

THE LAST CHRISTMAS

The North Pole is Melting!

Screenplay by

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From his novel

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FADE IN:

1

EXT. ELVISH CITY - PAST - DAY

1

PROLOGUE, MONTAGE: MATILDA CLAUS (MATILDA) narrates off-screen.

(a) Northern Lights sweep across snow and ice, illuminating the tall glass spires of a magical ELVISH CITY.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Long ago, in a land of shimmering light, Santa's elves lived in harmony with nature.

(beat)

Yet even there, darkness was rising.

(b) Acid-green lightning tears the clouds revealing a snow-clad clifftop. KROOLIO SNEAR (mid-30s) stands at its edge, SOLID EMERALD WAND leveled at the city below. CRACK! The glass spires shatter.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Kroolio Snear, a sorcerer consumed by greed, longed for the elves' golden magic. Yet magic was their heart and soul. They couldn't bear to lose it.

(c) The elves flee, surrounding a raven-haired ELF WOMAN (22) carrying an ornate GLASS BOTTLE glowing with LIQUID GOLD.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Snear ordered Nocty to steal the elves' magic before they could escape.

(d) NOCTY (25), a tall, lean woman with a cloud of white hair, SHAPE-SHIFTS into a bat-winged NIGHT GAUNT. Eyeing the bottle, she dives for the elf who cries out and runs.

MATILDA (V.O.)

But Tolver fought back.

(e) LORD TELVER (30s) conjures an ICE DRAGON with his SWORD-WAND. Its FROST-BREATH SHATTERS SNEAR'S WAND and freezes him HALF-CRYSTAL. He falls, howling.

MATILDA (V.O.)

And with the wand shattered, Snear's power was broken.

(f) Nocty whirls through the air, snatching Snear mid-fall. The clifftop cracks open, swallowing the pair beneath a roaring AVALANCHE of snow and ice.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Snear and Nocty were buried alive while
the elves fled across the Arctic.

(g) Exhausted, the elves collapse. Two reindeer approach
through the snow, their eyes full of gentle concern.

1A EXT. SANTA'S VILLAGE - PAST - DAY

1A

PROLOGUE, MONTAGE:

(a) The two reindeer lead the elves to a village lit up by
lights at the North Pole. Arctic animals gather round.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Santa welcomed the weary elves into his
village.

(b) SANTA (21), a young man in a red and white suit, opens
his arms to greet them. Telve steps forward.

MATILDA (V.O.)

In gratitude, Telve offered Santa
the bottle of golden magic. But Santa
wanted no reward. His wish was simply
to bring light to a darkened world.

(c) The two reindeer stand between Santa and Telve. They
JOIN HANDS over the bottle. MAGIC races along the reindeer's
antlers like SILVER LIGHTNING.

MATILDA (V.O.)

From that day on, the reindeer -
touched by the elves' magic - could
fly and speak, carrying the spirit
of Christmas across the world.

(beat)

Yet darkness is not easily
defeated...

1B EXT. DEEP SNOW - YEARS LATER - DAY

1B

Nocty claws through the frozen drift, dragging the HALF-
CRYSTAL Snear into the light. He grips the BROKEN WAND. A
sickly glow pulses across his face.

SNEAR

Nice try, elves. You thought this
was over.

(beat)

It isn't!

END PROLOGUE:

2

EXT. SANTA'S VILLAGE - PRESENT - DAY

2

Northern Lights ripple across the sky, illuminating ice formations sculpted by unforgiving winds. The lamps of Santa's village glow in the distance.

Two reindeer trade aerial tricks, yelling: "Your turn!", "Beat that!", "Top this!".

VIXEN, a small doe, is quick and graceful. DASHER, a mighty stag, flies with reckless daring. A TWINKLING YELLOW AURA surrounds them both, Vixen's shines brighter. They hurtle over the village.

Below, reindeer unload mailbags from sleds. Young calves watch DONNER, wearing a Head Teacher cap, demonstrating how to pull a small sleigh. Older reindeer doze on piles of hay while Arctic animals laze or wander through the village.

