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The Secret Adventures of Charlotte Bronte



Par Laura Joh Rowland
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Par Laura Joh Rowland : The Secret Adventures of Charlotte Bronte before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Secret Adventures of Charlotte Bronte:

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Description : Description du produit Upon learning that she has been falsely accused of breaching her publishing contract, the normally mild-mannered Charlotte Bront sets off for London to clear her name. But when she unintentionally witnesses a murder, Charlotte finds herself embroiled in a dangerous chain of events. With the aid of her sisters, Emily and Anne, and of the suspiciously well-informed but irresistibly attractive brother of the victim, Charlotte works to unravel a deadly web of intrigue that threatens not only her own safety but the very fabric of the British Empire. Charlotte is plunged into a thrilling adventure and a passionate romance that leads her from the peaceful Yorkshire moors to the crime-infested streets of London, across the sea to the Continent to the ports of Cornwall, the wilds of Scotland, and the palaces of Queen Victoria herself. Will Charlotte be able to stop a devious invisible villain whose schemes threaten her life, her family, and her country? Laura Joh Rowland's Sano Ichiro samurai detective series has enthralled tens of thousands of readers. Now the author turns her gifts for historical fiction to Victorian England in this

thriller starring the legendary 19th century author Charlotte Brontë and her equally famous family. Laura Joh Rowland is the author of twelve other books, including the critically acclaimed *Red Chrysanthemum*. The granddaughter of Chinese and Korean immigrants, she was educated at the University of Michigan and now lives in New Orleans with her husband.

Prsentation de l'diteurNow in paperback, the March 2008 Book Sense Pick by beloved author Laura Joh RowlandLaura Joh Rowland's samurai detective novels have enthralled tens of thousands of readers. Now the author turns her gifts for historical fiction to Victorian England and the famous and fascinating Brontë family with this critically acclaimed new thriller.Upon learning that she has been falsely accused of plagiarism, the normally mild-mannered Charlotte Brontë sets off for London to clear her name. But when she unintentionally witnesses a murder, Charlotte finds herself embroiled in a dangerous chain of events that forces her to confront demons from her past. With the clandestine aid of the other Brontë sisters, Emily and Anne, and of the suspiciously well-informed but irresistibly attractive brother of the victim, Charlotte works to unravel a deadly web of intrigue that threatens not only her own safety but the very fabric of the British Empire. Will Charlotte be able to stop a devious, invisible villain whose schemes threaten her life, her family, and her country?ExtraitTable of ContentsTitle PageCopyright PageDedicationChapter 1Chapter 2Chapter 3Chapter 4Chapter 5Chapter 6Chapter 7Chapter 8Chapter 9Chapter 10Chapter 11Chapter 12Chapter 13Chapter 14Chapter 15Chapter 16Chapter 17Chapter 18Chapter 19Chapter 20Chapter 21Chapter 22Chapter 23Chapter 24Chapter 25Chapter 26Chapter 27Chapter 28Chapter 29Chapter 30Chapter 31Chapter 32Chapter 33Chapter 34Chapter 35Chapter 36Chapter 37Chapter 38Chapter 39Chapter 40Chapter 41Chapter 42Chapter 43EPILOGUEAUTHORS NOTEREADERS GROUP GUIDEALSO BY LAURA JOH ROWLANDShinj Bundori The Way of the Traitor The Concubines Tattoo The Samurais Wife Black Lotus The Pillow Book of Lady Wisteria The Dragon Kings Palace The Perfumed Sleeve The Assassins Touch Red Chrysanthemum The Snow EmpressThis edition first published in the United States in 2008 by The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc. Woodstock New YorkWOODSTOCK: One Overlook Drive Woodstock, NY 12498 www.overlookpress.com[for individual orders, bulk and special sales, contact our Woodstock office]NEW YORK: 141 Wooster Street New York, NY 10012Copyright 2008 by Laura Joh RowlandAll rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of CongressBook design and type formatting by Bernard Schleifer ISBN: 9781590206225To my agent, Pamela Ahearn, for her loyalty and perseveranceThe human heart has hidden treasures, In secret kept, in silence sealed; The thoughts, the hopes, the dreams, the pleasures, Whose charms were broken if revealed.CHARLOTTE BRONTë Evening Solace, 1846I hardly know what swelled in my throat . . . such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work . . . such a strong wish for wings . . . CHARLOTTE BRONTë Letter to Ellen Nussey, 7 August 1841PROLOGUETHERE ARE CERTAIN EVENTS THAT HAVE THE POWER TO RAVAGE LIVES and alter the fate of nations, yet they transpire unnoticed by the general public and leave no record, because their history is a secret locked within the souls and memories of the few mortals involved. Such were the events that I, Charlotte Brontë, witnessed in the year 1848.I have sworn to take the secret to my grave, and to speak any word of it would bring censure, scandal, and disgrace upon myself and betray a sacred trust. Still, my knowledge burns inside me like a fire, a pressure that must find release or shatter the fragile vessel of my being. I cannot bear that the most singular episode of my own history should go untold.It occurred at a time when my life held meaning and promise, and I had the companionship of persons most beloved to me. But now, as I write, a year has since passed, and my companions are gone. Thus stripped and bereaved, I spend night after night in terrible solitude, haunted by memories. I have decided that I must record the events of that summercome what mayand although I know not whether anyone will ever read these words, they shall be my tribute to the valor of those whose loss I mourn. Let these pages survive them, that they shall not fade into obscurity as their mortal remains disintegrate into dust. The fantastic narrative which I am about to commence is the truth as I know it, and I shall be as candid as the truth requires. God is my ultimate witness, and I beg His forgiveness if I say anything to offend.My story does not begin with me, nor at the moment when I stumbled into these events that would transform my life. It begins on the other side of the world, in Canton, the port of foreign

