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THE VENETIANS

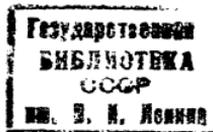
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A Novel

BY

M. E. BRADDON

AUTHOR OF "AURORA FLOYD" "THE FATAL THREE"
"THE DAY WILL COME" ETC.





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THE VENETIANS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CITY BY THE SEA.

LITTLE golden cloudlets, liked winged living creatures, were hanging high up in the rosy glow above Santa Maria di Salute, and all along the Grand Canal the crowded gondolas were floating in a golden haze, and all the westward-facing palace windows flashed and shone with an illumination which the lamps and lanterns that were to be lighted after sundown could never equal, burned they never so merrily. It was Shrove Tuesday in Venice, Carnival-time, and a hum of joyous, foolish voices echoed along those palace façades, and floated out seaward, and rang along the narrow Calle, and drifted on the winding waterways and resounded under the innumerable bridges; for everywhere in the City of the Sea men, women, and children were making merry, and had given themselves up to a wild and childish rapture of unreasoning mirth, ready to explode into loud laughter at the sorriest jokes. An old man tapped upon the shoulder by a swinging paper lantern, a boy whose hat had been knocked off, a woman calling to her husband or her lover across the gay flotilla—anything was food for mirth on this holiday evening, while the great gold orb sank in the silvery lagoon, and all the sky yonder towards Chioggia was steeped in the crimson after-glow, and the Chioggian fishing-boats were moving westward in all the splendor of their painted sails.

At Danieli's the hall and staircase, reading-room, smoking-