

*Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë

CHAPTER I (Part 1)

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so gloomy, and a rain so strong, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question. I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with frozen fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the complaining of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither fighting nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had stopped from joining the group; saying, "She regretted the need to keep me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation, that I was trying to acquire a more pleasing and childlike character, a more attractive and

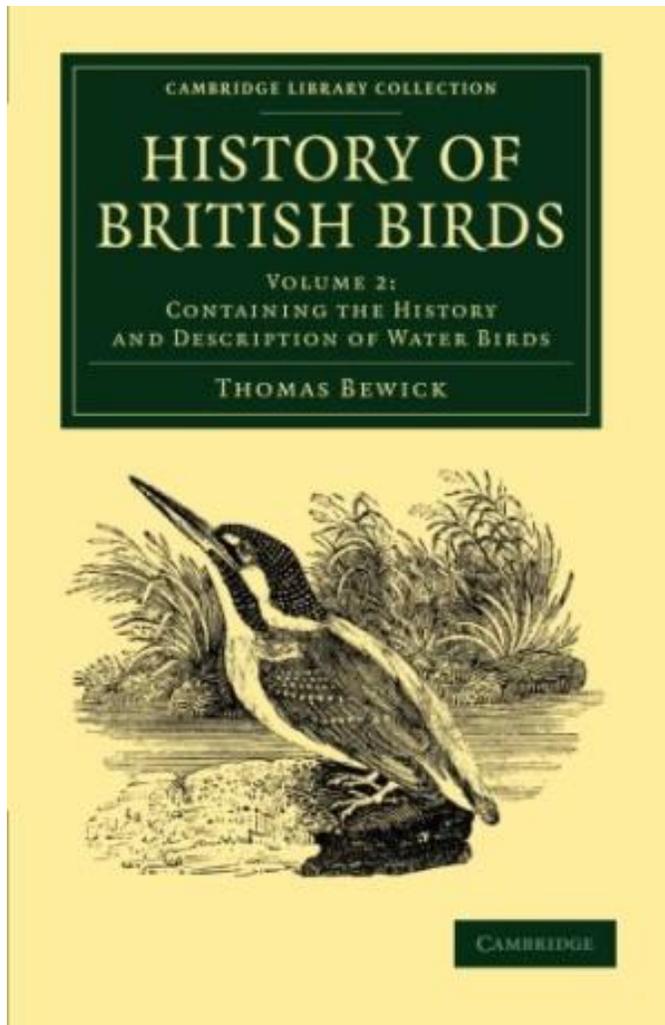
lively manner - something lighter, freer, more natural, as it were - she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children."

"What does Bessie say I have done?" I asked.

"Jane, I don't like protesters or questioners; besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child talking to her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent."

A breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room, I slipped in there. It contained a bookcase: I soon took a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red curtain nearly close, I was sheltered in double retirement.

Folds of red curtains shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear windows, protecting, but not separating me from the gray November day. At times, while turning over the pages of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. The distant view offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.



I returned to my book -  
Bewick's History of British  
Birds: the text I cared little  
for, generally speaking; and  
yet there were certain  
introductory pages that,  
child as I was, I could not  
pass quite as a blank. They  
were those which treat of the  
haunts of sea-birds; of "the  
solitary rocks and cliffs" by  
them only inhabited; of the

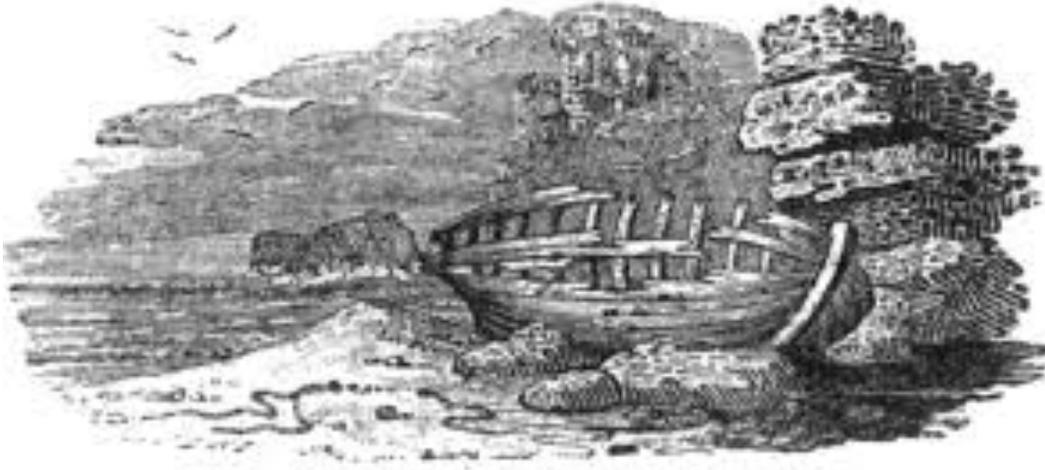
coast of Norway, studded with islands from its southern extremity, the  
Lindeness, or Naze, to the North Cape.

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of  
Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with "the  
vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those isolated regions of depressing  
space, - that reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the  
accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above

heights, surround the pole, and concentrate the multiplied rigours of extreme cold." Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding scenes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of waves and spray;



to the broken boat stranded on a deserted coast;



to the cold and ghostly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck  
just sinking.