

**THE LAST CHRISTMAS**

The North Pole is Melting!

Screenplay by

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Based on his novel

Story by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ELVISH CITY, PAST - DAY

PROLOGUE, IMAGE MONTAGE: MATILDA CLAUS (MATILDA)  
narrates offscreen.

(a) A battered band of elves, led by a tall warrior,  
LORD TELVER (30), flee a burning elvish city.

MATILDA (V.O.)

Long ago, the elves were driven  
from their home by Kroolio Snear,  
a wicked human sorcerer, and his  
shape-shifting ally, Nocty.

(b) A raven-haired elf woman (20) cradles an ornate  
glass bottle with shimmering contents of liquid gold.

(c) KROOLIO SNEAR (25), atop a high tower, targets the  
elf woman with a beam from his emerald wand.

(d) NOCTY (26), a shape-shifting, bat-winged night  
gaunt, plummets down towards the elf woman.

MATILDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Snear wanted the elves' magic. But  
magic was their heart and soul, and  
they could not bear to lose it.

(e) Telveer blasts with his sword-wand. Snear's emerald  
wand snaps and he turns half crystal. The tower  
topples and he falls. With an eerie screech, the night  
gaunt shape-shifts into Nocty and vanishes.

(f) The elvish city crumbles to rubble.

MATILDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Snear vowed to return for the  
elves' magic, one day. The elves  
fled into an icy wasteland.

(g) The starving elves collapse on endless ice.

EXT. SANTA'S VILLAGE, PAST - DAY

PROLOGUE, MONTAGE:

(a) A herd of reindeer lead the elves to a pretty  
village where Arctic animals frolic.

(b) SANTA (22), a slim young man in a red and white  
suit, takes the elves in.

MATILDA (V.O.)

In thanks, Lord Telveer offered  
Santa the bottle of elf magic.

(MORE)

MATILDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But Santa didn't want a reward, he wanted to bring light into a dark world.

(c) A middle-aged lead reindeer stands between Santa and Lord Tilver, who bind arms over the bottle.

MATILDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Santa and Tilver agreed to share magic with the reindeer, and use it to bring Christmas joy to all the children of the world.

(beat)

But evil is not easily defeated...

(d) Nocty rises from the rubble like a vampire. She lifts the half-crystal Snear, who clutches the broken emerald wand.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. NORTH POLE ICE, PRESENT - DAY

Shimmering Northern Lights fill the sky. Polar ice wind-sculpted into fantastic shapes. The lamps of Santa's village glow in the distance.

Two reindeer with warm yellow auras do aerial acrobatics and cheer each other on. VIXEN, a little doe, is quick and graceful. DASHER, a big, strong stag with majestic antlers, flies with reckless daring.

They hurtle over the village. Below, reindeer unload mailbags, carry supplies, haul firewood on sleds. DONNER, in a teacher's hat, shows calves how to pull a small sleigh. Old reindeer doze on piles of hay.

Dasher misjudges a dive, hits the ice and tumbles across it. Vixen circles, smiles dreamily.

VIXEN

I love being one of Santa's reindeer.

DASHER

You're the best flier in the world!

She laughs and soars higher.

VIXEN

Come on, slow-coach.

Dasher follows. They do a series of interwoven manoeuvres: zigzags, loops, whirls, spirals, thread-the-needle.

CRACK! A FISSURE zigzags across the ice for miles and splits it open.

The Northern Lights go out. CRACK, CRACK. More fissures tear the solid ice into a jumble of floes.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

Why would our ice break up *in winter?*

Vixen and Dasher land next to the largest fissure. Vixen eyes the cold grey sea below, and shivers.

EXT. TOY WORKSHOP, SANTA'S VILLAGE - DAY

The Northern Lights reappear to form a question mark above the village. Warm, cosy cottages; a majestic hall like a Norwegian stave church; a library made of driftwood; school; shops; train station and 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 *Last Push* Christmas party.

DASHER

How come we're not invited?

VIXEN

Is there something about 'elves only' you don't understand?

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

DASHER

Let's spy through old Telper's pool. Where he moon-bathes, when he's *sooo stressed*.

VIXEN

Well, a quick look couldn't hurt.

EXT. TOP OF TOY WORKSHOP - DAY

Telper's moon pool is cut into the top of the iceberg. The circular rim bears huge ice statues of creatures that ward off evil: phoenix, leprechaun, owl, goldfish. The legs of the phoenix are cracked.

VIXEN

Telper's got no sense of humour. He'll be furious.

