

the phoenix

Literary Journal of Milligan College

Spring 1997

Volume 2

the phoenix

the milligan college literary journal

Editor: Kevin Cox

Assistant Editors: Kari Keller, Heather Armstrong,
and Devon Fisher

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Patricia Magness

Special thanks: Dr. Terry Dibble, Cameron Deeb,
the people of Angola, and Josh Mugele,
Matthew Andris, and Lisa Fellows

The Phoenix is a mythological bird of fire that only once in a very great while will be resurrected from ashes. Like the Phoenix, life is born from death, our true spirituality is born from suffering, and ultimately, artistic creation is born from the pain the artist experiences as he or she tries to make sense of the paradox of the beauty of life and the isolation from it. Everything we have in life that we consider good or true or beautiful must be constantly resurrected from and is only possible because of the ashes of suffering, isolation and death.

One of the unfortunate parts of being an editor is that sometimes choices must be made. This year's edition of the Phoenix was made open to all Milligan College students, faculty, and alumni. Due to a limited budget, limited space, and the tremendous volume of entries, we regret that we were unable to use all of the excellent submissions we received. The editorial staff would like to thank each individual who was willing to take the risk of not having their selection included in this year's Phoenix. We sincerely appreciated each entry, and we thank you for allowing us the privilege of reading your work.

--the editors

Table of Contents

Stephen Glass	"Motion and Light"	1
Matt Good	"Your smile today seems"	2
Amy Wicks	"Cycles"	3
Patricia Magness	"FEBRUARY"	4
Eskimo	"Frozen 6th Sense"	5
Heather Armstrong	"Dream of Persephone"	6
Jody Sparks	"April 10th"	7
Amy Wicks	"Beside the Bass Pond"	8
Kevin Cox	"Traces of Shade in a Summer Girl"	9
Sara	"September 24, 1996"	10
Stephen Harvey	Seasonal Sonnets I	11
Stephen Harvey	Seasonal Sonnets II	12
Stephen Glass	"Exile"	13
Anne Acker	"Beyond This"	14
Sara	"VOL"	17
Jacob Sutherland	"Nature's Way"	18
Devon	"Wall Street Religion"	19

Matt Good	"Better?"	21
k.c.9.4.	X	23
Greg Hartley	"Flagellant"	25
Brian Free		
"Passion's Fire & Confusion's Fog"		27
T. C. Patrick	"The Death of Pride"	28
Stephen Glass	"Cassandra"	29
Jody Sparks	"Ringo"	31
Brian Landrum	"On Your Wedding Day"	38
Anne Acker	"The Gift"	42
Devon Fisher		
Excerpts from a forthcoming novel		44
Josh Mugele		
"The Best Thing for a Man"		48
Anonymous Epilogue	"Absalom"	60

Motion and Light
by Stephen Glass

Red and screaming
Still waking from my birth
I knew you
And in you saw the same glint of
Ruin and the eternal
Felt sparked within myself
Like stars, like stars.

There is something of the same dream in us
Impossible to relate, yet
No less palpable
Than the press of hand
The push of bodies that
Brought us into being
Thrust out from womb to womb
Sacred, scared and disoriented
Into consciousness
Into motion and light.
Your eyes and mine
Confusion and fire.

the phoenix

“Your smile today seems”
by Matt Good

Your smile today seems
sad

But I tell you the truth
 even in trial
 the Lord’s hand is on you.

His breath is in your heart
 and I see His fire burn
 in your eyes

I tell you the truth
 His light envelopes you
 even if darkness is all you see

His tears, shed for you,
 can wash you clean
 and clear the darkness

But all talk aside
 know that
 He loves you

And . . .
 so do we

the phoenix

Cycles
by Amy Wicks

Whiteness, whiteness everywhere:
 the falling snow, a child at play,
 tears of joy.

Grayness, grayness everywhere:
 rain and slush, when babies die,
 tears of pain.

Blackness, blackness everywhere:
 storms that break, children that kill,
 tears of rage.

Redness, redness everywhere
the Blood of Christ, souls redeemed,
 love restored;

White again.

the phoenix

FEBRUARY

by: Patricia Magness

Burn your books
 and run all the way
 to the top of Grassy Ridge Bald.

Embrace the world
 and kiss the sky
 as you lean back on the wind.

Forget your job
 And ramble off
 where the first green of spring is pink.

Abandon words
 and breathe the sun
 before it turns to snow.

*the phoenix*Frozen 6th Sense

by: Eskimo

I hear, I see, I smell, I taste, I feel;
 One sense illusive yet remains, keeping
 The world in shroud of blank empty whiteness.
 I hear the sound of sob, laughter; and see
 The tear on cheek or radiant with smile's gleam
 The smell and taste of life's abundant spice
 Flavor all around me; I yet frozen
 At the very pith feel but feeling not, live
 But living not. Arctic land soul's province
 Now, Sun's inspiriting light upon another
 Shines, and I live the winter of thy love!

the phoenix

Dream of Persephone
by Heather Armstrong

When silence lies shattered in frosty despair
as the oak stands disrobed without shame,
She whispers her grief, slumb'ring on unaware—
waiting only return whence she came.

When brittle moonlight takes pause to reflect,
as the tears of the angels fall soft—
She welcomes the cold sterile blanket's effect
to dispel distant mem'ries aloft.

When all hoary madness relinquishes rule,
and the fetters melt slowly away—
She stretches her legs and drinks of his pool,
breathing life into old, ailing grey.

She lavishes kindness, but sighs with breath sweet,
fearing return and awaiting defeat.

the phoenix

April 10th
by Jody Sparks

Today I woke up cold under two thick blankets
And knew it was a wear-my-red-flannel-and-eat-frosted-cheerios-
for-every-meal-day.
I wished I was married already and
Hoped Josh would get some writing done.

