



THE
NASTIES
OF
NASTGANT SWAMP



A Story of Antyfas

By
Laura DiNovis Berry

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Dedication

This story was inspired by you, Valentino. Thank you for being such a shrewd and silly nephew.

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The Nasties of Nastgant Swamp

A Story of Antyfas

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Chapter 1

Bored on the Farm

Valentino was staring out the window, his round face held up by his tiny hands. They weren't unusually tiny hands, but Valentino (or Tino as his family called him), was only five years old, so he hadn't had the chance to grow big yet. He was hoping to see his eldest brother, Cristiano, coming down the road. Cristiano had been visiting their Aunt Lauya at the magical Dusbar College where she worked. Valentino was excited to see his brother again, but he was also very sure that his Aunt Lauya would bring him a treat, and that he was quite looking forward to. His sister, Sabrina, rested her elbows on the window frame next to him.

"What're you lookin' at, Tino?" she asked him.

"Nuthin'," he sighed. "Cristiano's not back y-eeehhht!"

On this last word, he threw his head back and cried out to the heavens. He was desperate for *something* to happen. It had been days since anything remotely exciting had occurred on the farm. Ginger, the fat barn cat, and her cat friend Lulu were very nice to play with and soft to pet, but spending time with the cats wasn't as fun as being in make-believe battles or building massive mud castles with his siblings. Unfortunately, Sabrina and his other brother, Alessio, had been far too busy with chores and reading lessons to pretend to be knights, and the skies had been dry for days so the ground was too hard to create mud castles.

He hopped off the window seat and spontaneously began to wriggle around on the floor.

"Um, what are you doing, Tino?" he heard his mother, Carolista the Spirited, ask from across the room. He flopped and bopped about until he could look up at her from the floor.

"I am a snake!" he declared with joyous enthusiasm. He added an energetic "*Hissss*" and some more dynamic wiggling for good measure. Sabrina broke out into a peal of laughter at the sight of her silly little brother, and his mother chuckled too.

"I see. Maybe we could *not* be snakes in our fancy shirts? Cristiano will be home today after all, and every one of your cousins, aunts, uncles, and both pairs of grandparents are coming over for lunch to celebrate his birthday."

Cristiano had turned eleven a few days ago, but since he'd been visiting

with Aunt Lauya, the family had decided that it would be best to have a belated birthday party. After Carolista reminded her children of this special event on the day's agenda, Sabrina jumped down from her perch and began to squish Valentino's cheeks between her palms for no other reason than she thought it was funny to make Valentino look like a ridiculous fish.

"Gentle with your brother," their mother warned as the two young children broke out into uproarious laughter.

"Ah fhurgot 'bout that!" Valentino yelled happily, despite still having his face compressed.

After two more good cheek squeezes, Sabrina decided to let go of him and twirled away. She was practicing her dance moves for the upcoming Summer Festival. Valentino, on the other hand, had no desire at all to get up. He rolled about a little more on the soft rug that covered the floorboards and grinned, pleased with himself.

"Tino, I need you to get up," his mother said, shortly, a little annoyed that Valentino's neat blue shirt and soft yellow pants were beginning to wrinkle. Valentino groaned. Grownups were always telling him to get up or down or move all around. All he wanted to do was wriggle on the floor. It was positively exhausting being five years old.

"Now, please," his mother told him, poking his tummy with a toe.

"Ok, ok," he grumbled as if he were eighty. When he was secure on his stocky legs, Valentino paused. A giddy balloon of happy energy seemed to pop inside his chest out of nowhere. Relishing the moment, he ran to his mother and wrapped his arms around her legs, burying his face in the folds of her long, soft skirt.

He was quite pleased that this day was not going to be as dull as he had first thought. Valentino liked when the family got together, and it always was a bit of a production because his family was very big. He had five first-cousins, six aunts, four uncles, and four grandparents. Tino also knew that he had a very special power: He could make all of the grown-ups in his family laugh. He was, as he had told his Grandpapa just the other day, the Master of Funny.

