

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 to illuminate the glass spires of a magical ELVISH CITY.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Long ago, in a land of shimmering light, the elves lived in harmony with nature. Yet darkness was rising...

(b) Acid-green lightning slashes the sky; torn clouds expose a snow-clad clifftop. From it a hard-faced man, KROOLIO SNEAR (mid-30s), points a SOLID EMERALD WAND down at the city. CRACK! Its spires fall.

MATILDA (V.O.) (cont'd)

Kroolio Snear, a sorcerer whose heart was consumed by greed, wanted the elves' golden magic.

(beat)

However magic was their heart and soul. They could not bear to lose it.

(c) The elves flee, surrounding a raven-haired ELF WOMAN (22) who carries a large, ornate GLASS BOTTLE. Its contents SHIMMERS like LIQUID GOLD.

MATILDA (V.O.) (cont'd)

Snear ordered his cruel, shapeshifter aide, Nocty, to take their magic.

(d) NOCTY (25), a lean, triangular-headed woman, SHAPE-SHIFTS to a bat-winged NIGHT GAUNT and dives. The elf woman cries out and runs, cradling the bottle.

MATILDA (V.O.) (cont'd)

An elf warrior, Telper, struck back. His magic broke Snear's wand and his power.

(e) With his SWORD-WAND, LORD TELPER (30s), conjures a vast ICE DRAGON. Its mighty FROST-BREATH SNAPS SNEAR'S WAND and turns him HALF-CRYSTAL. He falls, howling.

MATILDA (V.O.) (cont'd)

Snear and Nocty were buried alive...

(f) With an EERIE SCREECH Nocty whirls and snatches Snear from mid-air. But the clifftop shakes and they disappear under rivers of snow and ice.

MATILDA (V.O.) (cont'd)

The elves fled across the Arctic.

(g) The elves collapse on endless ice. A male and a female reindeer approach them, concerned.

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

1A

PROLOGUE, MONTAGE:

(a) The two reindeer lead the elves to a pretty village at the North Pole. Arctic animals gather around.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Santa took the destitute elves in.

(b) SANTA (21), a slim young man in a red and white suit, welcomes the elves and gives them shelter.

MATILDA (V.O.) (cont'd)

In thanks, Tolver offered Santa the bottle of golden magic. But Santa didn't want a reward. He hoped to bring light into a dark world.

(c) The two reindeer stand between Santa and Tolver, who BIND ARMS over the bottle. MAGIC crackles along the reindeer's antlers like SILVER LIGHTNING.

MATILDA (V.O.) (cont'd)

They vowed to share magic with the reindeer, so they could fly and talk, and use it to spread the spirit of Christmas across the land.

(beat)

Yet darkness is not easily defeated...

1B EXT. DEEP SNOW - YEARS LATER - DAY

1B

Nocty digs out the HALF-CRYSTAL Snear. He grips the broken wand with clawed fingers, his eyes glinting with malice.

SNEAR

The elves will bitterly regret their defiance! I *will* have their magic.

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 do aerial acrobatics, cheering each other on. VIXEN, a small doe, is quick and graceful. DASHER, a mighty stag, flies with reckless daring. They're surrounded by TWINKLING YELLOW AURAS, Vixen's much the brighter.

They hurtle over the village. Below, reindeer unload mailbags from sleds. DONNER, in a Head Teacher cap, shows calves how to pull a small sleigh. Old reindeer doze on piles of hay. Arctic animals laze, or meander cheerfully.

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

VIXEN

I love being one of Santa's reindeer.

DASHER

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

She snorts derisively and soars higher, her AURA FLARING.

VIXEN

Expect turbulence, slow-coach!

DASHER

You're on, hotshot!

He follows at dangerous speed. They do a series of interwoven manoeuvres: zigzags, loops, spirals, thread-the-needle. He zooms low, just inches above the ice.

CRACK! A FISSURE zigzags across it, splitting the ice apart. The Northern Lights flicker and fade. CRACK, CRACK! More fissures tear solid ice into a jumble of floes.