I want to be soothed, or moved, or just warm.
I don't want to **do** anything today.

the phoenix

Beside the Bass Pond
by: Amy Wicks

Beside the Bass Pond is a bench
where I would sit, if it were mine.
And on the "porch"--another place
I would not hasten to recline
To see a view
of hill and flower, sky and trees,
to feel the sultry summer breeze
and have your presence next to me.

the phoenix

Traces of Shade in a Summer Girl
by Kevin Cox

A rain-sweetened summer of sunshine
Flows through one fall day's reminiscence. . .
Like two children we sit enthralled by the game.
Taking our turns and forcing fate with a dice roll.
Another game is played apart from our awareness.
We ignore the odds as fingers brush against hands,
Arm rests on arm,
Under the pretense of the first game.
July brings sun-soaked afternoons
Followed by evening shadows tautly drawn to the horizon.
I rest by the water pump, watchful eyes slyly spying
As you take the cup from the shaded shed wall.
You drink and pass the cup to me.
My hands feel the remnant of warmth where
The burning brand of your hands had been.
I place my parted lips where yours had sipped the water.
Only once removed from refreshment more cool and clear than liquid.
A drop, a dream tinged with shadowed love, falls from my mouth.
Later, almost under the awning of autumn.
After a game is completed for the evening,
Sleep speaks to me in a droning drawl
Until a voice cuts across the grain of my repose.
My eyes, half opened, slowly solidify the blurred lines of your face.
I see you seeing me,
Standing there where you hadn't been when I succumbed to sleep.
Perhaps you were drawn by my dream to cross the room,
To watch for my waking. . .
The contours, colored by time, weave away while your face fades in memory,
Now nearly as nebulous as your intentions, but the impression lingers.

September 24, 1996
by: Sara

Hurt, pain, confusion.
Smiles on the inside.
Tears on the outside.
Why can't you trust?
Why won't you trust?
I want to help.

But can I?

Will you let me love
YOU.

Love can heal.
Love can hurt.
You make me smile,
But you cause me pain.
Open up, don't hide.
Please,

Let me inside.

Seasonal Sonnets I
by: Stephen Harvey

In between my goodbye and your goodbye,
I overheard a stray train whistle blown
Across receivers from your end to mine;
And after I replaced the telephone,
Another call came falling from the sky
As if it were a second train unknown
To that first train, and offered more advice—
But I suppose I heard the same sound twice.

Was it that sound that made you pause instead
Of hanging up? The first goodbye was mine—
I thought the single whistle was a sign—
But I will never know if I have read
In between the lines another line
That you had tried to say but never said.

the phoenix

Seasonal Sonnets 2
by: Stephen harvey

What thing that tells the earth to still the flow
Of life in colored wood has made no flaw
by testing faith in all we've come to know;
but, still, this winter thing forgot to leave
the memory of green through white of snow,
and nature, by obeying its own law,
now keeps the thought of spring held up its sleeve.

Though green of leaves is gone before they go,
The conifers continue to relieve
The whitened world with colors that we know
will soon return when winter wakes to thaw.
What summers overlook, the winters show—
the dull evergreen we never saw—
and we will wait for winter to believe.

the phoenix

Exile
by Stephen Glass

I want to show you something
Among these gleaming heaps.
There is something of us, you and I,
In the rust and wear of ages,
In the way all men have moaned for love
Making monuments of their tongues.
Where are our tents and caravans
Beneath these warring stars and constellations?
To what depths will we make our sacred pilgrimage?
If we must be in exile from the heavens now,
Let down your hair,
Consolation, soft-shining cathedral.

the phoenix

Beyond This
by: Anne Acker

i

We are the insubstantial steam
Rising from God's cauldron,
And, as with all things seen. . .

All things seen, tasted, felt, and heard,
Numeral, formula, word,
All are expressions
Of an untouched essence.

This also provides a meaning—
Life exists as just a seeming.

ii

When every single fragment
That is part of who I am
And all that I have been,
When every moment I have spent
Is fashioned to its final shape
And finally, firmly put in place,

The picture complete, the problem done,
Death alone reveals the sum.

the phoenix

iii

If my heart is a cathedral,
I see through stained glass.
Life, Light, Right, All,
Each has

The hue
Given it by painted
Shapes, and I see tainted
Images of what is true.

Shaped by mortal or divine invention,
I see Truth in two dimensions,
And all that really matters
Is what is there when this glass is shattered.

iv

I have never seen pure Light,
Undisturbed by contaminating colors,
Shapeless and shaping,
Illuminating and blinding Reality.

I have not seen Light,
But, through the painted windows of my soul,
I have felt warmth,
And known fullness.

the phoenix

When the glass is broken,
 Each shimmering shard shattered,
 And the Sun pours into the empty shell,
 He will *not* be a stranger.

the phoenix

VOL

by: Sara

Moon-night highway glides by.
 Reflectors golden glimmer.
 To where am I going?
 Home?
 Anthropic fields beckon.
 Sleep awaits.
 Smokeless bar filled with class.
 Drown your sorrows in
 the golden glimmer.
 Hope, Mercy, and Love play.
 Music speaks.
 Soul awakens.
 Receive salvation from
 the golden glimmer.
 To where am I going?
 Home?
 Yes. Home.
 The golden glimmer beckons.

the phoenix

Nature's Way
by Jacob Sutherland

I am from a different age
and technology scares me.
I see a world of discontent
stretched out before me.
I live off this land and
scavenge for the existence which escapes me.
I eat it all, leaving nothing to chance,
no leftovers, it's nature's way.
I am a microwave Indian.

the phoenix

Wall Street Religion
by: Devon

I drove to Wal-Mart yesterday
And bought a brand-spankin'-new
Mr. Potato Head Jesus.

He's great.
I can put him together just the way i want him
And you can buy one of your own.

If I don't like that arm
That takes my money and gives to the poor,
I'll just make it another ear

So that he can listen even better
To all of my complaints and problems
And fix them all with the one arm that I left.

And if my Mr. Potato Head Jesus
Appears to frown at me
And all of my lust and greed,

Why that's no problem at all
I'll just yank out the mouth
And flip it upside down.

the phoenix

See, now it's a smile,
A gentle laugh,
To condone me and all that I do.

What's that?
You don't like the feet
That make your Jesus walk away into cities

Where those lazy shiftless good for nothings
Sit around and mooch off of you and me
And the rest of the hard Workers?

You can fix that.
Just pull the feet off of your Jesus
So he can't ever walk away from you.

Aren't they great?
I think I might just buy stock
In Mr. Potato Head Jesuses.

the phoenix

Better?
By Matt Good

Is it better to have
 than to hope
Is it better, truly, to
 have a bird in the hand

than two in the bush
 The race is fun to run
 but what becomes of
 the runner with the
 finish of the race

Trick:

to never stop running
to keep moving, hoping, hunting
searching

Key:

to do so without
total disregard for what is
gained

Therefore, run @ a pace

the phoenix

my love
Run @ a pace

Perhaps i shall one day catch up to
you and when i do
do not look for my back for it
will

not be found unless you
stop

no, look for my profile or a frontal
as i turn my attention to the reason for the
race, love.

the phoenix

X
a satire in 81 words
by: k.c.9.4.

Mother
You have fed my rage
And given birth to my
ennui.

