

The Christmas Concert

by Keith West

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The PA system on the ice rink outside was drowning out the children's choir in the small tent that had been set up on the only bare patch of ground in the Addison Street Winter Wonderland. Mike Pronzini shifted to get a clear view of his daughter Mikaela. The woman in front of him kept waving her hands in the air to attract the attention of one of the children. The boy in the front row picking his nose, if Mike had to guess. Each time she raised her arm, the woman either blocked his view with her arm or bumped his camera.

Mike got an elbow in the ribs.

"Watch it, buddy. You're blocking my view," a bass voice growled in his ear.

Mike started to say something in response, but as he turned his head so his camera's microphone wouldn't pick up his words, he changed his mind. The guy had six inches on Mike, and a dagger tattooed on his cheek.

"Sorry," Mike mumbled.

It didn't matter anyway. The concert was ending. The children were only singing four songs. He began to move forward to pick up Mikaela. Her teacher was requiring the children to stay on the stage until a parent or guardian came to claim them.

Mike's wife, Denise, was at home on bedrest with their second child. She had insisted that Mike video the concert, brief as it was.

Mrs. Tuttle, a veteran teacher, was smiling as she greeted the parents, complimenting each one on their child's performance. Her aide and a student teacher, on the other hand, looked like they were ready to strangle some of the kids.

Mikaela threw her arms around his waist when she saw him.

“How was it, Dad? Were you able to hear my solo?”

“Of course, kiddo. You were great.”

The truth was that Mike had barely been able to hear anything over the rap version of “Jingle Bells” blasting over the PA system.

“Can we get some hot chocolate, Dad?”

“Sure.” Mike began shepherding Mikaela towards the booth selling hot chocolate while dodging the members of the next performance, a steel drum band dressed in tropical style shirts with Christmas patterns, and their instruments.

After getting their hot chocolates, with extra marshmallows, they managed to find an unoccupied bench. As Mike blew on his cocoa, Mikaela said, “It’s okay if you couldn’t get all of the concert on the camera.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I saw that woman waving. She kept getting in your way. And the music from outside was really loud.”

“That’s true,” he said. “It was.”

Mikaela sipped her cocoa before continuing.

“I know Mom wanted you to get a video so she could see me sing. But I can sing for her when we get home.”

“Umm, yeah, you could.”

Mike wondered where this burst of maturity was coming from. Sometimes his daughter surprised him.

“Thanks for trying, though. And Merry Christmas, Dad.”