VIXEN

Dasher, what have you done?

DASHER

I didn't touch it!

They land next to the largest fissure and their FLIGHT AURAS DIE. Vixen eyes the cold grey sea below. Shivers.

VIXEN

Why would our ice break up in winter? We've got to tell Santa.

3 EXT. TOP OF TOY WORKSHOP - DAY

3

The Northern Lights twist into a question mark above the village. Warm, cosy cottages; a majestic hall like a Norwegian stave church; a library made of driftwood; a school; shops; warehouses; train station and clock tower.

Vixen and Dasher head for Santa's toy workshop, built inside a vast, hollowed-out ICEBERG. Outside, jaunty ice letters count down: "18 DAYS TO CHRISTMAS, HURRAH!"

VIXEN

Santa's gone to the elves' famous Christmas party.

DASHER

How come we're not invited?

Vixen points to a sign, "ELVES ONLY." They press their ears to a frosted window. Laughter and cheers are heard from inside.

DASHER (cont'd)

Let's spy through Telper's pool, up on top. He moon-bathes up there, when he's *sooo stressed*.

VIXEN

Well, a quick look couldn't hurt.

4 EXT. TOP OF TOY WORKSHOP - DAY (MINUTES LATER) 4

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

VIXEN

Telper's got no sense of humour. If he sees us he'll be furious.

DASHER

The silly old elf won't know.

A wolf howls, not far away. Vixen goes rigid, eyes staring.

DASHER (cont'd)

What's a wolf doing here? Vixen, are you okay?

VIXEN

(falsely bright)

Never better.

Dasher frowns. After a pause, he plunges his head into the pool and looks down through its clear base.

5 INT. TOY WORKSHOP - DAY 5

The cavernous space blazes with light and colour. Magnificent tapestries cover the walls. Banners hang from the ceiling. Elvish bagpipes wail. An enormous dragon clock breathes white fire, WHOOSH!

SANTA, now elderly with white hair and beard, and his coat buttons under a strain, looks around and beams.

SANTA

Splendid party, elves. Your best yet.

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

Santa checks the level against a measuring rod, marks the bottle. He turns to the TOYMAKER ELVES. They're half his height, with round eyes and pointy ears.

SANTA (cont'd)

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

A few elves carve at benches, use wands to make magical mechanisms, or paint toys. The rest party furiously -- eating, drinking, dancing, leg-wrestling. Snogging.

Santa inspects a display of toys: galleons glide on silver seas; strange beasts creep through enchanted glades; feisty princesses sneak into haunted dungeons.

He shakes the hand of a CHUBBY ELF (Limricky) and strokes her toy tiger. It almost takes a finger off. He yelps.

SANTA (cont'd)

Beautiful job, Limricky.

She hugs him. Other elves proudly show Santa their work and kiss his whiskery cheeks. He sits on the floor with the elf children at their own little party, cracking jokes, and they climb all over him and steal his cap.

An ancient elf lies under a table, his snores lifting the tablecloth. An IRASCIBLE ELF, stiff and angular, prods him with a poker after each snore.

On the table, KEGG, a white rat in a waistcoat and tail kerchief, snaps up undefended snacks.

Santa's wife, MATILDA, grey and wise, chats to RAFF, the elderly, white-maned head reindeer.

Lord Telfer, old and dignified, leads FEAZEL (16), an elf girl with big VIOLET EYES and a silver wand, to Santa.

Behind, two elf kids mock his stately walk. An elderly elf lady swats them. They desist, smirking.

TELVER

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, will you come this way?

She swirls her wand. In a shower of violet-coloured sparks, a glorious CRYSTAL STAIR spirals up, a speaking platform on top. The elves cry out in wonder. Santa climbs the stairs.

SANTA
 Breathtaking wizardry, Feazel!
 (beat)
 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 flat out
 until Christmas -- but today, we relax.

IRASCIBLE ELF
 Be a lot more relaxing if you'd pass
 the eggnog, old man.

In the background, two young elves sneak away to the
 shadows behind the benches, hand in hand.