Father
You have put me here
With nothing
In the giant crapper
of this world.
alone.

Parents
I want to kill you
for you have created
me
and
given me nothing
worth living for
no
hopes
no
dreams

the phoenix

only a horrible boredom
and indifference
which suits this
dying
(world).

I will sit
and contemplate
in the dark
where it's less dangerous
and complain
and
maybe
I will shoot myself.

the phoenix

Flagellant
by: Greg Hartley

"Blasphemy takes many forms! One of
which are you." The ostler spit ale
On his bib and sat down, peace said.
Humphrey glanced at his watch, licked his
Lips and left the pub, too self-consumed
With the drunkard's words to remember paying the tab:
Yet another charge.

"Filth," he murmured and slogged through
The street, muddying his priest's robes,
Shaded like a crow razing a forbidden crop,
Convicted yet content, reluctant to budge.
Time passed and mass came, absently for
Humphrey, who was intent on drinking up
Any leftovers and leaving his guilt
As a hound slinking home from abuse.
Blasphemy sagged through Humphrey's veins,
And his mind told him the ostler was insane.
The pub was opened to all, Christ beckoned,
He had entered; it was Divine ordination.
With a fogged mind, the priest fell asleep
And dreamed the following verse over and
Over, in a singsong, restless metronomy
*Curses and spoiled and spilled the ink,
Makes the Virgin Mary stink.*

the phoenix

*Lurches and crows betray the cloth
Is it Son of God or Son of Sloth?*

Cold sweat splashed a rapid, lidded eye, and
Humphrey awoke with a start, daisies
At the bedside overturned and water everywhere.
The sewing machine, where the priest
Mended his own collars, beckoned; another call.
And twenty minutes later Humphrey discovered
He had stitched a bloody seam up his
Left hand. Smiling at the pain
He dressed, careless of the stains,
And walked down the cluttered Browning
Street to the pub and went in.
The ostler was not there.

the phoenix

Passion's Fire & Confusion's Fog
by Brian Free

Passion's flames ambient prance - bewitching gleam
figures swirl, twirl, glide caught in mystic trance
all seem to move in haze of foggy dream.

Flows shamanistic cadence gentle stream
a torrent now, circling primitive dance
passion's flames ambient prance - bewitching gleam

Yet mind with fears, hopes, tears is all a' teem
desiring, but How? When? Kept in ignorance
all seem to move in haze of foggy dream.

Of cresting peaks radiant with golden beam
vision that cause flutters of exuberance
passion's flames ambient prance - bewitching gleam.

Each suffering soul its pain want to scream
silent lives behind mask of incognizance
All seem to move in haze of foggy dream.

Appear as lost character with no theme,
We live the paradox of this inhabitance:
Passion's flames ambient prance bewitching gleam;
All seem to move in haze of foggy dream!!

the phoenix

The Death of Pride
by: T.C. Patrick

Flocks of figment feathered beasts
A circle swarming tender prey
On tender flesh the birds make feast
Their blood-black beaks despise decay
 And I, the center of their savage play

Then piercing through this violent rage
A mocking, cackling, om'nous laugh
A man stands shaking an open cage
And in his right a budding staff
 Familiar feathers tucked crisply in his hat

Talons barbed like fishhooks lock
High-lifted, limp, my title tried
Released! Released upon the rocks
Reality the crags for lofty pride
 And truth is twice as sharp when twice denied.

the phoenix

Cassandra
by Stephen Glass

What of this vast chasm between us—
Dark spaces gouged out
By time's imperious hand?
What of these loose-winged symbols
We let fly between us—
So many doves & ravens
Sent out to try for footing?

I cannot alter these accidents &
Essentials.
Cannot communicate my bare being to you.

For this I have shaken w/ madness.
For this I have sat on the flats of my hands
In restaurants & chewed my tongue.

Cassandra,
Cassandra I
Share a grief w/ you.
Pour out Libations.
Raise up your voice.
This truth
Is passing between us.

*the phoenix**the phoenix*

Ringo
by: Jody Sparks

Our youngest rushed into the house in a frenzy to find Ringo. But when I entered, the only thing I could think was, My God, who left out the hamburger? I looked at my wife and said, "It smells like death warmed over in here." Before she could bring her face to full grimace our five year old was tugging at my wife's shirttail. Quickly trying to put on a more tender and motherly face, she turned to little Rosa. Rosa looked up and politely asked, "Why is Ringo all stiff and stinky?"

The tenderness immediately switched to motherly concern, and we all moved quickly to the living room. Poor Ringo, the lab we'd had for eleven years, the family companion that had his own place setting at the kitchen table and his own stocking hung by the chimney with care, was becoming one with the shape carpet he'd had too much respect to even pee on. What an indignity! I looked at my wife and little Rosa who clung to her mother and knew what my wife was thinking. Not only were my wife and I unprepared to tell her about death, we also didn't know how or even if we should explain that he'd been shot.

Ringo must have been lying there belly-up for about a week. We'd been gone two weeks—Disney World. I hoped the kids wouldn't think about the incident every time

we'd go to Disney World from then on.

I called Nicholas to me. At the time he was thirteen and seemed the least traumatized of the three. I told him to make sure the rest of the house was in order. He groaned something about the disgusting smell, rolled his eyes and waved his hands over his nose and face. He stomped off. I was going to be pissed off if the TV and VCR were missing.

On my way to the kitchen to call the next door neighbor, I noticed a week's worth of cereal bowls full of Purina spread out as if when Mr. McPhearson came over to feed Ringo he hadn't noticed the bowls weren't empty let alone the horrible stench. Cry old coot. I wanted to show my wife this bizarre occurrence in the kitchen, so I forced myself back into the thick living room to find her. She wasn't there, but Maria was.

Maria, our middle child, a strange case, was standing there with her mouth gaping open, staring, and frozen. She always did have the closest relationship to Ringo. She hadn't moved since we got home.

"Maria, honey," I said, "What are you doing?"

No response.

"Maria? Maria?" So, I shrugged and went my way to find my wife. She, Nicholas, and Rosa had all found their way back outside.

"Did you call Jim McPhearson?" my wife asked.

"Uh, no . . . no, I didn't."

"Oh, are you going to?"

"I thought I'd just walk on over. Why don't you and the

kids take the luggage back out to the van and go on over to Aunt Grace's for the night. I'll meet you there after I take care of . . . this."

Nicholas couldn't help himself. "Dad, please. I'll clean up Ringo. Just don't make us stay over there!"

