Crimson “Bodice-Rippers”
From lawyering to a literary life

Of course their hook was “Harvard student writes bodice-ripper,” says Lauren Willig, A.M. ’03, J.D. ’06. And of course it worked: the publisher’s strategy attracted “all sorts of media attention” to her novel The Secret History of the Pink Carnation.

Other lucky circumstances helped to make that 2005 debut a hit, like the cresting popularity of chick lit, Jane Austen spin-offs, and stories that switched between eras. Willig’s historical romance, its chapters shifting between past and present England to pursue two plots, had traces of all these trends. The historical half tells the story of a pair of lovers in the League of the Pink Carnation—a ring of aristocrat-spies, led by the mysterious Jane Wooliston, who serve their country during the Napoleonic Wars. Historian-heroine Eloise Kelly, an American abroad in search of fulfillment professionally mounted objects started out as planters. Even in his dermatology practice—which enables his ceramics habit, and brings structure to his life and human contact into his day—Adams is most excited when he gets to identify and classify plants (fungal infections) and animals (his favorite diagnosis—scabies).

His devotion to nature does not always see returns: efforts to grow vegetables on the farm have been stymied by New Hampshire’s unforgiving climate, tomato hornworms, and a mischievous cadre of foxes, deer, and one “happy little woodchuck.” But the naturalist-at-heart takes an evenhanded interest, if not a certain glee, in what other people might consider dark, disappointing, or gross: all of it is part of the natural process. Glazing, too, is a notoriously fickle process; Adams has been described as “fearless” in his approach. Equanimity helps, in this art as in life. With another small smile, he says he likes the hornworms better than the tomatoes, anyhow.

~OLIVIA SCHWOB

In some sections of the installation, pieces appear in grid formation (left); in others (center), they seem to burst free. One sculpture (right) acts as a kind of doorstop, greeting visitors from the ground.

Lauren Willig and two of her stand-alone works of historical fiction: That Summer (2014) and The Other Daughter (2015).
Ten years and 14 books later, Wilig is cheerfully matter-of-fact when describing her work and how it’s structured, marketed, and read. “Pink was very much a product of a certain moment in time,” she reflects. “Everything was light, and frivolous, and slightly silly….I personally could not write that book now, and even if I did, I don’t know if I could sell it now.” To her, romance novels are workaday objects, more artisanal than art. “The same way that you find that really beautiful furniture, that was designed for everyday use, winds up in the Victoria & Albert, you find that really beautiful run-of-the-mill run-of-the-mill novel and read. ”

Many aspiring writers dream ardently about publication; Wilig dreamt urgently. When she was nine, Simon & Schuster rejected her manuscript, and “I was just totally devastated, because I was going to be in double-digits next year! I was going to be old.” At the end of her second year of Harvard’s graduate program in history, she felt again that “This is now or never, make or break”—and so after sitting her general exams, she resolved to use the summer to write fiction. “I needed to do it before that sort of historical voice in my head was entirely dead. My characters were starting to tire of the historical voice in my head was entirely dead. My characters were starting to tire of being me. I needed to do something different.”

Readers might be struck by the similarities between the author and her narrator, Eloise—both are alumnae of an all-girls Manhattan private school (Chapin), with an academic interest in espionage and a taste for sleek shoes—but Wilig chose a different specialty at Harvard (Tudor and Stuart, not Regency), and on her research year in England, did not stumble on a pristine and overabundant cache of old documents. Instead she discovered that she would rather practice law in New York City than be a professor anywhere else, and decided to follow what she calls a family tradition of “lawyers who have (or will) Jewish grandchildren.”

As Wilig started her first year of Harvard Law School, a publisher bought Pink

Chapter & Verse
Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Stuart Kirsch seeks a source “for what many commentators, including Alan Dershowitz in The Vanishing American Jew, refer to as a ‘quip’ or ‘anecdote’: ‘A Jew is defined as someone who has (or will have) Jewish grandchildren.’”

Stephen Josephs asks who declared, “A generalization is useful only insofar as one’s knowledge of the particulars will take him.” He has heard it attributed to Henry James.

“his error is himself” (May-June). Gene Dwyer, who kept his Greek Aa textbook, wrote, “The (unattributed) apothegm ‘The Two Packs’ is cited in Lesson 12 in Chase and Phillips, A New Introduction to Greek (1961), 43 (I translate, with Chase’s and Phillips’s help): ‘Each man carries two packs, one before and one behind. And each is full of faults. The one before carries the faults of others, and the other those of the man himself. Because of this men do not see their own faults, but they very keenly see those of others.’” After consulting Kenyon College colleague William McCulloh, he added: “The fable can be found in Greek in B.E. Perry, Aesopica I (1952), no. 266, and the Latin version in Pherdrus, book IV, fable 10 (Loeb Classical Library 436, pages 316-17 (1975). In both cases, credit the legendary Aesop!”

Send inquiries and answers to “Chapter and Verse,” Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via e-mail to chapterandverse@harvardmag.com.
The series had shifted from hardcover to mass paperback; the next step was digital-only, or cancellation. “I was very afraid that if I dawdled, I wouldn’t be able to wrap it up.”

There were other, internal, factors: “I had to make a real effort to remember what it was to be Eloise, or in her position.” At first, author and character were essentially contemporaries—in fact, Eloise was a few months ahead in her semester. But the gap between them has inverted and widened as Willig entered and left the law, got married, and had a daughter; Eloise, lagging behind, only just abandoned Harvard.

Revisiting the reviews of her early work, Willig finds herself agreeing with those who described it as “relentlessly effervescent” and the characters as “young and carefree.” She believes the series has grown up along with her. After nearly a dozen novels’ worth of staying in the shadows, donning disguises, directing her operatives, and gathering intelligence, the hyper-competent Jane (alias the Pink Carnation) at last gets to tend to her private affairs. As for Eloise? Happily-ever-after comes with wedding bells—and a book deal.

---SOPHIA NGUYEN

Action, Camera, Lights
Putting the finishing touches on animated worlds

You’ve probably seen a great deal of Danielle Feinberg’s work without knowing it—in fact, it might be more accurate to say that you’ve seen a great deal by virtue of her work. Feinberg ’96 is a director of photography at Pixar, where for almost a decade and a half she’s designed lighting for many of the studio’s most successful animated worlds, from A Bug’s Life (1998) and Monsters, Inc. (2001) through Wall-E (2008) and Brave (2012).

Feinberg’s role is unusually specialized. Whereas the cinematographer for a live-action film is in charge of both camera and lighting, Pixar’s production system splits these responsibilities between two people, one handling the movement, angle, and focus of the virtual camera near the beginning of the pipeline, the other handling lighting at the very end. Rather than recording in real-time, every element of Pixar’s animations—the characters, their actions, and the virtual worlds they inhabit—is programmed into a computer before being “rendered” into moving images; as a result, the process is uniquely additive, each stage in the composition building on and inflecting previous layers. Lighting is the final step: each sequence is programmed without lighting, with Feinberg synthesizing the proper amounts of natural and artificial light, selecting the angle of each virtual object, adding tasteful cloud or tree cover when necessary, and accentuating certain hues to match the visual texture and ambiance to the action. Feinberg describes her job as “mind-melding” with her counterpart in camera “to find the magic pieces to pull it all together.”

But as the capabilities of computer graphics asymptotically approach realism, Feinberg is careful to note that verisimilitude is neither Pixar’s aim nor hers: “Realism has never been a goal... You can just get pulled out of ‘realistic’ so quickly.” Indeed, animated worlds that mirror the physical world too precisely can be jarring, often veering into an “un-