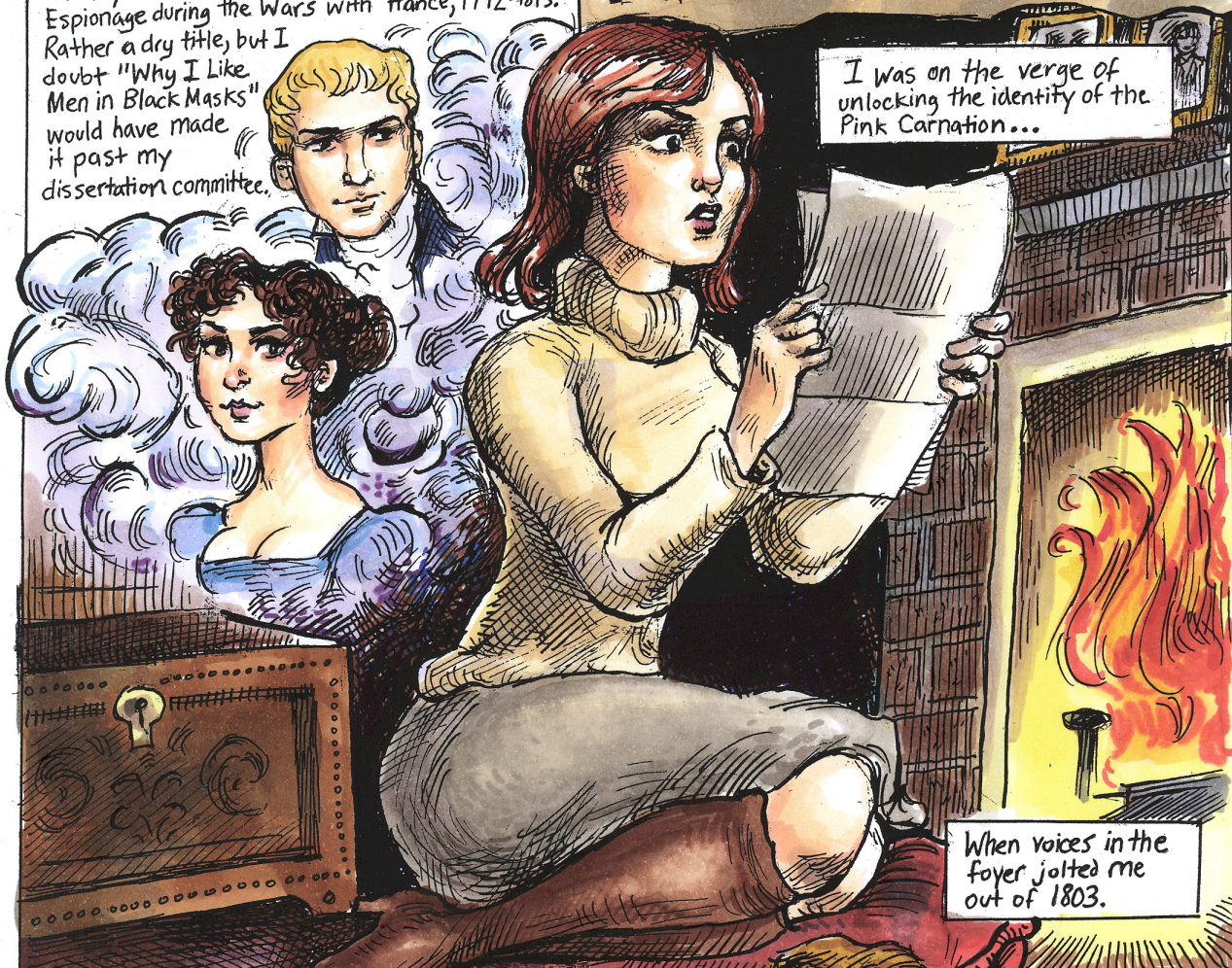


In October 2003, I was on the trail of two of history's most elusive spies, the Purple Gentian & the Pink Carnation, desperately searching for material for my doctoral dissertation: "Aristocratic Espionage during the Wars with France, 1792-1815." Rather a dry title, but I doubt "Why I Like Men in Black Masks" would have made it past my dissertation committee.

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE PINK CARNATION

I was on the verge of unlocking the identity of the Pink Carnation...



When voices in the foyer jolted me out of 1803.

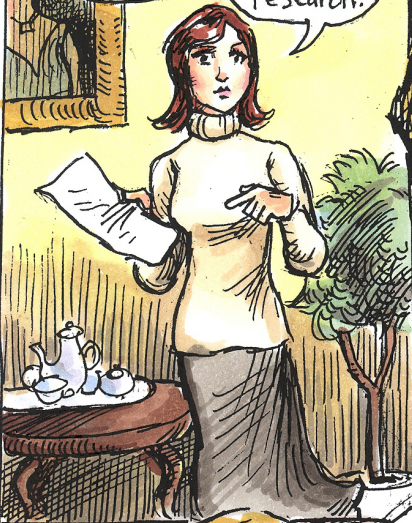
Who...?
What...?