"No, just go with your mother." Suddenly my wife's seeing the cereal bowls of dog food in the kitchen didn't matter anymore. "Maria's in the living room," I said.

So, off went my family to Aunt Grace's, and off I went to Jim's. He was a typical old codger. His mind was the first thing to go. He was just forgetful, very gentle and quiet, spent most of his time doing crossword puzzles and baking delicious apple pies. In fact, I was disappointed not to find one in the kitchen for our return. But, now could I not forgive this sweet old man—he'd probably just forgotten.

He opened the door with a gummy grin and asked how the trip was and if we'd see the electric parade again this years. He said he hoped we got off the newspapers and that Ringo had been a good dog.

"Well, actually, Jim, uh . . . yeah, I need to talk to you about that."

"What?"

"Ringo," I spoke a little louder.

"Oh, that ol' Ringo. What a rascally dog!"

"Jim, Ringo's . . . dead. He's been dead about a week I think."

"Dead? Ooooh."

"Yes, do you know what happened?"

"No. Come on in. Look, I got a pie in the oven. Maybe you'd like some?" He shuffled his way into the kitchen, and I followed.

"Well, Jim, did you notice anything . . . anyone coming to the house?" We sat down with our pie.

He was concentrating. "No, I don't think so," he finally answered.

"Are you sure Jim?"

"Yes, I'm sure. He was fine yesterday."

"I just don't get it." I threw up my hands. "Well, where's Laverne?" I thought that maybe his wife might have seen something.

"Oh, uh . . . well, now she's not here."

"Prayer meeting?"

"Yes . . . uh, no . . . well, no."

I looked at him, eyebrows curled. "Where is she?"

"Well, she's at the hospital."

"Oh, my God, is she okay? Why in the world didn't you tell me, Jim? Is it serious? You should've said something. We've been neighbors for years."

"No, no, not serious. Well, it's pneumonia, I guess."

"My God, we should go see her. Have you been to the hospital today?" I knew he didn't drive anymore.

"No." He looked lost as he said it.

"Well, let's go when we're done with our pie. We'll take some to her."

When we had finished, we walked towards the door. Jim kind of scratched his bald head and looked around a little like he was searching for something. As we were walking back to my house to get my Jeep, Mrs. Preene, Jim's neighbor on the other side, came running over to us waving one finger in the air and yoo-hooing in her monstrously shrill voice. She attacked Old Jim.

"I just wanted to tell you that there are awful, and I mean just awful things going around about your wife, Jim McPhearson. And far be it from me to gossip, but Mrs. Brill and I were talking and she just happened to mention to me that she saw your wife out, I think it was last Sunday afternoon, saw your wife out sunbathing completely naked, and I mean naked as a jaybird, and what could I possibly say to that old gossip except that I too had seen just after dark last Tuesday running around your yard chasing after that little shih tzu you have without one thread of clothes on. And she chased that dog clear into your yard, Mr. Moore," she glared at me. "Now I'm not trying to say anything, Jim McPhearson, you and I both know I'm a very Christian woman, but I just thought you might want to know."

The last part she said with very distinct spaces between each word. Of course, old Jim just stood there red-faced without a thing to say to Mrs. Preene. So after a very awkward silence, Mrs. Preene relaxed her pursed lips and let a very funny little noise out. "Oh lordy, there's Mrs. Wilhoite." I noticed she was out doing some gardening, and old gossip Preene never let a chance to tell Mrs. Wilhoite something spicy or otherwise go by. I, of course, didn't say a word about this on the way to the hospital. I too was embar-

"Yes, do you know what happened?"

"No. Come on in. Look, I got a pie in the oven. Maybe you'd like some?" He shuffled his way into the kitchen, and I followed.

"Well, Jim, did you notice anything . . . anyone coming to the house?" We sat down with our pie.

He was concentrating. "No, I don't think so," he finally answered.

"Are you sure Jim?"

"Yes, I'm sure. He was fine yesterday."

"I just don't get it." I threw up my hands. "Well, where's Laverne?" I thought that maybe his wife might have seen something.

"Oh, uh . . . well, now she's not here."

"Prayer meeting?"

"Yes . . . uh, no . . . well, no."

I looked at him, eyebrows curled. "Where is she?"

"Well, she's at the hospital."

"Oh, my God, is she okay? Why in the world didn't you tell me, Jim? Is it serious? You should've said something. We've been neighbors for years."

"No, no, not serious. Well, it's pneumonia, I guess."

"My God, we should go see her. Have you been to the hospital today?" I knew he didn't drive anymore.

"No." He looked lost as he said it.

"Well, let's go when we're done with our pie. We'll take some to her."

When we had finished, we walked towards the door. Jim kind of scratched his bald head and looked around a little like he was searching for something. As we were walking back to my house to get my Jeep, Mrs. Preene, Jim's neighbor on the other side, came running over to us waving one finger in the air and yoo-hooing in her monstrously shrill voice. She attacked Old Jim.

"I just wanted to tell you that there are awful, and I mean just awful things going around about your wife, Jim McPhearson. And far be it from me to gossip, but Mrs. Brill and I were talking and she just happened to mention to me that she saw your wife out, I think it was last Sunday afternoon, saw your wife out sunbathing completely naked, and I mean naked as a jaybird, and what could I possibly say to that old gossip except that I too had seen just after dark last Tuesday running around your yard chasing after that little shih tzu you have without one thread of clothes on. And she chased that dog clear into your yard, Mr. Moore," she glared at me. "Now I'm not trying to say anything, Jim McPhearson, you and I both know I'm a very Christian woman, but I just thought you might want to know."

The last part she said with very distinct spaces between each word. Of course, old Jim just stood there red-faced without a thing to say to Mrs. Preene. So after a very awkward silence, Mrs. Preene relaxed her pursed lips and let a very funny little noise out. "Oh lordy, there's Mrs. Wilhoite." I noticed she was out doing some gardening, and old gossip Preene never let a chance to tell Mrs. Wilhoite something spicy or otherwise go by. I, of course, didn't say a word about this on the way to the hospital. I too was embar-

the phoenix

rassed by Mrs. Preene.

At the hospital, Jim couldn't remember what room Laverne was in. So, I asked the woman behind the desk who showed us to room 126. I walked right in, bent over ready to kiss her sweet forehead. She was such a youthful old woman. It just wasn't like her to be ill. In fact, I couldn't imagine it. Maybe I'd been a father so long it seemed natural to kiss her forehead, like a cure, in fact. Once I did it she patted my hand and began chattering on like she always had. She must have been feeling better, I thought. Her hair was done—which is something I've always wondered why is important to women over 65—and her face was just aglow with life. She had flowers and balloons all around her. The TV was muted but the Roadrunner was on. Also, she had big fluffy Mickey Mouse slippers on that peeked out of the covers. Every once in a while she'd laugh in the appropriated places but all the time was talking to me about all the things she was thinking about. Jim sat there with his hands in between his knees concentrating heavily on the conversation.