Dasher misjudges a dive and belly-flops onto the ice. Vixen circles, smiling.

VIXEN

Santa's reindeer don't belly-flop,
Dasher. Well, most of us don't.

DASHER

You're our *second-best* flier, Vixen.

VIXEN

Oh, is that right?

Her AURA FLARES as she shoots upward. Dasher follows.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

First one to the clouds.

DASHER

You're on, hotshot!

They streak across the sky in zigzags, loops and spirals. Dasher dives low, skimming the ice.

CRACK! A FISSURE rips across the frozen expanse. The Northern Lights flicker, then dim. CRACK, CRACK! More fissures split the ice into drifting floes.

VIXEN

Dasher. What have you done?

DASHER

Me? I didn't touch it!

They land hard beside the largest fissure. Their FLIGHT AURAS sputter and fade. Vixen peers down at the cold grey sea churning below.

VIXEN

Why would our ice break up in winter?

She looks out across the widening cracks.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

We have to tell Santa.

3

EXT. TOP OF TOY WORKSHOP - DAY

3

The Northern Lights twist into a question mark above the village. Snow-lit cottages, a Norwegian stave church styled hall; a driftwood library; a school; shops; warehouses; train station and clock tower.

Vixen and Dasher trudge through snow towards Santa's toy workshop, carved into a vast ICEBERG. Outside, jaunty ice letters count down: "18 DAYS TO CHRISTMAS, HURRAH!"

VIXEN

Santa's gone to the elves' Christmas party.

They press their ears to a frosted window. Laughter and cheers rise from inside.

DASHER

How come we're not invited?

Vixen points to a sign, "ELVES ONLY".

DASHER (CONT'D)

Let's spy through Tolver's pool.

VIXEN

Are you *trying* to get us in trouble?

DASHER

It's where he "recharges his feelings." You never know what we might catch him doing!

VIXEN

Well, a quick look couldn't hurt.

4

EXT. TOP OF TOY WORKSHOP - DAY (MINUTES LATER)

4

The circular rim of Tolver's moon pool is guarded by ice statues of creatures that ward off evil: phoenix, leprechaun, owl and goldfish. The phoenix's legs are CRACKED.

VIXEN

Have you noticed Tolver's lost *all* sense of humour? If he sees us he'll be furious.

DASHER

The silly old elf won't know.

A wolf howls nearby. Vixen stiffens, eyes fixed.

DASHER (CONT'D)

What's a wolf doing here?

(eyeing Vixen)

Vixen, are you okay?

VIXEN

(falsely bright)

Never better.

Dasher frowns, unconvinced. He plunges his head into the pool to see through the water, into the workshop below.

5

INT. TOY WORKSHOP - DAY

5

Ablaze with light and colour. Magnificent tapestries and banners hang. Bagpipes wail. An oversized dragon clock breathes white fire, WHOOSH.

SANTA, older now, white hair and beard, coat buttons straining, looks around, beaming.

SANTA

Splendid party, elves. Your best yet.

The huge, ornate bottle sits on a central stand. It's more than HALF FULL of glowing, swirling GOLDEN MAGIC.

Santa checks the level, marks the bottle, turns to the round-eyed and pointy-eared TOYMAKER ELVES.

SANTA (CONT'D)

Thirty-four inches of golden magic left. Enough to make this Christmas our best ever.

A few elves carve toys at benches. Some use wands to make mechanisms or paint while others party furiously - eating, drinking, dancing and leg-wrestling. Snogging.

Santa inspects various toys: galleons on silver seas; fantastical beasts in enchanted glades; feisty princesses in haunted dungeons. He strokes a CHUBBY ELF's (Limricky) toy tiger and almost loses a finger. He yelps.

SANTA (CONT'D)

Mercy! That tiger's got spirit.
Wonderful work, Limricky.

LIMRICKY hugs him in thanks. Elves gather, showing Santa their work and tugging at his cap. He joins their tea party.

Under the table, an ancient elf snores hard enough to lift the cloth. An IRASCIBLE ELF prods him with a poker after each snore.