trade in southern China. The date was 14 May 1841. Imagine a twilight sky swollen with storm clouds hovering above British warships on the river outside Canton. Their tall, square sails heave like dragon wings in the tropical wind; cannons and guns on the decks thunder, bombarding the waterfront. The Chinese Imperial Army returns fire from war junks and from forts and watchtowers on the river-bank. Flames consume docks and warehouses on shore. The turbulent water reflects the blaze, gleaming crimson as if layered with blood. Smoke drifts towards the wall surrounding Cantons Old City, inside which crowds of Chinese stampede through alleys in desperate flight. Ruffians loot abandoned shops; renegade soldiers brawl in the street outside an estate belonging to a high imperial official. The incident that precipitated everything which befell me occurred within this estate, a complex of courtyards and gardens surrounding a mansion. Precisely what happened there that evening is known only to persons who are no longer able to speak, but I shall recreate the terrible drama and hope that speculation based on facts will not compromise the truth. Inside the mansion, a woman named Beautiful Jade huddles in her chamber on a carved bed draped with satin curtains. She wears multicolored silk robes; tinsel ornaments sparkle in her black hair. Her slim arms encircle her two daughters, small versions of herself. Their delicate faces pinched with fright, the three listen to the gunfire and the rioting in the streets. The bitter fumes of gunpowder mingle with the scent of jasmine from the garden. Beautiful Jade fears that the battle will rage until Canton lies in ruins and everyone inside it is dead. The estates guards and servants have all fled. She longs to follow suit and remove herself and her beloved children from danger, but her husband has insisted that they remain inside until he returns. A loud crash outside startles Beautiful Jade. She looks through the window. The night glows with the ruddy, fitful light of a sky reflecting fire. Beautiful Jade hears rapid footsteps in the courtyard; ere long, she sees shadows moving in the garden, where palm trees rustle. The footsteps mount the stairs to the veranda, and the door creaks open. An icy terror spreads through Beautiful Jade. The barbarians have invaded Canton. They have entered her house! She scrambles off the bed, dragging her daughters with her. Five men burst through the doorway, one bearing a torch that splays flame light onto the chamber walls. They are not foreigners but Chinese ruffians dressed in ragged clothes and straw hats. Each carries a long knife. As her daughters scream in fright, she asks the men who they are and what they want. They command her to tell them where her husband is. When she replies that she doesn't know, they rampage around the chamber, hurling vases to the floor, overturning tables, smashing chairs, and ripping down tapestries. The terrified children cling to their mother. Again, the men demand to know her husband's whereabouts. Even had she known, Beautiful Jade could not have betrayed him. Now two ruffians grab the girls. Aghast, Beautiful Jade holds tight to them, but the men drag the children away. The girls sob while she begs the men not to hurt her daughters. Another ruffian lashes out at her with his knife. She screams. The blade cuts through her robe. Faint with horror, mouth agape, she clasps her hands over the blood welling from her bosom. The knife slashes again. Beautiful Jade flings up her arms and feels the blade slicing open her flesh. Desperate, she tries to stumble away from her tormentor. Beyond him she sees her daughters helplessly flailing in their captors' grasp. They shrill in a high-pitched chorus that pierces her heart. She falls to her knees, bleeding from countless cuts, weeping in pain and terror, crying in vain for help. Were the last sounds she heard the thunder of cannons from the attacking ships and her daughters' screams? I shall never know the anguished last thoughts of these three innocent victims, but I do know that they were found with their throats cut, their bodies mutilated. As to why they were slain, and the consequences of their murder, those facts became apparent during my own part of the story, which begins seven years thence.

