FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

The Phoenix
The Writers? Collective
978-1-932133-40-0
(August 31, 2004)

Like *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* or Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, this Victorian novel is replete with plot twists, years—long detours, providential meetings, villainy, and a great deal of drama. It differs from most other Victorian novels in that the main characters who meet and fall in love are both men, one an adopted son with a dark secret and Dickensian background who has taken on a new identity, and the other an uptight doctor with a strong religious background.

Kit St. Denys, who began life as Jack Rourke, is an up-and-coming actor in London. He has gone from poverty and abuse at fourteen when he fatally stabs his abusive father, to riches when he is adopted by a man who introduces him to the world of the wealthy and the theatre. Nick Stuart is a troubled man who becomes estranged from his strict, unforgiving father when he goes off to medical school. Although his father is also a doctor, he is unwilling to allow his son to step beyond the small village and turns his back on Nick when he leaves home. Kit and Nick meet after one of Kit's critically acclaimed performances and, from there, they begin a troubled but madly-in-love relationship that takes many years to resolve.

Nick's religious beliefs cause him the deepest pain in loving Kit: "He loved Kit in the way God meant him to love a woman. It was as simple and as soul-damning as that." While this problem should have been enough to doom their relationship, Kit has demons of his own, never able to shake the nightmares of his father's abuse, nor of the night he left him for dead. "The old man wrestled with him. Seized his hand. Forced it down upon…Michael's rotting flesh…His hands sank into soft eyes, into putrefying brain."

And yet, Kit and Nick persevere through numerous reversals of fortune, years of estrangement, entanglements, and madness in a "snake pit" even Joan Crawford would find disheartening. Those who enjoy historical fiction and Victorian novels will become enthralled with *The Phoenix*. The author fulfills the implied promise to bring all the subplots together in a logical and satisfying resolution at the end of the novel. The main characters and supporting cast are fully developed and believable, and like any good Victorian novel, the villain is one who can

be booed and hissed off stage, without being melodramatic.

This is Sims's first novel, which she originally published as an electronic book, after a lifetime of raising children and educating herself by reading everything from forensic medicine to Latin, comparative religion to gay history, biographies to classic literature. She is currently working on an historical novel about Alexander Hamilton. This writer's imagination and delight in creative wordplay will take her satisfied readers everywhere they want to go.