

**THE STORY WITHOUT A  
NAME. WITH IMPRESSIONS  
OF THE AUTHOR BY EDGAR  
SALTUS**

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The Story Without a Name. With Impressions of the Author by Edgar Saltus by Barbey d'Aurevilly & Edgar Saltus

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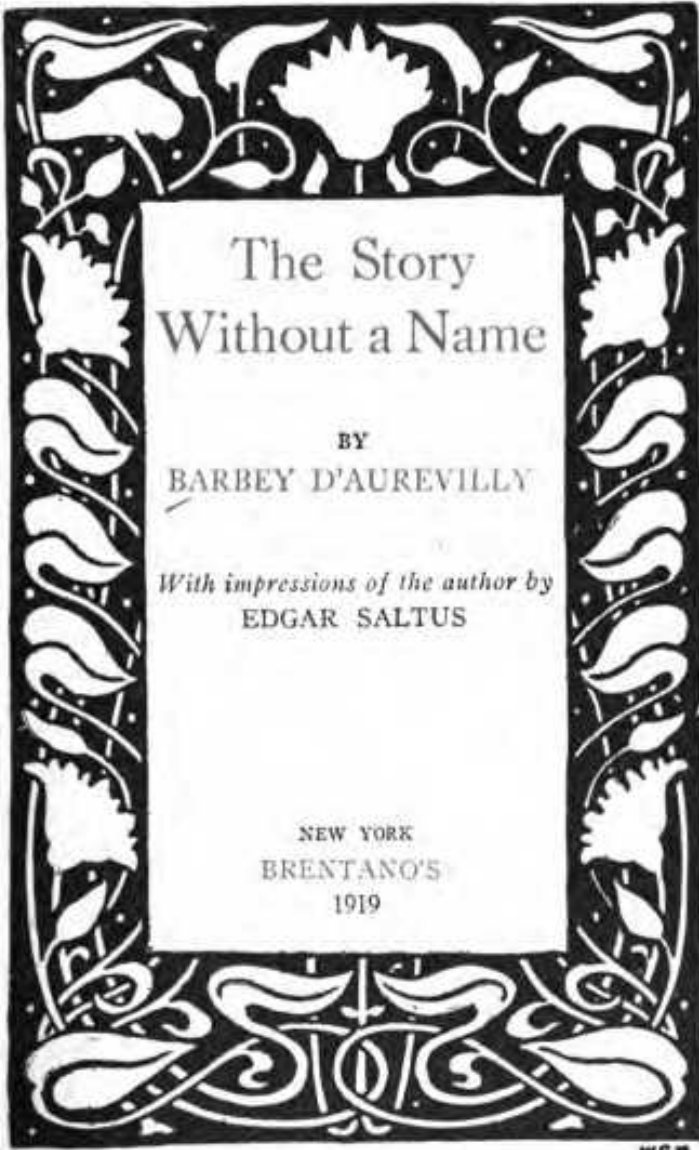
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The Story  
Without a Name

BY  
BARBEY D'AUREVILLY

*With impressions of the author by*  
EDGAR SALTUS

NEW YORK  
BRENTANO'S  
1919

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## Barbey D'Aurevilly

**W**E usually get what we want, if we know how to want it, but we get too the consequences. Balzac wanted fame. The strumpet came and killed him. Barbey d'Aurevilly wanted obscurity and acquired it so amply that when I presented an earlier translation of *The Story Without a Name*, a local critic, who contrived to be both complimentary and amusing, said I had invented Barbey and that the vile story was my own vile work. *Inique mais folichon*.

*The Story Without a Name* is a masterpiece in duo-decimo. Very soberly told, it is unexceeded in fiendishness,

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except by the Huns and the *Conte cruel* that Villiers told of the fervent Inquisition. Another man overboard. Outside the cénacle—where he is much overrated—Villiers de l'Isle Adam is remarkably unknown. But that story of his will live when French is a dead language. It may be that *Salammbô* will survive it. Personally, I would rather have written *Salammbô* than own New York. For second choice I would take Villiers' little horror and, for third, Barbey's.

Barbey's other novels are more colored and less poignant. It is not given to every writer to surprise an unsuspecting reader in bed and make him shriek with fright. Barbey did it once and once is enormous. Twice would be excessive. Sacrilege and sorcery, shapes of sin, les vieux castels, these, to-



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gether with cognate accessories, he manipulated in an atmosphere charged with shivers and occasionally with chic. Here and there the chic is circumambient. In the odor of that opopanax you might fancy that if he ever stopped writing, it was because of imperative intrigues with incandescent duchesses who, save for him, would be ice. As a matter of fact, his main diversion consisted in exchanging the time of day with his concierge. I would give a red pippin to have seen him at it.

Otherwise his life was very enviable. He wrote for himself—which is the only way to write—and for thirty-six unknown friends. That is the ideal. Too fair though. Bourget, always pertinacious, ferreted him out, turned him into copy.

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"At the hour when, the curtains drawn, the candles lighted, this alchemist elaborates his work, little he cares whether or not it will interest you. You, the future reader, are absent from his mind. Is there without a world of vulgar sensations and commonplace destinies? He knows nothing of it. He is absorbed in his characters. Yes, in the literal meaning of the word, *his* characters, for he has projected them from his brain, as Jupiter projected Minerva, engendered and nourished by the purest substance of his being."

If I did not know that Bourget wrote the foregoing, I would suspect him of it. Barring only Georges Ohnet, I know of no French writer who has succeeded so perfectly in being both emphatic and banal. Besides, as my friend Willy somewhere remarked: "Quand Ohnet mord c'est pour longtemps." Ohnet is very satisfying. In reading him you realise that nowhere, at any time, has there been anything worse. Bourget

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lacks that distinction. He gives the impression that there may be something worse and yet manages to leave you wondering.

Paul de Saint-Victor strums a different guitar. Hugo said it was a joy to write a book which Saint-Victor would write about. Barbey said nothing. He preferred to be ignored.

Here is the guitar.

"In Barbey d'Aureville's work there is something brutal and exquisite, violent and tender. It is like the philters that sorcerers brewed in which were asphodels and vipers, tiger's blood and honey. Never has language been raised to a prouder paroxysm."

One may wonder what a proud paroxysm is, but otherwise the image leaps. Barbey wrote on a piano. You might guess it, precisely as you might guess that Hugo wrote in a pulpit.