CHARLOTTE BRONT, July 1849
WITH A TALE SPINNERS SLEIGHT OF HAND I ADVANCE THE calendar the date is now Friday, 7 July 1848. I rotate the globe and sight upon my home village of Haworth, in the North of England. Reader, I present for you a picture of Haworth on the morning of that fateful day when my adventures began. The sun, glinting from between cloud masses in the vast, cerulean Yorkshire sky, illuminates the ancient stone houses that line the steep, stone-paved main street. Shopkeepers scrub their doorsteps, a farmer herds a flock of sheep, and village women carry baskets past a horse-drawn cart piled high with raw wool. At the top of Church Lane, isolated at the highest point in the village, stands the parsonage, a two-storied house built of grey-brick, roofed with stone flags, and flanked by graveyards. Beyond the parsonage lie the moors undulating hills cloaked in grey-green heather, shading into the far horizon. Inside the parsonage, I was sweeping the hall when I heard a thud outside. Puzzled, I set aside the broom and opened the door. My younger brother Branwell toppled towards me and crashed at my feet, sprawling across the threshold. Branwell, I said, peering with consternation at him through my spectacles. He pushed himself to his knees and smiled jauntily up at me. Ah, my dear sister Charlotte, he said, slurring the words. How

convenient that you should be here just in time to welcome me home. I regarded his bleary eyes and lurid complexion, his disheveled clothes and shaggy auburn hair. Rank fumes of whisky rose from his person. You have been drinking again. I felt the anger, disgust, and helplessness that Branwells inebriation always occasioned in me. It was just a little tittle down at the Black Bull Inn, Branwell protested, clambering to his feet. Life gets unbearably dull hereabouts, and surely you wouldnt deny me a bit of amusement now and then? Except that it isnt only now and then. I shut the door more firmly than was necessary. And its not just the drink. Youve taken laudanum, havent you? Branwell had, alas, degenerated into a habitual user of that tincture of opium dissolved in spirits. Im sorry, Charlotte, Branwell said, but I was so in need of comfort. A coughing fit wracked his thin body. Can you not see how miserable I am? Please forgive me. Reluctant compassion quenched my anger as I observed my brother. He was only thirty-one but looked a decade older, his once handsome features haggard. Still, I could see in him a vestige of the robust, bright-eyed boy who had been my favorite childhood companion. You had better go upstairs before Papa sees you like this, I said. The door of the study opened, and out stepped our father. Though in his seventies, Papa was still an imposing figure over six feet tall, whitehaired, stern-featured, and proud of posture. Beneath his black clerical garb he wore a voluminous white silk cravat wound high around his neck to protect him from Yorkshire drafts and guard against bronchitis. He squinted at Branwell through the spectacles perched on his prominent nose, and a look of anxious confusion came over his face. I thought you were asleep upstairs, he said to Branwell. Have you been gone all night? Branwell hung his head; his coughs subsided into wheezes.

Not all night. I just slipped out for a few hours. Thats Gods honest truth. It is a sin to deceive, Papa said, frowning in reproach, and shameful of you to invoke God as your accomplice. My younger sisters, Emily and Anne, appeared in the parlor doorway. Anne, neat and unobtrusive as always, held a cloth with which shed been dusting furniture; when she saw Branwell, distress clouded her violet eyes and gentle features. Oh, dear, she murmured. Emily, tall and lanky, pushed up her leg-of-mutton sleeves. Always indifferent to her appearance, she stubbornly clung to that outmoded style of dress. She had been canning blackberry preserves, and purple stains blotched her apron. Heat had frizzed her brown hair and flushed her long face, and that day she looked even more wild and singular than usual. She glared at our brother. She had lost all tolerance for the sickness, the convulsive fits, and the unpredictable moods that Branwell inflicted upon our household. Well, have you all gotten a proper look at me? Branwell said with sudden belligerence. Then I believe I shall go to bed. Im all done in. Reeling towards the stairs, he stumbled. Emily grudgingly helped me assist him up the stairs. I couldnt help but regard with some sadness the family portrait in the stairwell.

