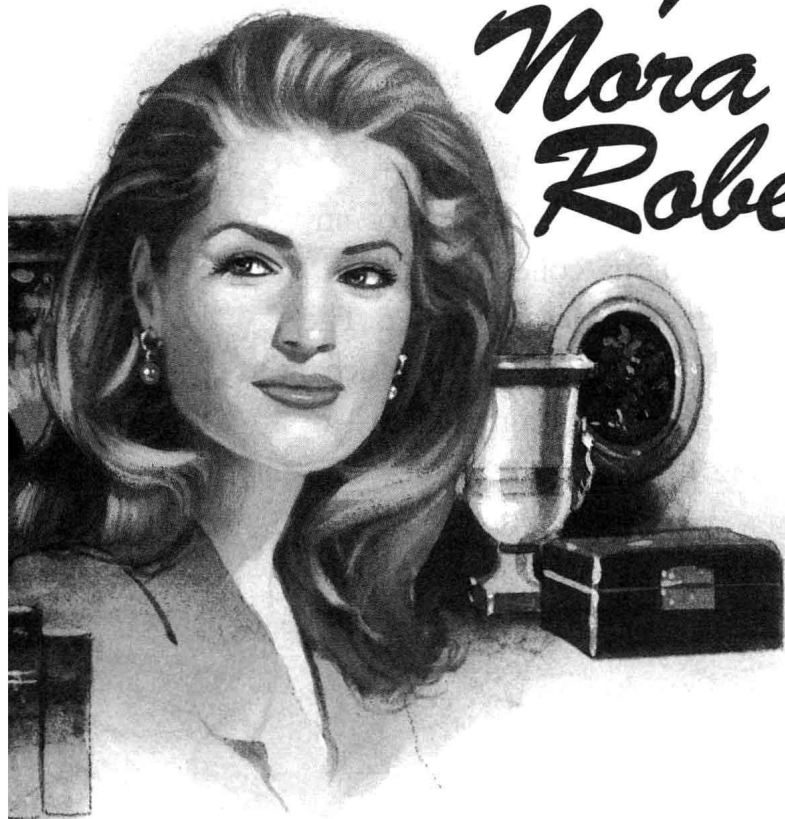
by Louis Charbonneau

The Alaskan coastal tundra looks forbidding and desolate, but it fairly teems with life: seabirds, fur sea's, and walruses. Yet where these animals congregate, poachers are sure to follow. And the quarry this time is the biggest prize of all—a magnificent old walrus whose tusks alone will bring a fortune in the Hong Kong market. But two people stand in the poachers' way: John Mulak, a tough old Eskimo, and Kathy McNeely, a spunky wildlife scientist. The author of *The Ice* has written a crackling adventure tale of the wild. / Page 445



Hidden Riches

by
**Nora
Roberts**



Jed and Dora are worlds apart. Jed's an ex-cop hiding from his troubled past. All he wants is to be left alone.

Dora owns a popular antiques shop. She loves people and noisy parties.

So they're both surprised to discover a smoldering attraction for one another. And when Dora becomes the target of an unscrupulous collector, Jed's instincts are to protect her. The trouble is, he's not sure which he's more afraid of: losing Dora—or loving her.

PROLOGUE

HE DIDN'T want to be there. No, he hated being trapped in the elegant old house, prodded and pinched by restless ghosts. It was no longer enough to shroud the furniture in dustcovers, lock the doors and walk away. He had to empty it and, by emptying it, purge himself of some of the nightmares.

"Captain Skimmerhorn?"

Jed tensed at the title. As of last week he was no longer captain. He'd resigned from the force, turned in his shield, but he was already weary of explaining it. He shifted aside as the movers carried a rosewood armoire down the staircase, through the grand foyer and out into the chilly morning.

"Yes?"

"You might want to check upstairs, make sure we got everything you wanted put in storage. Otherwise, looks like we're done here."

"Fine."

But he didn't want to go up those stairs, walk through those rooms. Even empty they would hold too much. Responsibility, he mused as he reluctantly started up. His life had been too crowded with responsibility to ignore one now.

Something nudged him along the hallway toward his old room, where he had grown up. But he stopped in the doorway. Hands jammed into his pockets, he waited for memories to assault him.

He'd cried in that room—in secret and in shame. And when tears had dried, he'd plotted in that room. Useless, childish revenges that

had always boomeranged on him. He'd learned to hate in that room.

Yet it was only a room. It was only a house. He'd convinced himself of that years before, when he had come back to live there as a man. And hadn't he been content? he asked himself now. Hadn't it been simple? Until Elaine.

"Jedidiah."

He flinched. He'd nearly brought his right hand out of his pocket to touch a weapon that was no longer there.