Laverne chattered on. "I can't believe what our little Pixie was doing the other day. I'd just gotten her from the Fancy Fur Pet Grooming and they had tied that sweet little pink bow in her hair, and she was trying to get it out as she always does." Here she inserted a giggle, "And she must have gotten frustrated or dizzy or something and started running her head into the wall until she just bolted out the back door yipping up a storm. Well, it nearly scared Jim half to death. He was out back with his hunting rifle trying to sneak up and bag some of the squirrels that kept getting into the bird

the phoenix

feeder. He jumped straight up at Pixie's barking and nearly fired his gun into the house." She giggled again. "It was so cute. Do you remember that, Jim, honey?"

He nodded quite bashfully.

"Speaking of dogs," she said, "Jim told you I got bit by a dog the other day, didn't he?"

I didn't motion yes or no.

"Yes," she said, "right on my backside. Got stitches and everything. Well, that's another story, but it sure did take me by surprise. And Jim too, didn't it honey?" She laughed again. "So, here I am!"

I looked at Jim who now had his chin resting on his fists. He raised his eyebrows. Laverne went on to another subject, and I admit that I only half listened because I began to realize Jim's embarrassment by his wife. It hadn't been Mrs. Preene he was embarrassed by at all. It was Laverne.

I got up and began looking at her balloons and flowers. They were all from Jim or "Pixie," with a little paw on the card. I looked at Jim. "Pneumonia, hush Jim?" I said. He shrugged bashfully. "You can help me clean up Ringo when we get back home." I said it quietly and smiled. Jim smiled too.

On Your Wedding Day

(Love 666)

("get rid of the annoying sarcasm")

by: Brian Landrum—"Don't blame me, I voted for Willie Nelson"

He had changed shirts four times, hoping to whittle away all signs of Life. These business dinners were so awkward to begin with—why was everyone in the office treating this one like a "date"? "I can only hope she pretends to be as pleasant as I plan to be." He enjoyed talking to his mirror (but not really)—it knew him more intimately than any woman (or any human for that matter) ever had. Young Mr. Prufrock had learned well from his father.

She caked on the paint. I know business comes first, but seriously—would anyone ever want to see me without it? Hideous! So plain, so delicate, so feminine. "Sally, have I covered up my birthmark? Do my eyebrows look even?" Sally's replie: "Don't worry about it—you look gorgeous!" Amy knew she didn't mean it, but didn't want to offend Sally by pointing out her insincerity.

While Sally sat riveted to "Walker, Texas Ranger," Amy and Richard enjoyed their business (wink from their supervisor) meal at Shoney's.

They talked about business, the Internet, their jobs, and the night ended. It was almost what one would call a "magical evening."

Very close!

"Well—do you want to hear about my meal?" Amy asked Sall after returning to the apartment complex. "Just a second—I want to hear the weather first." After about twenty minutes, Sally broke open a Caffeine Free Diet Coke and sat down with Amy.

"So?"

"I . . . I guess I'm in love. He's an Accountant!"

Richard shut the door behind him, looked in the mirror, and placidly muttered, "Wow. This must be what love feels like." He looked in the mirror a few more times, and thought it through for two min-

the phoenix

utes. “Yeah, I guess that’s about as good as I can do. She’s a Computer Supplies Coordinator, and she seemed to seem pretty nice. Maybe she’ll marry me—I’ve been waiting too long anyway.” He glanced at his reflection in the mirror and nodded in agreement with himself.

Sally was satisfied to see the reception going smoothly (she still wished Amy would have just hired someone to do it. She was glad it was a December wedding—Mannheim Steamroller was ideal celebration music—you know, vague, not too hard, not too soft. And the decor—nothing more pleasing and acceptable than eggshell. The spontaneity of a dance was fortunately forgone by setting the gift table in the middle of the dancefloor. And that foolery with the wedding cake? Glad to see no one was in the mood for that. “I’ve never seen such a beautiful wedding. I should tape this or something.”

Time for Sally (being Amy’s best friend and all) to give the reception toast. “To Amy and Richard. May they enjoy their honey-

the phoenix

moon to Ft. Lauderdale, may they live lives of comfort and stability, and may we all be inspired by their love and passion.” Moderate applause filled the room, spawned by guests overcome with joy and emotion.

On the plane, Richard opened the forwarded email hard copy his colleague had given him for the special occasion. Inside the letter, the following had been typed: “On your wedding day, know that from now on you will share everything in common—everything but the beer!” “Well, I’ll be damned,” Richard sincerely chuckled to himself, “I think that’s the funniest thing I’ve ever read.” Struggling to control his laughter, he glanced over and grinned at his new wife. She was kind of attractive when she was asleep. “I hope her sense of humor is as good as mine.”

The Gift

by: Anne Acker

"Yes, ma'am," said Mr. Tollins, grinning broadly, "this here is one fine horse. You won't find one better."

The young lady to whom he happened to be speaking said nothing just then, only looked at the horse with a mysterious expression which the big man beside her took to be bewilderment. He proceeded to commend and recommend the horse to her, educating her patronizingly as to its many qualities and virtues for, of course, he was trying to sell it to her.

"And you're sure," she broke in, "that this horse is perfectly healthy?"

"Absolutely. I've raised some fine horses in my time, miss, if I may say so, and anything was wrong with this horse, I would know.

"Yes, I'm sure you would." Miss Fernsworth looked up and studied the man. She did not further examine the horse for she knew nothing about horses. She did, however, know something about people, and she was sizing up this particular person. She knew she was at his mercy, for even if something were wrong with the horse, she would never know it on her own, and she had not brought anyone with her. She had her own reasons.

Mr. Tollins met her gaze with a smile. He was also smiling to himself, which is quite a different thing altogether. For he had sized up Miss Fernsworth as well. He *knew* that she was completely at his mercy. Imagine, a young woman like her, with no knowledge of horses, trying to buy one. He was a little uncomfortable at the idea of cheating her, but, after all, business was business. He glanced at the horse's bad leg. He couldn't imagine why someone hadn't insisted on coming with her. Her family ought to have more sense.