TELVER
 Hoy! Show some respect to Santa.

The pair freeze, then turn, blushing.

SANTA
 Let them go, bless 'em. I was young
 once.

KEGG
 Back in the age of the dinosaurs.

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

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,
grins cunningly.

DASHER
One sip from Santa's bottle and I'll
be able to control my magic.

VIXEN
You'll get into *big* trouble.

She puts her head underwater, bumps Dasher. He slips,
kicks furiously. Breaks the legs of the phoenix statue.

It topples and spears through the bottom of the moon pool.
Water and ice flood down into the workshop, along with
Vixen and Dasher.

7 INT. TOY WORKSHOP - DAY (SECONDS LATER)

7

Vixen flies clear and tries to look inconspicuous. Dasher
hits a splendid chandelier, scrambles to hold on. Cut
crystal goes in all directions, casting rainbow
reflections across the workshop.

Telver is drenched. The phoenix shatters on the table.
Food, forks and fondue go flying. Elves duck for cover.

Dasher swings upside-down from the chandelier's chains,
grins in embarrassment. He falls, knocks Telver over.
Dasher sits up, surrounded by ruin and furious faces.

VIXEN
Santa, our ice is cracking --

Telver gapes at the hole in the roof.

TELVER
My pool, my precious pool!

Dasher shakes himself, sprays water in Telper's face.

MATILDA

I'm sure it was an accident.

TELVER

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

Dasher eyes the bottle of magic greedily. Vixen nudges him. Santa gives Telper a sympathetic smile.

SANTA

Let's not spoil the party. We'll
discuss this in my office.

He turns away. Dasher gazes at the bottle, oblivious.

SANTA (cont'd)

Now, please, Dasher!

8 INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

8

Vixen and Dasher follow Santa, Telper and Rafe up a ramp to a cosy office with panelled walls and brass-framed portholes. A fire blazes in a stone fireplace.

An internal window looks down into the workshop, where a handful of elves clean up the wreckage. The rest party on.

VIXEN

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

DASHER

And me. We wanted to see the party.

TELVER

You should both know better.

Santa gives them a part-stern, part-fond look.

SANTA

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

VIXEN

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

Through a porthole, the question mark of the Northern Lights turns a baleful green. 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.

MEMORY FLASH: Dasher, a clumsy two-year-old calf, shoves a
table across to the bottle of golden magic, clambers up
and pokes in a long DRINKING STRAW.

MATILDA (O.S.)

Dasher, is that you? *Stop!*

Wide eyes reflecting the golden radiance, he grins, sucks,
swallows. His eyes revolve. His stubby antlers TWINKLE,
then LIGHTNING FIZZES from them, overturning a bench full
of Christmas toys.

Dasher falls in a daze, burping golden bubbles. Matilda
enters, panting, and runs to him.

BACK TO SCENE:

DASHER

That's how I got *my* magic.

RAFE

Which made you even more reckless.
Vixen would make a better leader.

Vixen's head jerks up, her eyes shining.

DASHER

I'm trained for leadership, she's not.

SANTA

I agree with Rafe. Vixen's smart and
sensible. What do you say, Vixen?

VIXEN

I'd love to lead the herd... one
day. Can I think about it?

Vixen, Dasher and Telfer go out. Rafe sighs.

SANTA

Dasher's got a good heart, Rafe. He
just wants to help.

RAFE

You think I'm too hard on him. But he
never seems to grow up.

SANTA
 (smiles wryly)
 He's much like you were, when you
 were a young stag.

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

9

Telver calls Vixen in. Green marble walls. An etching of a raven-haired elf woman. Devices oscillating in corners.

Santa stands by a doorway, gazing across the polar ice.

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

SANTA
 Is everything all right between you?

Telver sits suddenly, rocks back and forth.

TELVER
 We argued. She just wants to have fun, and I... I was angry with her.

SANTA
 She needs to find her own way.

TELVER
 Can you look for her, Vixen? Please?

VIXEN
 I'll go right away.