He relaxed and glanced at his grandmother. Honoria Skimmerhorn Rodgers was wrapped in mink, discreet daytime diamonds at her ears. Her eyes, as vivid a blue as his own, were filled with concern.

"I'd hoped I'd convinced you to wait," she said quietly.

"There was no reason to wait."

"But there's a reason for this?" She gestured toward the empty room. "A reason to move out of the family home?"

"Family? We were never a family here, or anywhere."

Her eyes hardened. "Pretending the past doesn't exist is as bad as living in it. What are you doing here, Jedidiah? Tossing away everything you've earned, everything you've made of yourself? Perhaps I was less than enthusiastic about your choice of profession, but it was your choice and you succeeded. You made more of the Skimmerhorn name when you were promoted to captain than all your ancestors did with their money and social power."

"I didn't become a cop to promote my name."

"No," Honoria said quietly. "You did it for yourself against tremendous family pressure—including my own. I saw you turn your life around, and it awed me." She studied him, this son of her son. He had inherited the bold good looks of the Skimmerhorns. Bronzed hair, tousled by the wind; a lean, rawboned face taut with stress; the tall, broad-shouldered build; the defiant blue eyes.

"I might have had reservations when you moved back in here alone after your parents died, but it seemed you'd made the right choice again. But this time your solution to your sister's tragedy is to sell your home and throw away your career? You disappoint me."

"I'd rather disappoint you than be responsible for the life of a single cop. I'm in no shape to command." He looked down at his hands, flexed them. "I may never be. And as for the house, it should have been sold years ago. After the accident. It would have been sold

if Elaine had agreed to it. Now she's gone, too, and it's my decision."

"Yes, it's yours," she agreed. "But it's the wrong one."

Rage sizzled in his blood. He wanted to hit something, someone. It was a feeling that came over him all too often. And because of it, he was no longer Captain J. T. Skimmerhorn of the Philadelphia Police Department, but a civilian. "Can't you understand? I can't live here. I need to get out. I'm smothering here."

"Then come home with me. At least for the holidays. Give yourself a little more time before you do something irreversible." Her voice was gentle again as she took his rigid hands in hers. "Jedidiah, it's been months since Elaine—since Elaine was killed."

"I know." Yes, he knew the exact moment of his sister's death. After all, he'd killed her. "I appreciate the invitation, but I've got plans. I'm looking at an apartment today. On South Street."

"An apartment." Honoria's sigh was ripe with annoyance. "Don't bury yourself in some miserable room, Jedidiah."

"The ad said it was quiet, attractive and well located. That doesn't sound miserable. Grandmother"—he squeezed her hands before she could argue—"let it be."

She sighed, tasting defeat. "I only want what's best for you."

"You always did." He suppressed a shudder, feeling the walls closing in on him. "Let's get out of here."

1

ISADORA Conroy absorbed the magic of the empty theater as she stood in the wings of the Liberty Theater, watching a dress rehearsal for *A Christmas Carol*. As always, she enjoyed Dickens, but also the drama of edgy nerves, of creative lighting, of the well-delivered line. After all, the theater was in her blood.

Her large brown eyes glinted with excitement and seemed to dominate the face framed by golden-brown hair. That excitement brought a flush to ivory skin, a smile to her wide mouth. The energy inside her small, compact body shimmered out. She was a woman interested in everything around her, who believed in illusions. Watching her father rattling Marley's chains at the fear-struck Scrooge, she believed he was no longer her father, but the doomed miser wrapped for eternity in the heavy chains of his own greed.

Then Marley became Quentin Conroy again, veteran actor, director and theater buff, calling for a minute change in the blocking.

"Dora." Hurrying up from behind, Dora's sister, Ophelia, said, "We're already twenty minutes behind schedule."

"We don't have a schedule," Dora murmured, nodding because the blocking change was perfect. "I never have a schedule on a buying trip. Lea, isn't he wonderful?"

Lea glanced out onstage and studied their father. "Yes."

Dora beamed. Leaving the stage hadn't diminished her love of it, or her admiration for the man who had taught her how to milk a line. She'd watched him become hundreds of men onstage—Macbeth, Willie Loman, Nathan Detroit. She'd seen him triumph and seen him bomb. But he always entertained.

"Remember Mom and Dad as Titania and Oberon?"

"Who could forget? Mom stayed in character for weeks. It wasn't easy living with the queen of the fairies. And if we don't get out of here soon, the queen's going to come out and tell us what might happen to two women traveling alone to Virginia."

"Relax, honey," Dora said to her sister. "He's about to take five."

Which he did, on cue. When the actors scattered, Dora stepped out to center stage. "Dad, you were great."

"Thank you, my sweet. I think the makeup is an improvement over last year."