Miss Fernsworth saw the glance and followed it to the horse's leg. She had a sudden flash of understanding and had Mr. Tollins looked up sooner, he might have seen an almost impish smile flicker on her face—a smile which she so instantly and thoroughly destroyed that, when Mr. Tollins did look up, all he saw was the previously mentioned mysterious expression.

"All right, Mr. Tollins," Miss Fernsworth pulled herself up to her full height. "I'll take the horse. One of the servants will be by to pick it up tomorrow.

And I can't thank you enough for all your help."

"You're most welcome," said Mr. Tollins ingratiatingly.

"I'm sure I am," answered Miss Fernsworth drily. And then much to Mr. Tollins surprise, she added, "By the way, out of exactly how much am I being swindled?"

Mr. Tollins was very much taken aback and appeared to be offended. "Miss Fernsworth, I assure you."

But she broke in "Oh, don't worry, Mr. Tollins. I never back out of an agreement. I assure you I have every intention of purchasing the horse. I was just curious as to what exactly was wrong with it. You see I want it as a present for a cousin I've always hated. He is the horseman. He also has the same opinion of women that you do, so when the horse does fall down under him, he'll just pat me on the head and take me out to dinner. Well, we'll see what happens to it. I only hope I'm around to see the look on his face. Oh, by the way, if what the horse has happens to be contagious, I'll pay you double!"

And with that she smiled and waved her farewell to the usually glib Mr. Tollins who stood and watched her drive off in rare dumbfounderment.

“Excerpt from a forthcoming novel”
by: Devon

By the time he was twenty-eight, Hugh S. Morehouse was worth well over four million dollars. He owed the entire fortune to two individuals—Professor Amin and his friend Bill Lester. Professor Amin had been Hugh’s biochemistry professor at Huntsville. Professor Chung Amin, the son of a Chinese mother and an Arab father, had been raised in Austria and was just plain hard to understand. Bill Lester was perhaps the one person at Huntsville who worked harder at being lazy than Hugh.

The idea had actually been spawned in Hugh’s mind way back in his first year of college during a lecture by Dr. Amin. As the short darkskinned slant-eyed man droned on in that weird accent of his, Hugh noticed that Brian had dropped off in La-la land. Unfortunately for Brian, so did Dr. Amin.

“Meesta Lestah,” he droned, “eggzackly what think you to do?”

Bill groggled out of his sleep, cheek wet from a puddle of spit, and head pocked like a waffle iron from the coarse white sweater he used as a pillow. Lounging back in his chair, Hugh thought to himself how nice it would be to have a more comfortable way to sleep in class. Somewhere deep within the recesses of his feeble brain, sparks began to fly as long forgotten, never oiled gears began to grind. At that moment, the first pieces of the Doze-E-Dry and the Pillow in the Sleeve fell into place.

That was Hugh’s graduation gift from his parents—the

money to set up his business. He immediately cut Brian a fourth of all profits to help him design his idea. The final products were amazingly simple. After several experiments, Brian hit on the simple idea of sewing a small pillow into the sleeve of a baggy sweater, providing an easy nap spot at any time of day. They test marketed the Pillow in the Sleeve in the southwest corner of Illinois. It sold like moonshine in a dry county, but as much as everyone liked the idea, it was doomed from the start. After selling only five hundred Pillow in the Sleeves, Hugh found himself sitting in a courtroom. An old man with a mole almost in the center of his bald head opened the testimony.

“Well, Yer Honor, seems like this here Pillow in a Sleeve’s just not good fer us old folk. Y’see, it just makes us fall asleep in all the wrong places.”

The old man was followed by the chief of police, himself long past the age he should have retired. He reported how ever since the Pillow in the Sleeve had worked it’s way into the market, the number of traffic accidents in the population aged 65 or more had nearly tripled. “Your Honor,” he judged, “in my opinion, the Pillow in the Sleeve is the next tobacco industry. It’s your responsibility to stop this right now, right here, or else this thing’s going to cost the taxpayers a bundle.” Hugh had to suck it up, pay the damages and agree never to market his idea again.

The only thing that saved Hugh was that his father was his lawyer. “And remember,” he finished to the jury, “most of them don’t need to be driving anyway. My client has done his community a service.”

It was the Doze-E-Dry, however, that was the real root of Hugh's fortune. "It was such a simple idea," he later thought to himself, "it should have come right after the wheel."

The Doze-E-Dry was nothing more than a bowl shaped piece of plastic. It came equipped with a strap, and it fit comfortably around the chin. Hugh himself promoted the invention—he starred in the first commercial for it. ". . . Just snap it on," he said, "and you've got an instant drool catcher. No more embarrassing puddles. And it's yours for just \$9.95." The first batch of five thousand were snapped up by college so quickly that they had to make more. Taking Brian's advice, Hugh authorized two different sizes—the smaller Monday version which had to be emptied every fifty minutes, and the Tuesday version which lasted for at least an hour and a half.

Hugh and Brian made so much money off the Doze-E-Dry that they invested in real estate, which is where most of Hugh's fortune came from. The Doze-E-Dry could have been an empire in itself had it not been for the administrations of several colleges around the country. They had no problem with their students sleeping through classes. "After all," spoke one leading administrator, "as long as we get our money, we don't care what they do." The problem was that the second largest purchasing group was tenured professors. And when professors started sleeping through class, complaints started rolling in. Leading the crusade against the Doze-E-Dry was, ironically, Huntsville College, whose own Professor Amin had fallen victim to the cruel device.

Dr. Amin had started as one of the largest supporters of

Hugh's inventions. In fact, he enjoyed his distinction as one of the one's who had helped inspire the creation. One Tuesday, though, right in the middle of Biology, the fifteen students had woken to a shrill shriek. Dr. Amin lay on the floor, his once yellowish face now a sickly shade of blue. They rushed him to the hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival, presumably from a heart attack. None of the students, of course, could verify this, for they had all been asleep. Rob, the coroner, however, disagreed with the hospital's original diagnosis. He took one look at Dr. Amin and stated, much to the surprise of everyone, that he had drowned. He was so certain that he refused to even do an autopsy. When the doctors at the hospital performed their own autopsy, they found that Dr. Amin's heart was in perfect condition and that his lungs were filled with fluid.

"How," the hospital coroner asked him later, "did you possibly know that?"

"Easy," said Rob. "It was Tuesday."

"What in the world has that got to do with anything?" The dumbfounded hospital coroner asked.