KEGG, a white rat in a waistcoat and tail kerchief, leaps onto the table and gobbles the snacks.

MATILDA, Santa's grey-haired, sharp-eyed wife, chats with RAFF, the white-maned head reindeer.

Lord Tolver, dignified as ever, leads FEAZEL (16) VIOLET EYES and her SILVER WAND toward Santa. Two elf children follow, mocking Tolver's grand stride until an elderly elf snaps them with a swat. They fall in line, still smirking.

TELVOR

Santa, meet my grand-niece, Feazel.
She came from Samoa to study art --
(nods to Matilda)
-- and advanced magic. Feazel?

Feazel shyly takes Santa's arm.

FEAZEL

Santa please follow me.

She swirls her wand. Violet sparks shower the air as a CRYSTAL STAIR coils upward, forming a shining platform at its peak. The elves cry out in delight. Santa ascends.

SANTA

Feazel, that's magnificent!
(from the platform)
Dear friends. Thank you for making us
honorary elves for a day, and
inviting us to this splendid party.

Loud cheers. Santa raises his glass to the elves.

SANTA (CONT'D)

How many Christmases is this, Matilda?

MATILDA

Nine hundred and eighty-four, dear.

SANTA

Goodness, how the centuries go by. And
we always get the toys to the children
on time. Well done, everyone. A toast!

Kegg springs onto a five-tiered cake, raises a paw.

KEGG

The same speech, nine hundred and
eighty-four years in a row. Wind it
up, Santa!

Roars of laughter. Santa beams at Kegg and everyone.

SANTA

Thank you, Kegg. We'll be working hard until Christmas – but today, we rest.

IRASCIBLE ELF

Rest would come quicker if you passed the eggnog, old man.

Two young elves slip off into the shadows, hand in hand, trying not to giggle.

TELVER

Hoy! Mind your manners before Santa.

They freeze, cheeks burning.

SANTA

Let them be. I remember being that young.

KEGG

Back when dinosaurs roamed.

Santa chuckles, lifts his glass and drenches the irascible elf's hairy ear. The elf glowers.

SANTA

It's time to celebrate, my dear, dear friends. Help your *elves*!

KEGG

Nice one, Santa. Ear, ear!

Santa stumbles as he steps down. Matilda steadies him.

MATILDA

Santa, are you a teensy bit tipsy?

SANTA

Well, we do say *Merry* Christmas.

6

EXT. TOP OF TOY WORKSHOP – DAY

6

Vixen nudges Dasher. He lifts his head out of the water.

DASHER

Just one sip of Santa's bottle – that's all I'd need to control my magic.

VIXEN

You'd be in big trouble. Don't say you weren't warned.

She plunges her head underwater and hits Dasher hard. He skids, kicks and breaks the legs of the phoenix statue.

It topples and spears through the pool floor. Water and ice flood the workshop, pulling both reindeer with it.

7

INT. TOY WORKSHOP - DAY (SECONDS LATER)

7

Vixen flies clear, skidding across a table of toys. Dasher smacks into a chandelier, clinging on as crystal rains down casting rainbow reflections. The phoenix statue shatters. Food, forks and fondue fly. Elves dive for cover. Telper stands drenched.

Dasher falls, sits up amid the wreckage, ringed by furious faces. Telper stares at the gaping hole in the roof.

TELPER

My pool, my precious pool!

MATILDA

I'm sure it was an accident.

Dasher shakes himself dry, spraying Telper.

TELPER

Dasher's whole life is an accident! Is there anything in the village he hasn't wrecked?

Dasher stares longingly at the bottle of magic. Vixen nudges him. Santa gives Telper a weary smile.

SANTA

We'll discuss this in my office.

Dasher's eyes drift right back to the bottle.

SANTA (CONT'D)

Now Dasher!

The frozen ceiling shifts - not breaking yet, but yielding. A slow, monstrous creak rolls across the cavern. The ice flexes. They look up.