"Tino, did you know that Grandmama is bringing your favorite pie today?" his mother asked him. Valentino drew his head back to look up at her.

"Peach pie!" he cried ecstatically. Oh, today really was turning into something wonderful. His mother smiled and stroked his head before extracting herself from his grip.

"Yes, now go help Alessio collect the eggs and feed the goats, please. And be sure not to get your pants dirty!"

With that, she whirled the little boy around and gave him a gentle pat on the bottom to send him to his task. Giggling like a loon, Valentino rushed to the back door and began to wriggle his toes into his barn boots.

Then, he was on his way, nearly flying down the hill to meet his brother Alessio.

Valentino huffed and puffed in the bright red coop's entryway. His hands were pressed against his knees as he gathered his breath.

"Oh, hi Tino!" Alessio greeted him with a smile.

"*Huff-Hi-puff-Alessio!*" Valentino replied as he pushed his glasses a little further up his nose. He poked his head over the edge of the straw filled basket Alessio held. The older boy had already collected three eggs that had beautiful lilac speckles, one that was as blue as the sky, and another that resembled a very small watermelon.

"Wow! You got a lot of eggs! Can I get the rest?" he asked. Alessio paused for a moment, considering the risks of letting his baby brother handle this important task. He tightened his lips before blowing out a big breath.

"Alright. I've considered the risks," Alessio said seriously. Valentino looked very somberly back at him. His chin was tucked so deep into his chest that it looked like he had two of them. His furrowed brows were magnified by his glasses, and his lips were stuck out. He somehow looked like a grumpy old man trapped in a five year-old's body. Alessio had to try very hard not to giggle at his baby brother.

"You can get two eggs from the ladies, and we'll see how it goes," Alessio finally managed to say. A big grin spread across Valentino's face and once again he looked like the little boy that he truly was before turning and creeping on tip-toe towards the remaining beds of untouched eggs. Grabbing eggs from this particular coop could be rather difficult, primarily because of the creatures that resided within it. The farm down the lane had very nice, even-tempered chickens, but Valentino's Pai was a very good trader.

Through a variety of deals, he had managed to secure no ordinary chickens, but creatures that were actually a variety of tiny gryphons. According to the *Antyfas Animal Almanac*, they were known as Minor Grickens, but Alessio usually just called them, "the ladies." Their eggs were larger, more beautiful, and more delicious than any old chicken egg. Most of the ladies were quite sweet things that took no issue with the task of collecting eggs, but Geraldine and Hester, the undisputed leaders of the coop, sported the emotional trappings of a thundercloud even on the sunniest of days. The children always had to keep their wits about them whenever they were required to snatch an egg from those two, especially if they wanted to keep all their fingers intact. Unfortunately for Valentino, Geraldine and Hester were next in line.

"I'm gonna get those eggs!" he whispered. Closer and closer he crept to a black egg that was covered in golden spots.

"Cluck, cluck, cluuuuuck," Geraldine warned darkly as she regarded his approach. She sat back on her butter yellow striped cat legs and flexed her

shiny claws. Somehow even her shimmering white and golden feathers radiated intense disapproval.

“I said I’m gonna get that egg, and I’m stickin’ to it!” Tino proclaimed, as the gricken stared him down with an azure eye that had streaks of white lightning running through it.

“It’s alright, Geraldine!” Alessio cooed in an attempt to calm her. “We don’t have a rooster so you know that there’s no baby in that egg!”

Valentino watched the irritable gricken as if she were an enemy combatant. The pair were frozen, waiting for the other to make the first move. Off to the side, Alessio made a face.

“Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea,” he nervously thought. Just then, there was a rumbling and the ‘clip-clop’ of hooves from beyond the coop. As Geraldine’s fine feathered head whipped toward the noise, Valentino’s hands flew out and snatched the golden spotted egg in a flash.