"Oh come on. You can figure that out. You knew Dr. Amin well enough to know how difficult it was to communicate to him sometimes. It was Tuesday and he was wearing the Monday version of the Doze-E-Dry. Obviously, he hadn't understood the difference. Well, he must have fallen asleep and then about an hour later, 'slurrrrp' a deep breath and he drowns in the buildup of his own spit."

the phoenix

The Best Thing For a Man

By: Josh Mugele

Many years ago there was a bus driver in our city, a small, timid man, named Julian Ames who was very feeble and, for the most part, harmless. Julian rarely spoke to anyone on his route, just bobbed his head like an old man, though he was barely fifty, but, for the most part he kept to himself, having a weak heart. When he'd come home from his job driving buses his wife would have his supper waiting for him, tremendous meals with many courses, with candles or flowers on the table, and she'd gently remove his jacket and ask about his day. He'd just nod his head, little strands of hair bouncing playfully, or whisper with a gulp, "Fine, fine, my day was fine." The way he moved stiffly, like he had rusted hinges, and the way he spoke softly, if at all, Julian seemed, as he no doubt believed, to have very few days remaining. One would have thought to see him on his bus that he lived in fear of catching a terrible disease from everyone he spoke with. Even in the presence of a Van Gogh or of an attractive woman you would have thought that Julian would have preferred to cover his mouth with a handkerchief and look away. He drove hunched over with his arms circling the wheel and his pale yellow face thrust out so that it was almost pressed against the window, wetting his lips nervously and occasionally slipping his eyes between the mirrors and the

the phoenix

change-box.

But for every person there is some factor which motivates him and gives him reason from day to day to go on living, and for Julian Ames it was his terrible fear of heart attacks, having seen his father die, many, many years before this story begins, clutching at his chest. If the bus lurched suddenly, or if he tripped climbing the steps, as often happened, or even if he laughed too hard at an old man's joke, he would fling his hand to his heart, and his eyes would grow wide with terror. Sometimes he would remain with his hand cupped on his chest for hours as if he was holding his heart in. He would try to calm himself by loudly humming (usually out of tune) old hymns, though he was by no means religious, or by mumbling bits of love poems he had once recited to his wife. His passengers worried about him, of course, they would wrinkle their foreheads and chew on their knuckles when they saw him gasping for breath or trying to steady his hands. Sometimes someone would pat him on the shoulder or a young woman would touch his arm as she climbed aboard. "At least he has his job to keep his mind off things," they'd say when the subject came up, and they'd shake their heads sadly.

Julian would try to see the cardiologist regularly, at least three or four times a year, and he'd treat his visits with great ceremony. On those mornings he'd inspect himself formally in front of the tall bedroom mirror, patting the hair on the sides of his head and cleaning out his ears with his little finger, and he'd dress himself carefully in his stiff, white shirt and his thick brown tie, one of only two neckties that he owned. He'd even wear his old, brown suit-

the phoenix

coat that smelled faintly of mothballs and would tuck a yellow handkerchief into the breast pocket. He'd walk to the doctor's office with his eyes on the sidewalk, occasionally leaning on lamp-posts or mailboxes or even, sometimes, people for balance, and once he'd arrived, he'd stop inside the doorway and glance around frantically as if, just for a moment, he'd forgotten where he was. The nurses and receptionists would roll their eyes and glance quickly at one another when they saw him standing there pulling on his tie, but Julian would ignore their looks, or perhaps he wouldn't even notice them. He'd shuffle nervously to the desk, and rubbing his ear and clearing his throat, he'd explain quietly about his heart and beg to see the doctor. Sometimes he would even cry unashamedly like a child, choking on his sobs, until they took pity on him and led him to the back.

In the examination room he'd pace around the table and wring his hands and roll his eyes until the doctor arrived. When he'd have to undress, his lips would tremble and his fingers would hesitate at each button as if he was suffering a terrible indignity (except when his heart was involved, he was usually a very reserved man, blushing at the mention of anything vaguely immodest). Julian's hands were white and fragile, but large, even too large for his bony arms. His eyes were small and black and jumpy, and his nose jutted sharply out from between them. He had very little hair, even his eyebrows were white and wispy, and the top of his head was fragile and speckled like a bird's egg. By the way he would sit on the table in his underwear with his legs dangling above the floor, small and frightened, one might have easily been reminded of a

the phoenix

chicken.

Usually as the doctor moved his stethoscope around his chest mumbling "hmm" or "uh-huh" as doctors do, Julian would sit quietly, taking deep breaths as he was told. But occasionally, he would lose control and grab the doctor's wrist and ask him urgently, "What is it? Tell me, doctor, what's wrong with me?" The question was frantic, even demanding, Julian's high pitched voice was probably louder than he'd intended, but the doctor was a patient man. "Nothing's wrong," he'd tell Julian and gently pat him on the arm. "Your heart's fine." But Julian would shake his head as if he didn't understand. "It's a mistake," he'd mumble and paw at the doctor, "a terrible mistake. You've got to check it again." He'd then explain how his father had died young, and he'd stab his fingers at his heart and moan that he could feel it seesawing behind his ribs.

No one who knew him could doubt that the poor man genuinely feared for his life, but even the most generous people would look at the floor or play with their fingernails when Julian stumbled into the waiting room, pale and trembling, and when he sat down, sobbing and sniffing loudly, they'd give him disapproving looks and harumph sternly. His antics, as one of his passengers called them, were tiresome, even annoying. Even his wife, who was by nature very patient and loving, being a devout Christian, would throw her hands up at him and would spend many hours kneeling in the closet, weeping and praying. Sometimes when Julian got home she would be sitting on the couch with her arms around her knees, sobbing (he wouldn't notice the cups and saucers set out on the

coffee table from where the pastor had visited and sat, stroking her fingers) with great big tears rolling down her fat cheeks and plopping on her breast. "Your problem is you think too much," she'd yell at him, weakly accusing. "Why, you don't even believe in God anymore." Julian would hesitate for just a moment, his eyes blinking slowly as if thinking about her words, then he would dig in his pockets or shuffle frantically to the medicine cabinet for his pills.

On one particular afternoon, it was summer and too hot for people or even dogs to move about too much. Julian was driving an empty bus, lazily clutching the wheel (he would have probably been more cautious if he had known what he was in for) and quietly humming something that sounded a little like "Blessed Assurance." It should be mentioned here that Julian had never had an accident or even a serious incident on his bus, being a very careful driver as was suitable for his condition. As a matter of fact, Julian's route ran mainly through residential neighborhoods and the old downtown business section past a few local restaurants, some pawn shops, and a very seedy bar, and it kept him away from the newer part of town where they'd recently built the mall and where traffic was usually very heavy. But on this afternoon, maybe he was tired from the sun, his eyes drooping as if he was half asleep, Julian nearly ran over a blind man who had stumbled off the sidewalk in front of General Cho's Chinese Restaurant.