Vixen runs out, past the broken moon pool, leaps off the top of the iceberg and flies away across the village.

10 EXT. GREEN POND - DAY

10

Vixen flies in, scanning the ice. Feazel's small prints lead to a pile of belongings. Over by the pond, a herd of walruses honk cheerfully at one another.

Vixen lands, looks around but sees no danger. She collects Feazel's elven cloak and sketch book, flies home.

11 INT. TELVER'S OFFICE - DAY

11

Telver paces anxiously. Vixen lands outside and enters.

TELVER
 That was quick. Find anything?

She gives him the cloak and sketch book. He studies Feazel's sketches. The walrus has a winning smile, but the line of its back trails off the page...

TELVER (cont'd)

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

(chokes)

Do you think a walrus got her?

He grips the back of a chair for support.

VIXEN

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

TELVER

What am I going to tell her family?

12 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

12

BROWN SMOKE covers the horizon. Human and elf children play in the square. A huge Greenland Shark bursts up through the ice and three elf kids fall in the water.

Vixen runs but Dasher is faster, scoops the kids out with his antlers. The shark, which has GLOWING VIOLET EYES, snaps at him. Dasher points his antlers threateningly.

DASHER

Back off, Toothy!

WILD LIGHTNING explodes from his antlers, SMASHES ICE all around him. He falls in. The shark, slow but relentless, curves towards him. Dasher scrambles onto an ice floe.

The shark tips it over, lunges. Dasher tries to get out but the broken ice won't support his weight. The shark turns to attack again.

VIXEN

Dasher, onto its tail!

He thrashes onto the shark's LASHING TAIL. It flicks back, forward and tosses him through the air, his foreleg dripping blood.

He lands hard and skids across the ice. The shark slaps the water with its tail, dives. The watchers cheer.

DASHER

I always planned to jump on its tail.

Vixen snorts.

VIXEN

Yeah, right! You're *nothing* without me.

She binds a moss pad over Dasher's wound, nuzzles him playfully. He grins. Santa comes running.

VIXEN (cont'd)
Santa, the shark cracked our ice like an egg. Why is it so thin?

SANTA
I don't know. Come with me. We've got to see Comet.

13 INT. COMET'S LAB - OFFICE - DAY (MINUTES LATER)

13

A cave-like space. A standing desk with a microscope. Home-made scientific equipment on benches. Photos of fungi, volcanic eruptions, black holes.

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

COMET is a small scientist reindeer with glasses and a wooden front right leg. He glares at Dasher and opens a MASSIVE WOODEN LAPTOP. Donner, a big female, enters.

COMET
Nobody listens! The more carbon dioxide in the air, the greater --

Santa smiles and holds up a hand.

SANTA
Make it simple, please.

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

Dasher winces. Comet taps a key on his yard-wide keyboard. On the screen a map: "1980", gives a satellite view of the Arctic. The ocean is covered in ice. A second map: "2026", shows the same view but there's hardly any ice.

COMET (cont'd)
Global warming is melting our ice and it'll soon be gone. No more polar bear cubs. No more village!
(beat)
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, sits down hard.

SANTA

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

COMET

Nobody listens! There's too much air pollution --

Dasher belches. Comet eyes him with disdain, then points to the huge, distant pall of smoke.

COMET (cont'd)

As I was saying! Something's been burning over there for months.

DASHER

I'll check it out right away!

RAFE

It could be dangerous. *I'll go.*

Rafe trudges out. Dasher looks crestfallen.

VIXEN

How long before our village falls into the sea?

COMET

Maybe a month. Maybe... less.

Stunned silence. Santa takes off his cap, runs his fingers through thin white hair, forces a smile.

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 gapes. Every surface is covered in quirky items: a planter of chequerboard cabbages; statues of exotic birds and mythical beasts; a carved gnome with a third eye in its forehead. Sketches of Arctic animals lie on a table.

VIXEN

Are they Feazel's drawings?

MATILDA

She has a great talent.

An EERIE CRY, and a WINGED SHADOW swoops past a skylight.