Hi, I'm Elo—

Who said you could look at these?



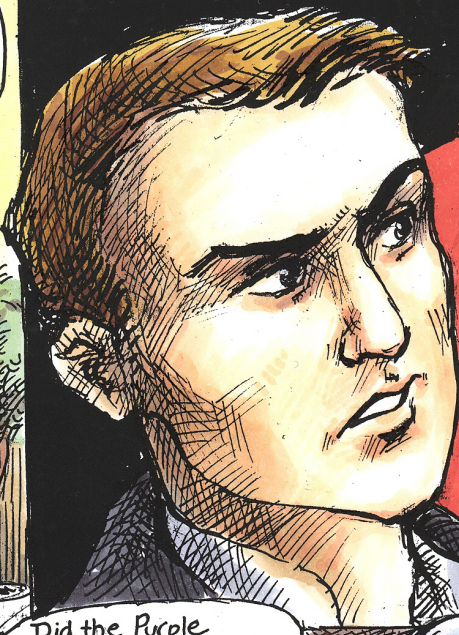
Who gave me? Oh, these! Mrs. Selwick-Alderly said I could look at these papers for my dissertation research.



I'm getting a Ph.D. From Harvard.

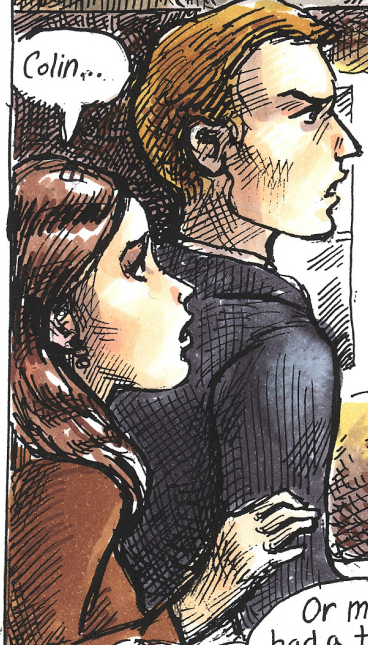
I don't care if you're David-bloody-Starkey. These papers are PRIVATE.

Why? What is it you don't want me seeing? What are you so afraid of?



Did the Purple Gentian sell out to the French?

Colin...



Or maybe he had a thing for women's underwear?

Or maybe it's the PINK CARNATION you don't want me finding out about?

HA! I've got it! The Pink Carnation was... FRENCH!



Will Colin kiss Eloise or kill her? Or let her into the family archives? STAY TUNED...

At the Tuileries Palace, Amy is in pursuit of the elusive Purple Gentian... but will danger find her first? And by danger, we mean Lord Richard Selwick...



Richard, these English women! They lack all the social graces. The boredom you must have endured, sharing a ship with them. I feel for you, my friend.

How long do you intend to keep your head at that angle, Amy?

Is Lord Richard still looking at me?

Not at all. Miss Balcourt—the brunette—is surprisingly well-read.

Let me get this straight. If you pretend you can't see him, he can't see you?

Exactly!

Jane, the man is a traitor!

Ah, a—how do you call them?— a bluestocking.

Yet.

You don't know that.

GIRLS! It is not polite to whisper!

No. An Original. Assuredly an Original.



Mme. Bonaparte, may I present to you Miss Amy Balcourt, Miss Jane Wooliston, and Miss Gwendo-

JOSEPHINE!!



