

Santa's Big White Chicken

Louis J. Marino

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This delightfully silly picture book is perfect to read aloud to overstimulated children during the hectic holiday season.

Louis J. Marino began telling the story of how *Santa's Big White Chicken* saved Christmas at annual family holiday gatherings many years ago. When grandson Louis W. Lonsway serendipitously grew up to become an accomplished artist, the duo teamed up to bring this humorous tale to life. It's a delightfully silly picture book that will inspire other families to include it in their own Christmas repertoire.

Like the beloved Yuletide classics *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Santa's Big White Chicken* unfolds in rhyme. The setting is December 24 and Santa has logistical problems in saddling up his team of reindeer for an all-night Christmas present delivery marathon. In this fresh and quirky mashup, an unlikely Christmas hero arrives to save the day: a small white chicken. In Marino's retelling, the reindeer derive their awesome stamina from a magic collar of jingle bells, which Prancer has bestowed upon the fowl. Once donned, he bulks up into a Big White Chicken that Santa can hitch to his sleigh. The author delivers this all very skillfully, with the rhyming couplets lightly tripping off the tongue.

Lonsway's artwork is boldly colored and outlined and his swooping lines inject a lot of dynamism into each scene. Each illustration has a riot of patterns and textures, which make the pages jump and dance along with the sprightly verse. That's quite an accomplishment given that most of the scenes are set in the stark and snowy expanses at the North Pole.

He wonderfully expresses his grandfather's humor in his illustrations as well. On one page ailing reindeer spokesman Prancer, wheelchair-bound with IV pole and elf caretaker, announces to Santa Claus that he and rest of the team are sick. The litany of flu symptoms is then enumerated for each reindeer, from Prancer's vomiting—depicted in action as an arc of graceful yellow swirls falling into the barf bag in his lap—to Blitzen's diarrhea, thankfully intimated from a simple illustration of a bathroom door left slightly ajar. It's the kind of gross-out humor that is so beloved by the older primary school and middle school crowd, but in the illustrator's capable hands it never crosses the line into inappropriate territory, so parents and grandparents can just roll their eyes when they get to these parts.

Santa's Big White Chicken is the perfect book to read aloud to overstimulated children during the hectic holiday season or to incorporate in Christmas traditions.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (November 30, 2015)

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