

**RACHEL DENE: A
TALE OF THE
DEEPPDALE MILLS**

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Rachel Dene: a tale of the Deepdale mills by Robert Buchanan

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ROBERT BUCHANAN

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A TALE OF THE DEEPDALE MILLS

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

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"GOD AND THE MAN," "THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD," ETC.



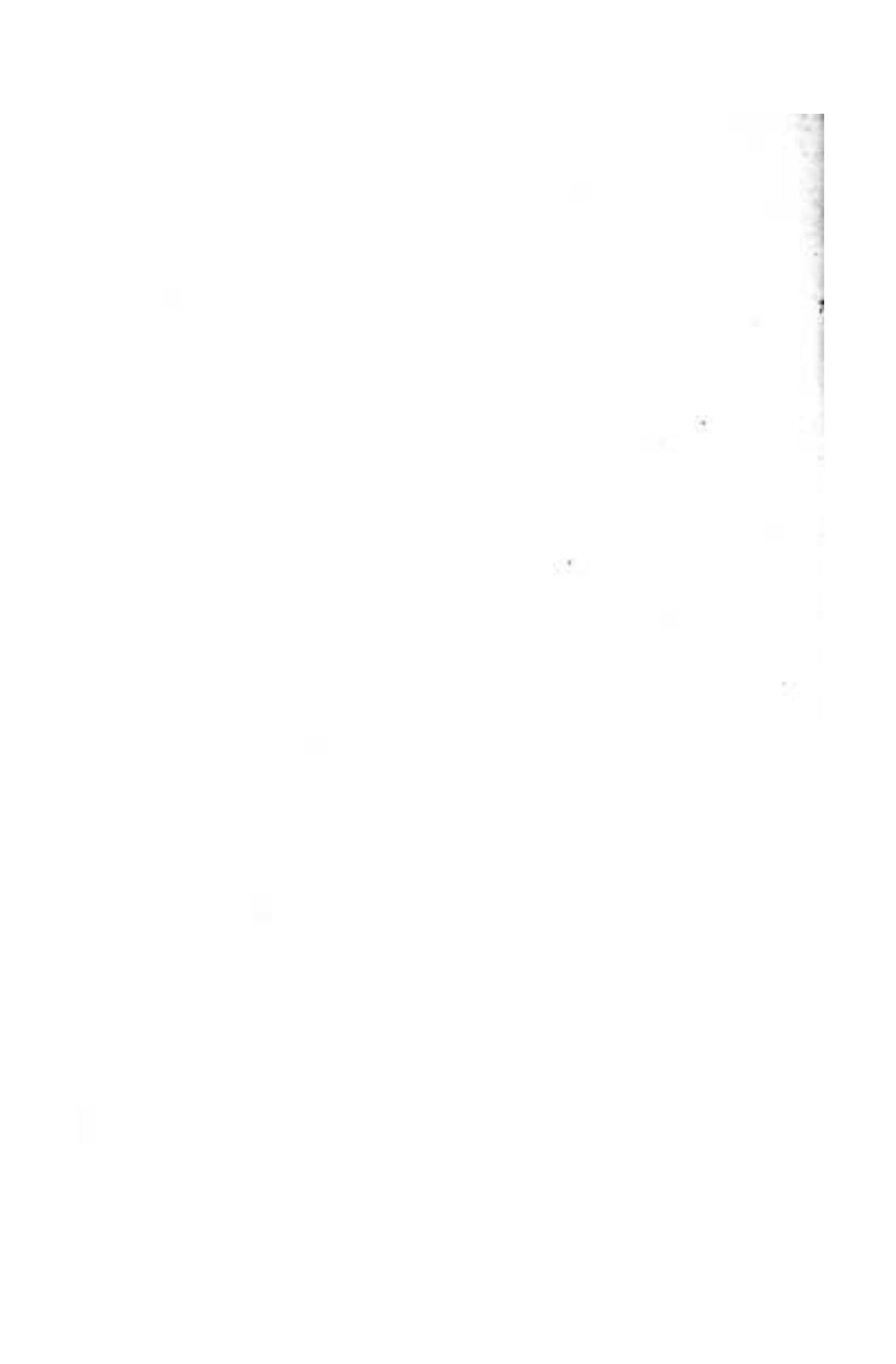
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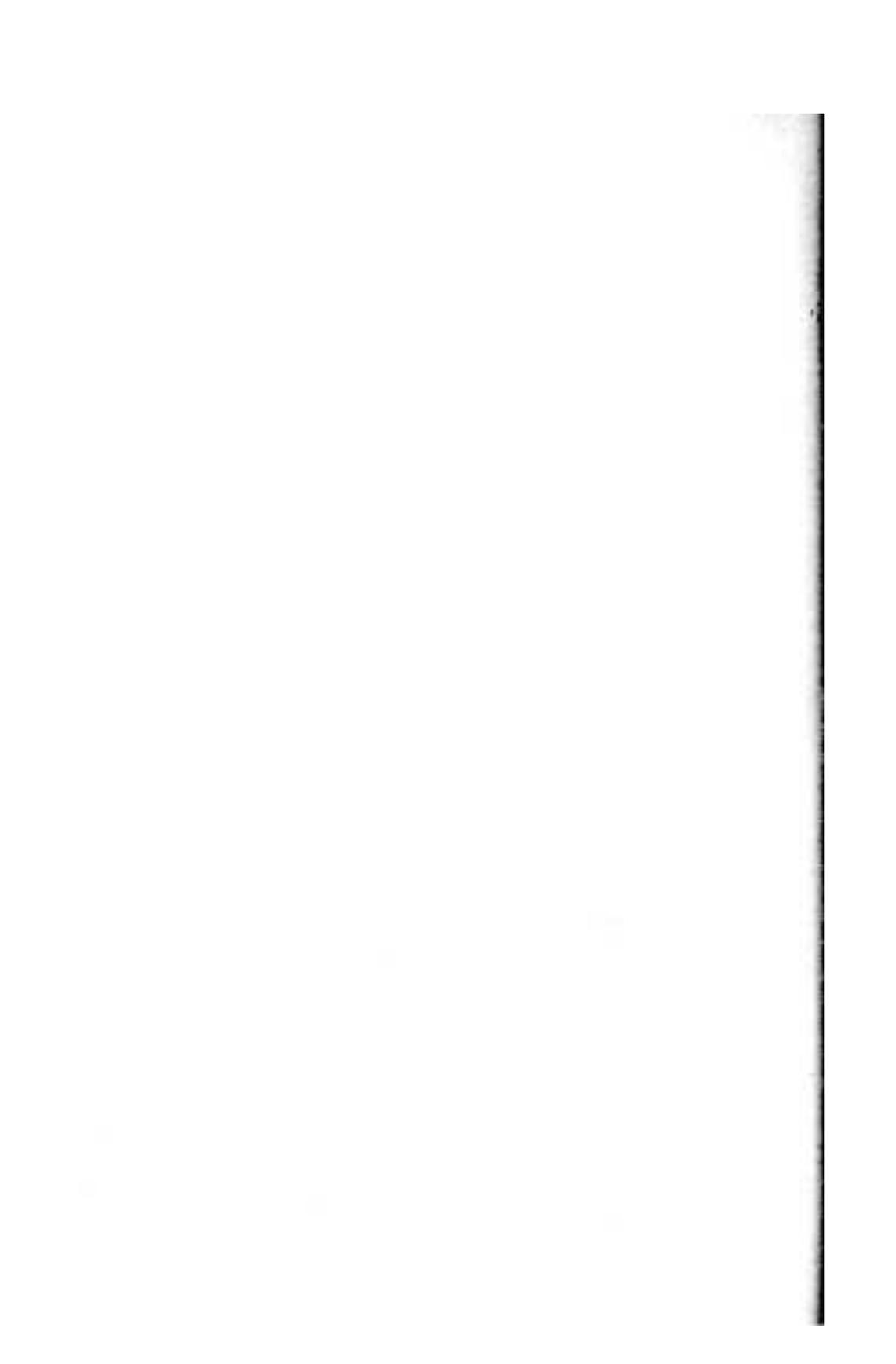
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RACHEL DENE.