VIXEN

(quietly)

Santa, our ice is cracking --

8

INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

8

Vixen and Dasher follow Santa, Telper and Rafe up a ramp. The office is cozy - a fire blazing, brass-framed porthole windows looking out over the ice.

Below, in the workshop, elves sweep wreckage while others keep celebrating.

VIXEN

I'm sorry about your pool, Lord Tolver.
It was stupid of me.

DASHER

And me. We wanted to see the party.

TELVER

You should both know better.

Santa gives them a look that's half-stern, half-fond.

SANTA

An excess of youthful high spirits.
We'll carve a new pool after Christmas.

Through a porthole window, the question mark of the Northern Lights turns a baleful green. Vixen watches the sky.

VIXEN

Santa, the ice around our village is cracking. Is something wrong?

Santa peers out, frowns.

SANTA

Not that I'm aware of. Rafe, you wanted to say something to Dasher?

RAFE

I'm old, Dasher, but how can I retire when you're too immature to take over?

Dasher looks abashed, shuffles his hooves. Santa muses.

SANTA

I should've child-proofed our magic.

FLASHBACK:

A two-year-old Dasher pushes a table toward a bottle of golden magic and clambers up. He pokes in a STRAW and slurps.

MATILDA (O.S.)

Dasher! Is that you? Stop!

Golden light floods his eyes. His antlers fizz with LIGHTNING, overturning a bench of toys. He falls, burping golden bubbles. Matilda rushes in.

BACK TO SCENE:

RAFE

So you became even more reckless. Vixen would make a better leader.

Vixen's head jerks up, her eyes shining.

SANTA
 Agreed. Vixen's smart and sensible.
 Vixen? What do you say?

VIXEN
 (hesitates)
 I'd love to lead the herd. It's
 just... I'm not sure I'm ready yet.

SANTA
 What are you afraid of, Vixen?
 Her voice softens.

VIXEN
 That someone will get hurt.
 (beat)
 Can I think about it?

Santa nods. Vixen, Dasher and Telve leave. Dasher hangs back.

DASHER
 I'm trained for leadership Santa.
 Vixen... well, she's not!

Santa waves him out. Rafe sighs and looks to Santa.

RAFE
 You think I'm too hard on him.

SANTA
 Dasher's got a good heart, Rafe.

RAFE
 But he never grows up.

SANTA
 (smiles wryly)
 Sounds like someone I knew when he was
 a young stag.

9

INT. TELVER'S OFFICE, TOP OF WORKSHOP - DAY

9

Telver calls Vixen inside. Green marble walls surround. On the far wall, an etched raven-haired elf woman watches.

Santa gazes across the polar ice. Telver paces, rattled.

TELVER
 Vixen, Feazel went to Green Pond
 this morning to sketch walruses and
 she hasn't come back.

Santa turns and studies him. Telver sits heavily.

TELVER (CONT'D)

She wants to have fun, and I... I was angry with her.

SANTA

She needs to find her own way.

TELVER

Vixen, would you go out and look for her? Please?

VIXEN

I'm on it.

Vixen runs out, leaps, her golden aura blazing and flies away across the village.

10 EXT. GREEN POND - DAY

10

Vixen swoops in, scanning the area. Feazel's tracks lead to a small pile of belongings. By the pond, a herd of walruses honk cheerfully at one another.

Vixen lands. She gathers Feazel's cloak and sketchbook, then lifts off and heads home.

11 INT. TELVER'S OFFICE, TOP OF WORKSHOP - DAY

11

Vixen lands outside and enters. Telve approaches.

TELVER

Find anything?

She pads over and hands him the cloak and sketch book.

VIXEN

I saw no blood, no sign of violence. She was just... *gone*.

Telve studies Feazel's sketches. The walrus has a winning smile but the line of its back trails off the page.

TELVER

Feazel's a born artist. She would never leave her sketch book behind.

He grips the back of a chair for support.

TELVER (CONT'D)

What could have happened to her?

12

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

12

BROWN SMOKE blankets the horizon. Human and elf children play in the square.

A massive GREENLAND SHARK erupts through the ice, sending three elf kids tumbling into the water.