Branwell had painted that portrait. He had, when he was younger, possessed artistic talent, and Papa had sacrificed much in order to pay for painting lessons. All of us had hoped Branwell would attend the Royal Academy, but his ambitions and our dreams had come to naught. Now, awkwardly climbing the stairs, Branwell began to weep. Emily and I dragged him into the bedroom he shared with Papa. Anne turned down the coverlet of his bed and pulled out the pillows he had rearranged to trick our father. Emily and I heaved Branwell onto the bed. Lydia, my distant, darling Lydia, he keened. My love for you has ruined me! Six years ago, Branwell had become a tutor to the son of the Reverend and Mrs. Robinson at Thorpe Green Hall, near York. Lydia Robinson, a wanton woman of forty, had seduced Branwell. He had fallen madly in love with her, and theyd conducted a torrid affair until her husband had discovered it and dismissed Branwell. Ever since then, Branwell had pined for Lydia, drowning his woes in liquor. What a sorry waste he had allowed that terrible woman to make of his life! None of you understand how I suffer, he moaned as Emily tugged off his shoes. You have never loved and lost as I have! With great self-restraint, I forbore to remind him that our

father had many years ago lost his beloved wife, and we our mother. Emily, stern and unrelenting, went downstairs without a word, but Anne tenderly arranged the coverlet over Branwell. Oh, Anne, dont fuss so, Branwell cried. Lord, I wish you would all go away! Chastened, Anne crept out of the room. Papa sat beside Branwell. We must pray for God to forgive your sins and give you the strength to reform. I cannot bear another sermon now, Branwell said in a tone of rising hysteria, and besides, theres no use moralizing, Father. Its too late; its all over with me. Stifling a sigh, I left the room. I knew I ought to finish sweeping and set out for my afternoon visits to parishioners suffering from the hard times that had fallen upon the country. Yet the tedious routine of my days oppressed me so that I succumbed to the powerful urge to escape to my other life, the secret existence known to but three other people besides myself. Furtively, I slipped into the small room above the front hall. Near its window stood a battered desk. I took from my pocket a key, then unlocked and opened the desk drawer. I lifted out a book whose cover read Agnes Grey, a novel by Acton Bell. Opening it to the title page, I read the handwritten inscription: To my dear sister Charlotte, with much

love, Anne Bront. In another book, *Wuthering Heights*, by Ellis Bell, Emily had simply penned her signature. I then took up my own book, and pride swelled within me as I caressed the gilt lettering that read *Jane Eyre*, by Currer Bell. Almost ten months had passed since its publication, but I felt the same ecstatic thrill as when I first held it in my hands. I could still hardly believe that Emily, Anne, and I had accomplished our dream of becoming authors. But the drawer contained further proof of this miracle. I perused book reviews cut out of newspapers. The one from the *Westminster* read, *Decidedly the best novel of the season*. There were also letters from my publisher, informing me that the first edition of my work had sold out, and notices of two subsequent editions. I smiled at a handbill for a play, *Jane Eyre, The Secrets of Thornfield Manor*, produced in London. Finally, I turned to the account book where I had recorded my income one hundred pounds for the copyright of the novel, and an additional hundred pounds in royalties. This was no great fortune, but it represented ten times more than the annual salary I had earned in my former occupation as a governess. Yet uncertainty about the future and a nagging dissatisfaction with the present worsened as I paged through the notebooks that contained the manuscript of my next, as yet unfinished, novel, *Shirley*. I had developed serious doubts about this novel and its reception by my publisher and, ultimately, my readers. I feared their high expectations of Currer Bell, whose identity was a subject of intense speculation among the literati. And I mourned that my present success had failed to bring me everything I craved. As a young girl, scribbling stories and dreaming of a future as an author, I believed that publication would gain me passage into a world of art galleries, concerts, and the theatre, where people conversed brilliantly. I had hoped to travel and to win the friendship of writers, artists, and intellectuals. Yet here I remained, hidden behind a *nom de plume*, my life as a parson's spinster daughter virtually unchanged. A wistful melancholy stole over me as I looked out the window and down the hill upon the grey rooftops of Haworth and the grey smoke from the textile mills in the wooded valley. Beyond these familiar environs lay the world of my dreams. I was thirty-two years old and, it seemed, destined to spend the rest of my days in torpid retirement. Then I spied the postman coming up the road, and my spirits lifted. The post was a source of light and life to me. I carefully locked the desk drawer, because although Papa had been told the secret of Acton, Currer, and Ellis Bell, no one else must know not even Branwell, who could not be trusted with the secret. I tucked the key in my pocket, hurried downstairs, and eagerly accepted a letter from the postman. I read the sender's address on the envelope: Smith, Elder Company, 65 Cornhill, London. This was the letter that would launch me on a dangerous path through worlds beyond my imagination, but all I then understood was that the letter came from my publisher. As I scanned the two sheets, my anticipation of good news turned to dismay. I rushed downstairs and found Emily stirring a cauldron of preserves on the stove. Her bulldog, Keeper, lay beneath the table where Anne and our servant, Martha Brown, sealed jars. The kitchen was humid with fruity steam and hot from the coal fire. Emily. Anne, I said, we must talk. My face must have revealed my agitation, for they immediately followed me through the back door to the yard, out of Martha's hearing. Above and away from us spread the moors, their hilly expanses broken only by a few stunted trees and the distant black lines of stone walls. Blustering wind whipped our skirts. Currer Bell has just received a disturbing communication, I explained, then read aloud: My Dear Sir, As you will no doubt recall, Smith, Elder Company has secured from you the exclusive right to publish your next novel and to grant secondary right of publication to our counterparts abroad. However, it has come to my attention that Mr. Thomas Cautley Newby, publisher of the works of Acton and Ellis Bell, has sold to an American publisher, for a high price, a book entitled *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which he claims to be the new work by Currer Bell. We at Smith, Elder Company were quite indignant to learn that a rival business has gained a property which is lawfully ours. Are we to believe that you have deliberately breached your contract with us? (It would appear so, judging by the enclosed document.) We respectfully request an explanation of this circumstance. Yours Sincerely, George Smith. Emily and Anne stared in astonishment. I cried, Anne, my publisher believes your book to be mine. He suggests that I've cheated him! There must be a mistake, Anne said hesitantly. My publisher knows that Acton Bell and Currer Bell are two separate individuals. Surely Mr. Newby would not claim otherwise. But he has, I said, holding out the paper that had accompanied George Smith's letter. This is an extract from a letter written by Mr. Newby to the American publisher: To the best of my belief, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are all the production of one writer. Emily shook her head, frowning. Anne, looking bewildered, ventured, I cannot believe that Mr. Newby would intentionally misrepresent me. I can, I said, because he has already treated you both in a shabby fashion. Remember that he charged the printing expenses for *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights* to you. Then he delayed publication of your books. And he hasn't yet sent you the royalties he owes you. Mr. Newby is an

