

Children's Book Review

Garza, Javier (2008). *Charro Claus and the Tejas Kid*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press. 40 pp., ISBN: 9788-1-933693-24-8 (hc). \$17.95. (Ages 5-8). Bilingual.

Reviewed by Marianne Martens, Rutgers University, U. S. A.



In a not-so-typical Night-Before-Christmas tale, Vincent is spending Christmas Eve with his Tío (Uncle) Pancho on the Texas/Mexican border. Suddenly there is a clatter on the roof. When Tío scrambles up a ladder to the roof to see what is the matter, Vincent sneaks up right behind him. On the roof is Santa Claus; much to Vincent's surprise, he hears his uncle greeting him as "Cousin Santa Claus!" Santa has come to ask for his cousin's help, as delivering presents on the stretch along the Rio Grande border has gotten to be a bit much for an old man like him.

Tío wants to help, but not if he has to wear Santa's suit. Santa quickly reassures him that he can wear his mariachi suit from days ago. They slip down the chimney, and with bursting seams Tío squeezes into his old mariachi suit and grabs his battered guitar. In a Cinderella-like moment, Santa sprinkles magic dust over Tío's head, and suddenly the mariachi suit is transformed into a brand-new golden version. Crowning the outfit is Tío's sombrero, sparkling with Christmas lights along the brim.

Again, like a fairy godmother, Santa turns Tío's old wagon and four burros into a fabulous flying wagon pulled by four flying burritos, resplendent in capes and lucha libre (free wrestling) masks. Santa shows Tío that the sack is filled with magic dust and promises that the perfect present for every boy or girl will magically appear at every house. Vincent is dying to go too, and so far no one has noticed him. Just as Tío is about to grab the sack, Vincent jumps in. The sack is tossed onto the wagon, and off they fly. At the first house, a little girl catches them and announces, "You're not Santa Claus!" Tío Pancho explains that he's Santa's Mexican cousin. When asked his name, Vincent pops out of the sack and announces "Charro (Cowboy) Claus!" Tío lulls the little girl back to sleep with a lullaby on his guitar.

All night long, Vincent and Tío deliver packages along the border from El Paso to Ciudad Juárez. With a nod to politics of the region, neither walls nor wire fences keep them from crossing back and forth over the border. Arriving back home, Tío asks Vincent if he enjoyed helping him; when he says he did, Tío gives him his new nickname: The Tejas (Texas) Kid.

Garza's book was created as a bilingual edition. As such, the text reads smoothly from English to Spanish and back again. Garza uses Spanish words such as *lucha libre* (free wrestling), *tío* (uncle), *primo* (cousin), *abrazo* (hug), and

seguro (safe) to provide atmosphere and welcome Spanish bilingual readers. A glossary would be helpful for English-only readers. Unfortunately, the book does not include any information about the artwork, although it appears to be acrylic on board. The colors are vivid, and the art is lively. The text boxes are bordered with delicate scroll work, reminiscent of cut-out Mexican paper streamers. Garza's voice is enthusiastic, energetic, and bursting with pride.

Garza includes a note at the end of the book about the genesis of his story. His father's story about Santa's Mexican cousin was his primary inspiration; in elementary school, Garza also heard a song about a Mexican Santa Claus called "Pancho Claus," memorizing every word. Deciding to create his own Mexican Santa Claus tale for his son, Garza pulled from different versions he had heard growing up. As such, *Charro Claus* was born. ¡Órale! (Right on!)