Vixen bolts toward them, but Dasher is faster. He scoops the children out with his antlers. The shark, its VIOLET EYES glowing, snaps at him. Dasher lowers his antlers.

DASHER

Back off, Toothy!

WILD LIGHTNING blasts from his antlers, shattering the ice around him. He plunges into the water. The shark, slow but relentless, curves toward him. Dasher claws his way onto an ice slab. The shark slams it, tipping the floe as it lunges.

Dasher scrambles, the ice collapses beneath him. The shark wheels back, jaws open for a second strike.

VIXEN

Dasher, jump on its tail!

Dasher thrashes onto the shark's LASHING TAIL. It flicks and tosses him through the air. He lands hard and skids, his foreleg dripping blood. The shark slaps the water and dives. The watchers cheer. Dasher forces a grin.

DASHER

I was *totally* planning to do that.

VIXEN

Yeah. Sure you were.

Vixen binds a moss pad over Dasher's wound. She nuzzles him.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

Honestly, what would you do without me.

He manages a grin. Santa strides in, grave.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

Santa, the shark cracked our ice like an egg. Why is it so thin?

SANTA

(on the move)

Come with me.

13

INT. COMET'S LAB, CAVE-LIKE OFFICE - DAY (MINUTES LATER)

13

A desk. A microscope. Homemade instruments. On the wall: photos of fungi, volcanic eruptions and black-holes.

COMET is a small scientist reindeer with glasses and a wooden front leg.

VIXEN

Our ice should be eight feet thick in December. What's going on, Comet?

He flips open an OVERSIZED WOODEN LAPTOP.

COMET

I've said this before but nobody listens.

Donner, a large female, enters.

COMET (CONT'D)

The more carbon dioxide in the air, the greater...

Santa smiles and raises a hand.

SANTA

The short version please, Comet.

COMET

Ugh! Here's the dumbed-down version. Even Electric Horns will get it.

Dasher winces. Comet taps the keyboard. A map pops up: "1980". A satellite view of the Arctic. The ocean covered in ice. He flicks to a second map: "2026". Same view almost no ice.

COMET (CONT'D)

Global warming is melting our ice. It's disappearing. No more polar bear cubs. No more village!

Comet looks around at the team's somber faces.

COMET (CONT'D)

(to Donner)

You're Head Teacher, Donner. Why do you leave all this to me?

DONNER

Can't get a word in edgeways.

Santa lurches to a chair and sits down.

SANTA

The North Pole's been our home for almost a thousand years. Why is this happening now?

COMET

Nobody listens!

Dasher lets out a random belch. Comet stares at him.

COMET (CONT'D)

As I was saying!

Comet looks out to a pall of smoke.

COMET (CONT'D)

Something's been burning over there for months. There's too much air pollution --

DASHER

I'll check it out.

RAFE

No, I'll go.

Dasher, disappointed, sits. Rafe at the door turns.

RAFE (CONT'D)

It could be dangerous.

VIXEN

How long before our village falls into the sea?

COMET

Maybe a month. Maybe less.

The room freezes. Santa scans their faces, hopeful.

SANTA

Christmas is two weeks away. Can we still get it done?

VIXEN

If it's going to be the last Christmas, we have to.

14

INT. MATILDA'S STUDIO - NIGHT

14

Vixen stares, transfixed: chequerboard cabbages in quirky planters, exotic bird and beast statues; a carved gnome with a third eye. Sketches of Arctic animals are scattered across a table. Matilda peers through a monocle, studying a sketch.

VIXEN

Are they Feazel's drawings?

MATILDA

That girl sure has talent.

An EERIE CRY. A WINGED SHADOW swoops past a skylight.

VIXEN

What was *that*?

MATILDA

Trouble could be on its way.
Dasher's going to need every bit of
magic he can muster.

(beat)

And you, Vixen, need to help him.

VIXEN

Me? I'm hardly the reindeer for the
job.

MATILDA

You're exactly the reindeer for the
job.

Matilda twirls a WOODEN SPOON around an ICE SCULPTURE OF
SANTA'S HEAD AND SHOULDERS.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

Bust of Santa, rise!