unscrupulous man who would do anything to profit himself. And he is doing so by capitalizing on the success of Currer Bell, Emily said. Her large, luminous eyes, ever a magical mixture of fire and ocean, were of a hue that changed with her moods; now anger darkened them to slate blue. He seeks to elevate little known authors by confusing them with a celebrated one. I winced: Emily was a person of few words, and those often too blunt for comfort. The differing degrees of success achieved by Currer, Acton, and Ellis Bell represented a sensitive issue that we avoided discussing. Though Emily and Anne were genuinely pleased by my good fortune, I knew that if our positions were reversed, I would envy them, in spite of our affection for one another. I also knew how badly they must feel about the reviews of their books. There is not in the entire *dramatis personae* a single character which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible, the Atlas had said of *Wuthering Heights*. Agnes Grey had fared no better. It leaves no painful impression on the mind; some may think it leaves no impression at all. Worse, both Emily and Anne had suffered from comparison to me when the Athenaeum had proclaimed of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey*: All three might be the work of one hand, but the first issued remains the best. How much I regretted that my writing had set me apart from my sisters! Would that today's missive had not done further damage to our harmony! Dear Charlotte, I'm so sorry that my book has endangered your reputation, Anne said. She was always too ready to accept blame and thereby restore peace. The fault belongs to Mr. Newby, I said. And I fear he has endangered more than my reputation. I paced the yard in a fever of anxiety. I know little of the law, but enough to see that appearances suggest that I've broken it. I had a horrible vision of the authorities descending upon the parsonage, and myself arrested and thrown into prison. What am I to do? Write to Mr. Smith. Tell him that Currer Bell, Acton Bell, and Ellis Bell are three distinct individuals, and that anyone who says differently is a liar, said Emily. But I told him as much when the critics raised the question of our identities, I reminded her. If he doubts me now, why should another letter convince him? Perhaps I could order Mr. Newby to set matters right, Anne offered. Why would he, and put himself in the wrong? I said, dismissing the notion that mild-natured Anne could force anyone to do anything. I halted my pacing and faced my sisters. The only way to solve the problem is to dispense with pen names and reveal who we really are. Anne gasped in alarm. No! Emily burst out. Vehemence harshened her normally quiet, melodious voice, and her eyes darkened to a stormy grey-green. When you first suggested that we try to publish our works, we all agreed that we would always use pen names. While Anne and I had adopted pen names because we enjoyed the secret and thought that male aliases would assure our work a more favorable reception, Emily had wished to avoid unwanted exposure. Neither my sisters nor I participated much in any society, but Emily was the most reclusive among us. She was like a wild creature happiest when rambling the moors alone. She shot a pleading glance at Anne, who moved close to her. Dear Charlotte, said Anne, I know your situation is grave, but surely there is a solution that doesn't require us to reveal our true identities. Anne always took Emily's side, for they shared a special intimacy that excluded everyone else. They were like twins sharing one heart. A familiar pang of envy needled me, because Emily was my favorite sister as well as Anne's. But there is not another solution, I insisted. Even if I manage to convince Mr. Smith that I didn't write *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, problems will continue to arise as long as there remains a mystery about who Acton, Ellis, and Currer Bell are. People will always confuse us. Let them, Emily declared, tossing her head. Her hair swirled in the wind; with her back to the clouded sky and sweeping moors, she seemed a wild force of nature. I don't care. Well, I do, said I. Even as I admired Emily's independent spirit and hated to cause her pain, I suddenly felt a tremendous impatience to cast off the pen name that had obscured me like a suffocating shroud. We must let Mr. Smith and everyone else know us at last. But . . . , Anne wrung her hands. If Mr. Smith doesn't believe there are three authors named Bell, why would he believe you if you write informing him that the authors are three Misses Bront? He probably would not, I said, encouraged by a sense that Anne shared my desire for recognition. Therefore, I propose that we go to London, so that Mr. Smith may see us with his own eyes. As I spoke the words, my heart fluttered like wings inside my chest; the world of my dreams seemed suddenly within reach. London? Emily said, as though I had suggested a trip to Hades. The color drained from her face, and she retreated from me. I won't go. I can't! Here I must add a few more strokes to my portrait of Emily. She had spent almost her entire life in Haworth. Each time away, however brief, she would become sickly and lifeless, like a plant torn from its native soil. She feared strangers and crowds, and hated noisy, dirty cities. She made me feel selfishly cruel for asking her to travel to London; however, I was determined for us to go. Please, Emily, I said. It won't be so terrible. We needn't stay very long, and we won't reveal our identities to anyone outside Smith, Elder Company. No! Emily ran to the parsonage and pressed herself against its brick wall, looking more a frightened child than the woman of