CHAPTER I.

FOUND IN THE SNOW.

It was Christmas Eve. Two men and a woman sat, snow-surrounded, in the parlour of a small cottage in the valley of Deepdale, Yorkshire. One man was old, and the woman was his grey, world-worn wife; the other man was young, hale, and hearty.

"Here's Jack's health," said the old man, Jasper Heywood.

"And here's Jack's wife," said Joan.

"Nay, let us toast them together," interposed the young man; "for sure man and wife are one flesh—so here's to 'em both, and God send 'em safely home from these cruel wars."

"Thou mayst well say cruel, Jabez," replied

Joan. "Ah, if I had my way, there'd be no fighting men abroad, nor weeping wenches at home!"

"Stop there, woman," said Jasper. "An there was no fightin' men abroad, what'd become o' the weepin' wenches at home?—what'd become o' us, and our tight little island, I'd like to know—eh, Jabez?"

"Well, father, when the world grows older and wiser, perhaps folk will find something better to do than cut other folk's throats; but I fear that won't be in your time, or mine."

"Likely not," was the reply. "Meanwhile, since Christmas comes but once a year, let's be jolly. Load thy pipe, lad—here's a bit o' rare bird's-eye; and, good wife, mull us another mug o' elder, and come round t' fire, for sure it's a bitter noct."

The old man was right. It was a bitter night indeed. The wind, however, had dropped, and the snow, which had been falling almost incessantly for the past twenty-four hours, had almost ceased.

All was calm now, and still.

When Jabez Pryke came down from Deepdale Mills the night before, to pass Christmas with his adopted father, Jasper Heywood, and his wife Joan, the grey goose in the sky was only just beginning to shed her feathers; but now she had shed them till the heavens were bare.

The snowdrift had fallen in the valley breast high, and the roads were nigh impassable.

"Strikes me, Jabez," said Joan, "thou'lt have to stay here for t' next week; for sure, thou'lt never be able to get to t' mills wi'out a snow-sledge."

"Well, good mother," answered the young man, laughing, "I couldna wish for better company, nor a warmer welcome, though for certain I promised t' gaffer to dine up at t' Hall to-morrow; and he'll think I'm lost i' t' snow-drift if he doesna see me."

"Come i' t' ingle neuk; draw thysen up t' fire," replied Joan.

The yule log crackled on the hearth, and shed a ruddy glow on the cosy cottage and its occupants, as they gathered closer to the fire.