VIXEN

What was *that*?

MATILDA

I... couldn't tell. Can you give Dasher a hand with his magic?

VIXEN

How? I can't do magic.

Using a WOODEN SPOON in her left hand like a magic wand, Matilda circles its tip around an ice bust of Santa.

MATILDA

Bust of Santa, *rise!*

The bust rises to the ceiling, descends, rotates once and settles neatly on its pedestal.

MATILDA (cont'd)

Successful magic needs focus, power and self-control. And you're very self-controlled. 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!*

It doesn't move. He tries again and again. Nothing. He stamps massive hooves.

DASHER (cont'd)

Something's wrong with them!

VIXEN

Matilda said you've got to practice self-control.

Dasher snorts. Vixen glares at him. He takes deep breaths, swirls his antlers in a furious figure-eight.

DASHER

Stupid snowball, *rise!*

LIGHTNING ARCS across his antlers, then BLASTS OUT. Snowballs fly everywhere. A distant CRY OF FURY (Donner).

VIXEN

Uh-oh! Get out of here!

Dasher bolts. Vixen turns to face Donner and the pretty twins, DANCER and PRANCER, both smiling vacantly.

Donner looms over Vixen, bares large teeth. A SMASHED SNOWBALL covers her forehead. Vixen laughs nervously.

DONNER

(shakes snow off)

You say you want to lead. But when I taught you, you followed that insolent ratbag around like a little puppy.

VIXEN

Ten years ago. We were just kids.

Dancer and Prancer dance a FLAWLESS JIVE, beaming.

DONNER

You're still aiding and abetting him.

(turns)

Dancer and Prancer, you're idiots!

Donner stalks away. Unabashed, Dancer and Prancer exchange grins and follow in PERFECT STEP. Vixen sags.

VIXEN

This is so unfair.

16 INT. TOY WORKSHOP - NIGHT

16

Elves work at their benches. Tolver marks the level on the bottle. Santa sits at a table piled with envelopes. Matilda sips BI-COLOUR TEA. Kegg wanders the table, sniffing for crumbs. Vixen unloads mailbags.

Santa reads a letter, beams and hands it to an elf scribe. She notes the child's request on the "GOOD" list.

SANTA

A joke! Why do I go down the chimney?

MATILDA

I have no idea.

SANTA

Because it *soots* me best. Ahahaha!

KEGG

Don't give up the night job, Santa.

Santa opens another envelope. Kegg's FUR STANDS UP.

KEGG (cont'd)

I smell danger! Santa, *look out!*

Santa drops the letter. A VIOLET-EYED SPECTRE erupts from it, holding a broken EMERALD WAND in FLAMING TALONS. Kegg goes flying. Santa tries to protect the bottle of magic. The figure blasts him aside, sets his coat ablaze.

SANTA

Aarrgh!

The spectre springs and touches the broken wand to the bottle. The wand tip GLOWS. Vixen prepares to charge.

TELVER

No! You can't fight dark magic.

She freezes. But the level of golden magic is FALLING FAST.

TELVER (cont'd)

Dark phantom, begone!

Blue-white fire blasts from his sword-wand and hits the spectre, which disappears in a shower of VIOLET SPARKS.

Santa stands painfully as Matilda tears off his coat and hugs him. Vixen and the elves watch anxiously.

MATILDA

Telver, you were *formidable!*

TELVER

Not a "silly old elf" after all.

Santa turns to the bottle, chokes.

SANTA

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

MATILDA

If Kegg hadn't warned you -- *Kegg?*

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

KEGG

Just checking the provisions.

MATILDA

Are you injured?

Kegg lays a paw across his eyes in a theatrical manner, and sighs, the classic ham actor. She kisses him.

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 solemnly carry Kegg out on a tiny stretcher. He waves grandly, like a royal. Matilda's smile fades.

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 among themselves.

IRASCIBLE ELF

It had violet eyes, did you see? Just
like Feazel's eyes. She's betrayed us.

TELVER

(groans)

I don't want to believe it.