"Absolutely." In fact, the greasepaint and charcoal were alarmingly realistic; his handsome face appeared just short of decay. She kissed him lightly. "Sorry we'll miss opening night."

"Can't be helped." He did pout a little. Although he had a son to carry on the Conroy tradition, he'd lost his two daughters—one to marriage, one to free enterprise. "So my two little girls are off on their adventure." He kissed Lea in turn.

"Oh, Lea!" Trixie Conroy, resplendent in her costume, complete with bustle and feathered hat, rushed out onstage. "John's on the phone, dear. He couldn't remember if Missy had a Scout meeting tonight at five or a piano lesson at six."

"I left a list," Lea muttered. "How's he going to manage the kids for three days if he can't read a list?"

"Such a sweet man," Trixie commented when Lea dashed off. "The perfect son-in-law. Now, Dora, you will drive carefully?"

"Yes, Mom."

"It's an awfully long way to Virginia. And it might snow."

"I have snow tires." Dora gave her mother a kiss. "And a phone in the van. I'll check in every time we cross a state line."

"Won't that be fun?" The idea cheered Trixie enormously. "Oh, and Quentin, darling, we're sold out for the week."

"Naturally. A Conroy expects no less than standing room only."

"Break a leg." Dora kissed her mother again. "You, too, Dad," she said. "And don't forget you're showing the apartment later today."

"I never forget an engagement. Places!" he called out, then winked at his daughter. "Bon voyage, my sweet."

Dora could hear his chains clanging when she hit the wings.

TO DORA'S way of thinking, an auction house was very like a theater. You had the stage, the props, the characters. As she had explained to her baffled parents years before, she wasn't really retiring from the stage. She was merely exploring another medium.

She'd already taken the time to study the arena for today's performance. The building where Sherman Porter held his auctions had originally been a drafty slaughterhouse. Merchandise was displayed on an icy concrete floor, where people who were huddled in coats and mufflers wandered through, poking at glassware and debating over paintings and china cabinets and carved headboards.

Isadora Conroy loved a bargain. She'd always loved to buy and all too often had exchanged money for objects she had no use for. But it was that love of a bargain that had led Dora into opening her own shop, and the discovery that selling was as pleasurable as buying.

"Lea, look at this." Dora offered a gilded cream dispenser shaped like a woman's evening slipper. "Isn't it fabulous?"

Ophelia Conroy Bradshaw lifted a single honey-brown eyebrow. "I think you mean frivolous, right?"

"Come on, there's a place for ridiculous in the world."

"I know. Your shop."

Dora chuckled. Though she replaced the creamer, she'd already decided to bid on that lot. She noted the number. "I'm really glad you came along on this trip, Lea. You keep me centered."

"Somebody has to. Still, I feel guilty being away from home this close to Christmas. Leaving John with the kids that way."

"You were dying to get away," Dora reminded her. Tossing one end of her red muffler over her shoulder, Dora crouched down to check a lady's cherry wood vanity. "Honey, it's only been three days. You'll be home tonight, and you can smother the kids with attention, seduce John, and everybody'll be happy."

Lea rolled her eyes and smiled weakly.

Dora straightened, shook her hair from her face and nodded. "I've seen enough for now. We'd better get some seats before—Oh, wait!" Her brown eyes brightened. "Look." Dora scurried across the floor.

It was the painting that had caught her attention. It wasn't large, perhaps eighteen by twenty-four inches, with a simple, streamlined ebony frame. The canvas was a wash of color—streaks of crimson and sapphire, a dollop of citrine, a bold dash of emerald.

Dora smiled at the boy who was propping the painting against the wall. "You've got it upside down."

"Huh?" The stock boy turned. "Uh, no, ma'am." He turned the canvas around to show Dora the hook at the back.

"Mmm." When she owned it—and she would—she'd fix that.

"This shipment just came in."

"I see." She stepped closer. "Some interesting pieces," she said, and picked up a statue of a sad-eyed basset hound curled up in a resting pose. No craftsman's mark or date, but the workmanship was excellent.

"Frivolous enough for you?" Lea asked.

"Just. Make a terrific doorstep." After setting it down, Dora reached for a tall figurine of a man and woman in antebellum dress, caught in the swirl of a waltz. Dora's hand closed over thick, gnarled fingers. "Sorry." She glanced up at an elderly, bespectacled man.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he asked her, grinning. "My wife had one just like it. Got busted when the kids were wrestling in the parlor."

Dora smiled back. "Do you collect?"

"In a manner of speaking." He set the figurine down and his old, shrewd eyes swept the display—pricing, cataloguing, dismissing. "I'm Tom Ashworth. Got a shop here in Front Royal. Accumulated so much stuff over the years, it was open a shop or buy a bigger house."

"I know what you mean. I'm Dora Conroy." She held out a hand. "I have a shop in Philadelphia."