Julian had to step suddenly on the brakes, a surprising action for a man normally so timid, to avoid hitting the bum, who he just

now realized was blind from the way he swung his arms around for balance and from his eyes, caked shut with dirt. He was fat and, though the days were warm, wore an olive coat that was ragged and had grease stains on the front. His beard was wild, tangled and long enough to belong to a hermit, and might have once been white, but was now dirty yellow. Julian winced, his knuckles white around the wheel, and he urgently hummed a few faltering notes, trying to remember where he had left off.

The blind man, apparently unaware of the danger, laughing and talking to himself, stretched his hands out to the bus as if he was calming a nervous horse and edged his way around the front. He stood against the door with his grubby fists placed on the glass and grinned almost suspiciously through his beard like a toothless madman. Julian, having no other choice, reached to open the door, though it seemed to cause him pain, and the blind man climbed aboard, hauling himself up to Julian's level with the railing.

When he reached Julian, who by this time was cowering as far back in his seat as he could, the old man stretched out his hands and flopped them clumsily like fish onto Julian's face. He groped about roughly trying to feel the bus driver's features like a blind man on TV would, laughing and biting his lips the whole time (Julian endured the whole thing like an ancient king, rigid and powerless), and then he turned and, edging his enormous belly around the change box, stumbled back to a seat.

"Crazy," Julian whispered tremulously, "that old man's drunk or crazy." He stabbed his hand into his pocket, hunting for his pills or maybe for a handkerchief to mop the sweat that was

the phoenix

building on his forehead. And then, as people will do in such situations, Julian tried to explain the old man's behavior. "Theatrics, a silly joke," he said and reached to close the door. He checked the mirrors and started to drive again.

After a moment the old man, probably not getting many chances to tell his story, spoke up. "I wasn't always blind, you know," he bellowed out suddenly.

"What?" Julian whispered hoarsely as if recovering from a great shock. He placed his fist on his chest and looked up into the mirror above his head. The old man was wedged back into his seat, tugging on his beard with his meaty hands. The way he nodded his head up and down made him look suspicious, as if he was looking the bus over.

"Blind," the old man rumbled again, apparently bothered that he had to repeat himself. "Since birth. I haven't always been blind."

"Oh," Julian said.

The blind man leaned forward in his seat and cupped his hands in front of him almost as if pleading for something. "No, you see, it happened all at once."

Julian pursed his lips and tilted his head as if considering, but he didn't dare speak lest the old man take it as a sign to continue.

"It had to happen," he thundered on to Julian's great distress. "I mean, it was the way it had to be." He tried to pull himself out of the seat, but he was too fat and his belly caught on the back of the seat in front of him.

the phoenix

"Look," he said and rubbed his forehead, "when I was much younger, my mother used to read to me from the family Bible. Don't get me wrong, this is no sermon, but there was one verse I always remembered." The old man raised one hand like an orator.

"*The best thing for a man,*" he quoted, "*is that he eat and drink and tell himself that his work is good.*" He laughed sharply like a bark.

"... *that he tell himself that his work is good,*" he said again.

Julian fumbled to open his side window. The air was thick and hot and difficult to breathe. The sweat was starting to soak through his shirt under his arms.

"That's what I did, you understand," the old man quickly added, stumbling over his words. "I convinced myself that life was good – got married just out of college, worked my way through law school, and I worked hard, gave my family everything they needed." He coughed loudly and bent his head. It seemed as if he was about to cry. Julian stared intently out the window and opened and closed his mouth like a gasping fish. The wind made little wisps of hair stick up on the top of his head.

"But, you know," the blind man continued hoarsely, "it's not true, about the best thing for a man. Though, you do what you can. You tell yourself that life is good, that it makes sense, most of all that God is in control and that everything you do and everything that happens is for a reason. But, it's like," the old man paused, "it's like all those people that were thrown down in that cave. Did you ever hear anything about that?" He summoned his strength and hoisted

the phoenix

her hand and said, very compassionate, of course, 'What a comfort it must have been to know that your family never gave up hope and prayed every day for your safe return' Well, the woman looked at the camera with her bulbous eyes – they weren't used to the light by that time. 'Hope?' she said, if I remember right – her voice was very foreboding – and she raised her hand to her eyes. 'Don't you understand? All we have in life is this imp on our backs, and he's screaming the truth at us night and day. "Nothing really matters," he says. "It's all vanity, vanity." We can *hope* not to hear him, cover our ears and pretend he's not there, but in the end he gets through.'"

Julian wiped his eyes. They were red and, to his embarrassment, he started crying. "It's not true," he mumbled weakly. "A cruel lie."

"No," the blind man suddenly surrendered and flopped into his seat. He smiled sadly. "A joke, nothing more. But I make a point. Surely you see why I had to do what I did?" He ran his fingers through his beard.

"You've got to have," Julian started and whimpered, terribly desperate. "What about love?" He offered quickly, but he obviously wasn't aware of what he was saying.

But the blind man raised his head. "Love?" he asked softly.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean . . ." You could see Julian's pulse just beneath the skin at his temples. He had to stop the bus, sweat trickling into his eyes.

"Now you understand," the blind man started hesitantly.

"What was I supposed to do? I loved my wife and my children – I

the phoenix

was a good man, for Christ sake. I worked hard for them. How was I supposed to know that love was merely an illusion like everything else – that at the dawn of humanity the wisest of our ancestors created this concept to help us get along? When you realize a thing like that like I did, that after twenty years . . . well, I did what I had to, you see." The blind man shook his head and spoke deeply like one of the dread prophets. There was no doubt now that he was insane. "With a pair of scissors I put out my own eyes. Reality was a false promise – a lie, a terrible lie."

"Oh, God," Julian moaned. His fingers scratched his seat belt loose and he stumbled into the aisle gasping for air. "Love," he whispered, but he was delirious, of course, his heart on the verge of stopping.

the phoenix

this is the age of absalom
sad suburban prophets who never sleep
this is the age of absalom
hovering over the slag heaps, hanging

someone said your mother was dead in the sea
dragged over drifts and reefs
someone said a lot of things about your father
someone said no one knows

someone said a lot of things
someone said a lot
and all they said was
doo doo doo, da da da

sleep your slaggy sleep
slaggy you sleep sleep
loupy saggy speels reel
sour sleep slayee plggy

E
P
i
L
O
G
u
e