Somehow even her shimmering white and golden feathers radiated intense disapproval.



“Cluck, cluck, cluuuuuck,” Geraldine warned darkly...

Alessio, basket still in hand, ran out to see who had arrived at the farm. Thrilled at his victory, Valentino chased after him with the prized egg held high over his head.

“Cristiano’s home!” Alessio cried out. Cristiano and their Aunt Lauya hopped down from the newly arrived carriage that was being pulled by two enormous horses. They waved at the bounding boys as a tall elven driver helped retrieve their luggage from the very top of the carriage.

“I got the egg!” Valentino called out to them.

“You did!” Aunt Lauya laughed, completely unaware why this was such

an achievement but delighted for her nephew all the same. Valentino let loose a cry of victory just before he tripped over an ill placed stick.

As he was propelled forward against his will, the egg flew up into the air. Alessio kept running onward, oblivious to his plight. Valentino watched as his aunt and Cristiano looked on in horror. Their contorted faces looked so ridiculous that he would have laughed if he weren't already preoccupied by his fall. And what was that on Cristiano's shoulder? Was it a *frog*? The questions were knocked away, however, when he hit the ground with a 'THUMP.' Very soon after, the egg landed on his head with a loud 'CRACK.'

When Valentino lifted his round, little face, his mouth hung open in mild shock. He couldn't see a thing! Smashed Geraldine egg was dripping down his head and onto the lenses of his glasses. He sniffled as he began to rub his shirt sleeve against them, but somehow that only made a bigger mess. Now it was even harder to see, and his lovely shirt was sticky with dirt and egg yolk. He tried to wipe it off, but he only succeeded in coating his fingers with the disgusting combination. He waved his hands around with disdain.

"Gross!" he thought. Valentino hated having his hands dirty.

"I want to be clean!" he called out in case anyone was listening. Through the eggy fog, he could just make out a grown-up approaching him. He assumed it was Aunt Lauya.

"Oh, Tino!"

As it happened, he was correct.

"Aunt Lauya, I can't see nuthin!" He declared.



*Valentino's hands flew out and
snatched the golden spotted egg
in a flash*

“I’m sure you can’t! Here, take my hand. Let’s get you inside so we can get you all cleaned up,” she said. With his aunt guiding him and his brothers laughing behind him, Valentino slowly made his way back up the hill.

Another Story of Antyfas is Coming!

Furad's Forewarning

A Story of Antyfas

Emily wasn't expecting to find a dire prophecy when she had the day off from school. Worse, the prophecy sounds like it's about her! Will Emily be able to thwart the terrible events foretold or will she be Antyfas' doom?

Enjoy this Excerpt from Furad's Forewarning

Chapter 1

A Day Off From School

Burning down the school hadn't been on Zoltig the dragon's itinerary for the morning, but the poor dear was suffering from a rather nasty cold. As she flew through that winter morning's fierce chill, Zoltig unleashed a tremendous sneeze. Sneezing is by no means shocking when an individual has a cold, but unfortunately, Zoltig was a fire-breathing dragon. Her sneeze sent a gargantuan fireball careening down toward the school below.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! The children!" Zoltig panicked as she looked on in horror. Tucking her merlot striped wings against her back, Zoltig shot through the flames that now were raging from the school's roof. As she blasted through the building, she was overcome with relief. Thankfully, no children or teachers had entered the building yet, but as she crashed through the front doors in a whirl of fire, Headmistress Iokina was sent hurtling head over heels. She had just been about to unlock the once beautifully carved doors and ring the first attendance bell. Stunned, she lay still in the snow, feeling rather toasted.

Zoltig stared down at her.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Are you in distress?"

"I don't think so, but tell me," Headmistress Iokina replied. "Do I still have my eyebrows?"

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About the Author

Inspired by all the ridiculous, frightening, wonderful, and adorable things she has discovered during her time on Earth, Laura DiNovis Berry writes what she hopes will be wonderful things for others to discover.