thirty years she then was. Anne asked cautiously, When would we leave? Today, I said. I must mend my relations with Smith, Elder Company as soon as possible. Anne! You wish to go, too? Emily gazed at Anne in disbelief. You want to break your promise to me? Oh, no, Anne hastened to say. Its just that I think we must do what is right, and perhaps Charlotte knows best . . . She quailed under the look of hurt and outrage that Emily gave her, then turned to me. But we cant just arrive at Smith, Elder Company without warning. What would they think of us? My determination wavered. We possessed among us no beauty to help us gain favor, and I considered myself the plainest so small and thin am I, with a head too large for my body, irregular features, and a pallid complexion. Furthermore, my plan seemed audaciously forward, defying convention that required modesty of the female sex. But I put aside vanity and fear of social censure; I got a firmer grip on my resolve. Smith, Elder Company can hardly think less of us than they do at this moment, I said. We must risk a minor discourtesy for the sake of achieving a greater good. Well, Im not going, Emily said. She was breathing hard, and her fingers kneaded her folded arms. Its not my predicament. Mr. Smiths complaint regards only you and Anne. Ive done nothing to warrant exposure. And I forbid you to tell anyone anything about me! It was clear that Emily would never be persuaded. Very well; you may stay home, I said reluctantly. I wont reveal your identity. I suppose that two of us will be enough to prove ourselves separate individuals to Mr. Smith . . . if youll come with me, Anne? Biting her lips, Anne looked from me to Emily, torn between her sense of duty to me and her loyalty to the person she loved best. When I became nurse, tutor, and disciplinarian to my younger siblings after the deaths of our mother and eldest sisters long ago, Anne was the only one never to disobey me. She had meekly accompanied me to the school where I taught, and she studied hard because she knew my salary paid her tuition. I knew she still felt indebted to me. Anne, Emily pleaded. A small sigh issued from Anne. Bowing her head, she murmured, Well need Pappas permission. Emily stood in stricken silence. Her eyes blazed with her fury and pain at Annes betrayal. Uttering a cry of despair, she turned from us and ran towards the moors with the swift grace of a fleeing deer. Anne and I silently watched her figure recede; then, without looking at each other, we went into the parsonage. Papa was in his study, writing a sermon. When I told him about George Smiths letter and our resolve to set things aright, he said, Of course you must uphold your honor, and your proposal seems the only way. Though I always defer to his authority, his generous heart is loath to deny me anything. He went on, However, the idea of your traveling two hundred miles to London disturbs me. These are dangerous times. A cataclysm of revolution had convulsed Europe during the year. In France, radicals had rebelled against a corrupt, oppressive regime; strikes, riots, and warfare had beset Paris; the king had abdicated and gone into exile. In the Germanies, mobs had clashed with the army in the streets of Berlin. The Italian states had risen up against Austrian rule; in Vienna, the Hapsburg monarchy had battled its own citizens when they clamored for social reform. In Britain, Irish nationalists had revolted against English domination, while across England, radical Chartists had staged mass demonstrations. Their quest for voting rights for all men and equal representation in Parliament had incited violent disturbances. Queen Victoria had fled London. Yet I had no inkling that these events held any significance for me they seemed but minor disturbances in distant domains. Things are somewhat quieted lately, Papa, I said. Anne and I should be safe enough. Emily does not wish to go? No, Papa. Guilt sickened me. Papa said with reluctance, I should escort you and Anne. Oh, no, Papa, I said, you must not risk your health. He was susceptible to severe colds, and besides, Id set my heart on our going unaccompanied. Well be fine by ourselves. Ive visited London before, and I know my way around the city. Very well, Papa said with evident relief. But do be careful. We shall, Papa. I hesitated, then asked, May we stay a few days to see the sights? After some debate, Papa consented. Jubilant, I hurried Anne upstairs, where we began hastily packing. I was folding garments into a trunk when I noticed Anne standing at the bedroom window. Outside stretched the moors, like an empty sea. Emily had disappeared. Shell understand that we have no choice. Shell forgive us, I endeavored to reassure both Anne and myself. Anne blinked away tears. I suffered a fresh onslaught of guilt, but resumed packing. The future beckoned. Now, as the hour grows late and the candles burn low, I wonder if I would have gone to London had I known that I was taking my first step towards a man who personified evil and madness. Would I have gone knowing what pleasure and pain, hope and despair, terror and glory, would be mine? But the fact is that I did go; and perhaps, when I have finished recording my tale, I will know whether I am more glad or sorry.