The bust rises, rotates, then settles back onto its pedestal.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

Successful magic needs focus, power
and self-control.

(beat)

Dasher has the power. Comet can
teach him focus.

Matilda points the spoon at Vixen.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

And you have self-control. Teach him
that.

15

EXT. GREENHOUSES - NIGHT

15

In the lamplight, Dasher and Vixen make a line of snowballs.
Dasher circles one with his antlers, spirals them upwards.

DASHER

Snowball, *rise!*

He tries again. Nothing. He stamps his hooves.

DASHER (CONT'D)

Why aren't they working?

VIXEN

You have to practice self-control.

Dasher swirls his antlers in a furious figure-eight.

DASHER

Stupid snowball, *rise!*

LIGHTNING ARCS then BLASTS OUT of his antlers. Snowballs whip around and shoot out the window. Offscreen: A distant CRY OF FURY.

VIXEN

Uh-oh! Sounds like you hit Donner!

Dasher bolts. Vixen turns and faces Donner. A SMASHED SNOWBALL covers her forehead. Behind her, the twins, Dancer and Prancer look on. Donner looms over Vixen, baring teeth.

DONNER

(shaking off snow)

I remember when I trained you, you worshipped that clown.

VIXEN

That was ten years ago, Donner.

Dancer and Prancer aim to please with a synchronized JIVE.

DONNER

You want to be a leader? Then stop backing idiots.

(to Dancer and Prancer)

Case in point.

Donner stalks to the exit. The twins follow, dancing out.

VIXEN

I'll never be good enough for her.

16

INT. TOY WORKSHOP - NIGHT

16

Vixen unloads mail. Elves hammer toys. Tilver marks the level on the bottle. Santa sits with a pile of envelopes. Matilda sips BI-COLOUR TEA. Kegg sniffs for crumbs. Santa reads a letter and hands it to a scribe, pointing to the "GOOD" list. He takes another letter.

SANTA

Anyone got a joke? No? Here's one.
Why do I go down the chimney?

MATILDA

Why do you go down the chimney
Santa?

SANTA

(chuckling)

Because the door's too small for my
belly!

KEGG

Best you stick to presents Santa!

Kegg freezes, fur BRISTLING. He points to Santa's letter.

KEGG (CONT'D)

Santa. Something's wrong.

A VIOLET-EYED SPECTER erupts from the letter, the BROKEN WAND in its flaming talons. Santa shields the magic. The specter blasts him with fire. Matilda races over, patting out flames. The specter springs forward, pressing the wand to the bottle. The tip GLOWS as the magic drains into it. Vixen lunges.

TELVER

No! You can't fight dark magic!

She stops. The golden magic level begins FALLING FAST.

TELVER (CONT'D)

Dark phantom, begone!

Blue-white fire erupts from his sword-wand, striking the specter. It detonates into a cascade of VIOLET SPARKS. Santa struggles to stand. Matilda helps him up.

MATILDA

Telver, you were formidable!

TELVER

Not a "silly old elf" after all.

Santa turns to the bottle. He chokes, stunned.

SANTA

It stole half our magic. There's barely enough to do Christmas!

MATILDA

If Kegg hadn't warned you...

(looking around)

Kegg?

Kegg, his nose bent, peeps from a bowl of gherkins.

KEGG

Just checking our provisions.

MATILDA

Are you hurt?

Kegg covers his eyes with a paw, milking the moment.

KEGG

Mortally... But a morsel of cheese would ease the pain.

MATILDA

Your warning saved Santa's life. You get all the cheese you want.

Two elves carry Kegg on a stretcher. He gives a royal wave.

SANTA

First Feazel disappears, now this.
What's going on?

TELVER

We've long had enemies among the
angry... and the evil.

The elves mutter. Irascible Elf stalks over.

IRASCIBLE ELF

That thing had violet eyes – same as
Feazel's! She's double-crossed us!

Telver lowers his gaze, speaking quietly.

TELVER

I don't want to believe that.