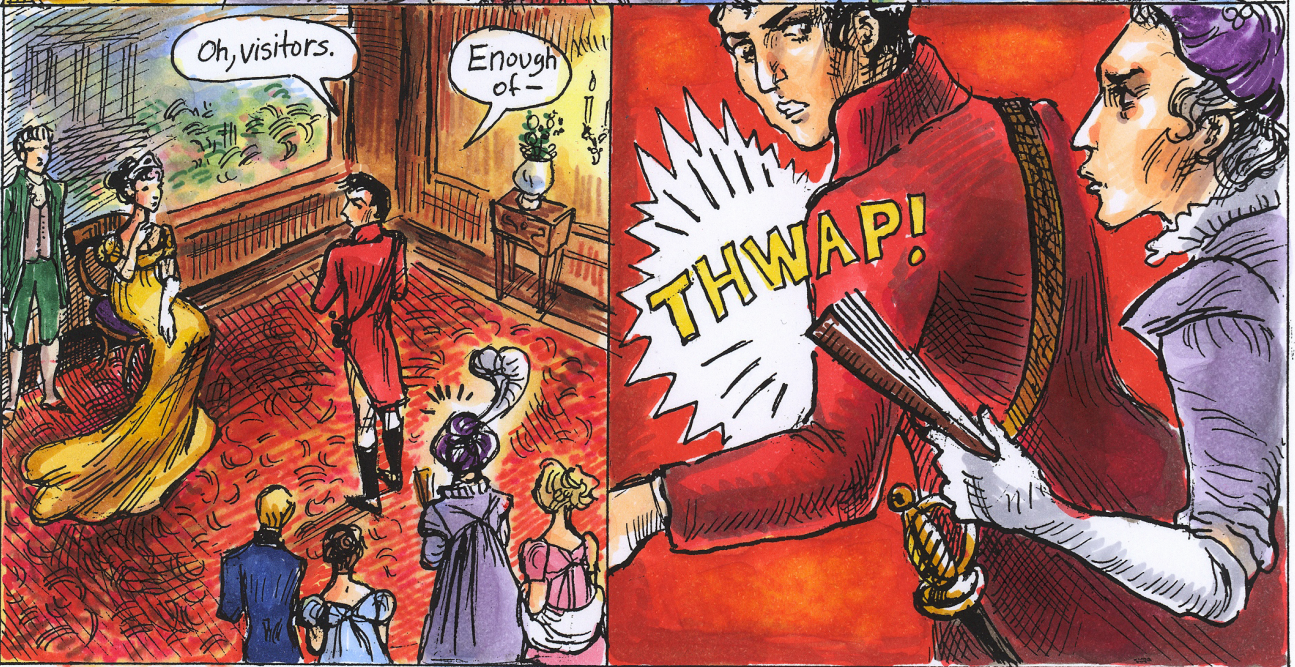
I DO wish you wouldn't shout so, Bonaparte.

SMACK

Urk!

Steady there. It's just the First Consul.

You would know!



Oh, visitors.

Enough of-

THWAP!

SIR! Take your hand out of your jacket! It is rude and ruins your posture. A man of diminutive stature needs to stand up straight!

An assassination attempt!!

No, no, it's just Miss Gwen!



While we are speaking, sir, this habit you have of barging into other peoples' countries without invitation — it is most rude! I will not have it! You should apologize to the Dutch and the Italians at the first opportunity!

But the Italians, they invited me!

That may well be, but your behavior upon entering their country was inexcusable!



So much for Boney! Right, Lord Richard?

Uh, Lord Richard?

If you were invited to someone's home for a weekend, would you re-organize their domestic arrangements & seize the artwork from the walls?

I thought not!



Will Amy find the Purple Gentian? What sort of skullduggery is the handsome — but dubious — Lord Richard engaged in? And will Miss Gwen prevail on Bonaparte to mend his manners? Read on to find out...

Paris, 1803.
The Hotel de
Balcourt--
Midnight.

All was quiet. Except...



Balcourt might not be the brightest frog in the pond, but even he wouldn't store incriminating papers in his desk...

Then where WERE they?

There's paper in there!

SHAKE SHAKE



Who's there?

Um... do you think you could put me down?



Don't worry! It's just me. OUCH!

Just me?

Oh, blast! My hem's caught!

May I enquire as to what you were doing under that desk?



Don't you think it would be rather foolish of me to answer that question?

Waiting for you, you ARE the Purple Gentian-- aren't you?

Only if you fear I might have the secret police hidden behind these curtains. See? No Fouché!





How very reassuring. Excuse me—



You're not planning to leave! I've been under that desk for ages, waiting to speak to you!



Why?

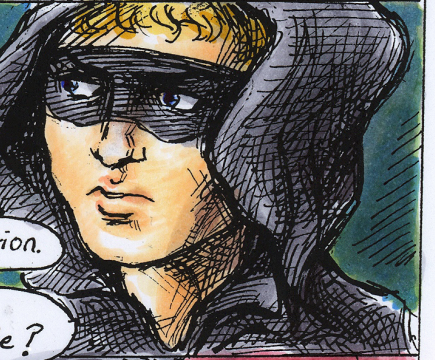


I want to help you.

HELP me?

I could be a great help to you! I have an entrée into the palace—I'm not squeamish & I'm excellent at disguise and—

NO. Out of the question.



Is that so unreasonable?

At least give me a trial. Let me do something to prove myself. All I ask is one chance.



Yes it is. You are a girl.

That's not exactly an original observation. And besides, I don't really see what that has to do with the matter at hand.



It has EVERYTHING to do with the matter at hand.

Is it espionage the Purple Gentian has on his mind? Only the next chapter will tell...