2ONCE, DURING A TRIP TO THE CONTINENT, I SAW A MEDIEVAL tapestry that depicted an everyday scene in an ancient town. Lords and ladies promenaded around the castle; merchants plied their trade in the street; peasants worked the fields while mounted hunters galloped through the forest and pilgrims entered a cathedral. Each tiny creature pursued his own business as if unaware of the folk in distant

sections of the tapestry yet all were joined by the underlying warp. I am struck by the resemblance of that tapestry to my story. On the morning I received George Smith's letter, I had no knowledge of events occurring a hundred miles away or of persons whose lives would soon be interwoven with mine. Birmingham is a large industrial city south of Haworth; for my description of it and the happenings there, I elaborate upon an account given me by my sister Anne, who became closely acquainted with certain characters and environs. In a district known as the gun quarter is a courtyard surrounded by the brick buildings of Lock Gunworks. The noise of saws, hammers, and metal on grindstones emanated from neighboring businesses.

Smoke from forges blackened the sky. Across the city resounded the Birmingham Roar: continuous gunshots from the test-firing of weapons. On this day the craftsmen of Lock Gunworks gathered in the courtyard around Joseph Lock, proprietor. I have interrupted your work to make an important announcement, Lock said. As you are aware, Lock Gunworks has a long, illustrious history. My ancestors armed King Williams troops against Louis the Fourteenth of France. A portrait that hangs in the parlor of his house depicts Joseph Lock as a robust man with bold features and shrewd blue eyes. He appears quite the successful merchant and town leader. As to the thoughts in his mind at the time of this announcement, I must enter the realm of conjecture. I imagine him feeling an eerie sensation of being two selves divided: one the physical manifestation of Joseph Lock; the other, an ugly wretch cowering inside him, ridden by guilt. My father may he rest in peace manufactured guns for the Napoleonic Wars and the African trade, Lock continued. It has been my birthright and my privilege to manage the firm and carry on the family tradition of loyal service to the Crown. Lock's voice cracked; tears of shame welled in his eyes, for he had dishonored his privilege and broken tradition through a secret, abominable crime. He gathered himself. However, I summoned you here not to speak of the past, but of present concerns. It is with great regret that I am today retiring from my post as head of Lock Gunworks and ceasing all involvement in the firm's operation. An uneasy stir rippled his audience; Lock noted surprise on many faces, curiosity on others. He reviled himself for making his men accomplices to his crime. He looked upon the grimy, calloused hands that crafted the guns that bore his name, and he hated himself for lying. I do not make this decision lightly, Lock said.

Indeed, he had agonized over what to do. But the chain of events that had begun with one small mistake brought his frantic search for alternatives to a single unavoidable conclusion. However, my advancing age and poor health leave me no choice but to retire. Another lie, that: he was only fifty, and in enviable health.

Therefore, I appoint my brother Henry as head of the firm. Lock gestured, and the young man stepped forward. He was twenty-nine years old, pale, handsome, and nervous. I ask you to work as loyally for Henry as you have for me, Lock told the workers, although he had no right to speak of loyalty after breaking all its bonds himself. As a farewell token from me, you shall each receive an extra day's pay. He hurried out of the courtyard, followed by the workers' murmurs of Thank you, sir, and God bless you. He strode through the gun quarter, past the workshops and public houses, to his home in the suburb of Edgbaston. Here lived Birmingham's important, wealthy citizens. The air was fresh, the smoke from the foundries a distant black smudge on the horizon, and the Birmingham Roar a muted echo. Birds sang in the trees that shaded the wide, sunny streets; mansions graced expansive lawns. The Lock residence was an elegant stone Italianate house. When Lock entered, his wife greeted him. You're home early, said she. Is something wrong? Not at all. Lock regarded her, blonde and rosy and innocent. Guilt and despair tainted his love for her. His betrayal of her was as grievous as his betrayal of his father and country. He said, There's just something I need to do. His two young sons raced into the hall, shouting and laughing. When they saw Lock, they halted, fell quiet, and stared at him. Lock mounted the stairs, consoling himself with the thought that his sons' heritage and livelihood would remain intact, and they would never learn the worst about him. He went into his study and locked the door. Cabinets lining the walls displayed firearms produced by Lock Gunworks. He removed a pistol. The sinner in him directed his trembling hands to place powder and ball inside its chamber; he welcomed punishment, craved release from suffering. But the vestiges of Joseph Lock, pillar of the church and community, resisted compounding his previous sins. His breath rasped; nausea roiled his stomach as he cocked the pistol. He deplored the agony and shame awaiting his family. Did he perceive the true nature of the villain responsible for all he suffered? Perhaps he thought about her, and the terrible heat of longing again enflamed him. He sat clutching the gun, torn by warring impulses, until his sinful, guilt-ridden self persuaded him that there was no other escape from the hell that he had made of his life, and certain disaster lay ahead if he did not act. By yielding to temptation and cowardice, he had abetted forces powerful enough to ravage the whole kingdom, and this offered the only possible means by which to stop them. God have mercy on my soul, he whispered, putting the pistol to his temple. He pulled the trigger. The echo of that fatal shot

quickly dissipated, but the inaudible reverberations traveled far beyond Birmingham, across time, and soon reached me.³DURING MY LIFETIME A MIRACLE HAS TRANSFORMED ENGLAND. Iron roads have spread fast and far, connecting every part of the kingdom. We now live in an age of steam engines and speed, and fortunes have been gained and lost on railway speculation. The rapid tide of progress merits awe, but on the evening when Anne and I set out for London, the miracle of train travel became a force hastening us towards doom.

From Publishers Weekly

The author of *Jane Eyre* plays sleuth in this enchanting historical from Rowland, acclaimed for her mystery series set in 17th-century Japan (*The Snow Empress*, etc.). After the instant success of *Jane Eyre* and the lesser success of her two sisters' novels, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, Charlotte Bront receives a letter from her publisher, George Smith, accusing her of breach of contract: Smith believes the same author penned all three novels, as they each appeared under a pseudonym with the surname Bell. On the train from Haworth to London to meet Smith, Charlotte and sister Anne encounter Isabel White, a mysterious girl who, once in London, is murdered. Charlotte becomes ensnared in a case involving a revenge plot orchestrated by an arch villain shaded with old school orientalism. Bront fans will delight in Rowland's portrait of Charlotte, who closely parallels Jane both in personality and station. The men playing opposite Charlotte often echo the character of Edward Rochester, lending an enticing will-they, won't-they tension to the proceedings. (Mar.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.