DASHER

The silly old elf won't know.

Dasher puts his front legs over the side, plunges his head in and looks through the clear base of the pool.

INT. TOY WORKSHOP, CONTINUOUS - DAY

The cavernous space blazes with light, colour and sound. Magnificent tapestries line the walls. Banners hang from the ceiling. Elvish bagpipes skirl. An enormous dragon clock breathes white fire twice: 2 p.m.

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

SANTA

Splendid. Our best yet!

On a central stand sits a huge, ornate glass bottle, half full of a magical golden fluid. It shimmers, swirls, ripples and creeps up the sides.

Santa checks the level against a measuring rod, marks the bottle. He turns to the throngs of toymaker elves. They're half his height, round eyes and pointy ears.

SANTA (CONT'D)

Thirty-four inches of golden magic. More than enough to make this Christmas our best ever!

A few elves carve wood at benches, assemble tricky mechanisms or paint toys. The rest party furiously -- they eat, drink, dance, argue, leg-wrestle. Snog.

Santa inspects a display of toys: galleons glide on silver seas; strange beasts creep through enchanted glades; melancholy princesses peep from grim towers.

He shakes the hand of a chubby elf, Limricky, strokes her toy tiger. It almost takes a finger off. He jumps.

SANTA (CONT'D)

Beautiful job, Limricky.

She hugs him. The elves show Santa their work and kiss his whiskery cheeks. He sits on the floor with the elf children at their own little party. They climb all over him and steal his cap.

An ancient elf lies under a table; his snores lift the tablecloth. An IRASCIBLE ELF, all ears, nose and chin, 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 reindeer leader.

LORD TELVER, now old and wizened, proudly leads FEAZEL (16), an elf girl with big violet eyes, to Santa.

TELVER  
My grand-niece, Feazel, visiting  
from Tierra del Fuego. Would you  
do the honour, Grand-niece?

FEAZEL  
Santa, come this way.

Feazel shyly takes Santa's arm, shows him to a dais.

SANTA  
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 times have we done  
Christmas now? I've lost count.

MATILDA  
984 years, my dear.

SANTA  
Goodness, how the centuries go by.  
And not once have we failed to get  
the toys to the children on time.  
Well done, everyone. A toast!

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

KEGG  
The same speech, 984 years in a  
row. Wind it up, Santa.

Roars of laughter. Santa beams at Kegg, and everyone.

SANTA  
We'll be working flat out until  
Christmas. But today, we relax.

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

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

TELVER  
Hoy! Show respect to Santa.

The pair freeze, then blush and turn.

SANTA

Let them go, bless them. I was  
young once...

KEGG

Back in the age of the dinosaurs!

Santa chuckles, waves the glass and spills his drink.

SANTA

A reminder to not take myself too  
seriously. It's time to celebrate,  
my dear, dear friends.

He stumbles as he steps down. Matilda steadies him.

MATILDA

Santa, are you a teensy bit merry?

SANTA

Well, we do say *Merry* Christmas.

EXT. TOP OF TOY WORKSHOP, CONTINUOUS - DAY

Vixen nudges Dasher. He lifts his head from the pool.

DASHER

What a great party!

VIXEN

Let me see.

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

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

INT. TOY WORKSHOP, CONTINUOUS - DAY

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

Telver is drenched. The phoenix slams into the main  
table and shatters. Food, ice and cutlery go flying.

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

VIXEN

Santa, our ice is breaking --

TELVER

My pool, my precious pool. This is too much!

Dasher shakes himself, sprays water all around.

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?

Santa carefully puts down his glass.

SANTA

Let's not spoil the party. Come up to my office.

INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - DAY

Vixen and Dasher take the ramp up to a cosy space with paneled walls and brass-framed porthole windows. An open ledger rests on a sea captain's desk. A cheery fire blazes in a stone fireplace.

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

VIXEN

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

DASHER

And me. We wanted to see the party.

TELVER

You should both know better.

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

SANTA

An excess of youthful high spirits, I'm sure. We'll build a new moon pool after Christmas.

(to Rafe)

Dasher needs a job.

RAFE

Not sure he's ready.

VIXEN

Santa, there are huge cracks across our ice. Is something wrong?

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



SANTA

Not that I'm aware of. Rafe, did you want to speak to Dasher?

RAFE

I'm old, Dasher, and my magic is getting weaker. But how can I retire when you're so immature?

Dasher looks abashed, shuffles his hooves.

RAFE

Right now, Vixen would make a better leader.

DASHER

(shocked)

But she can't do any magic!

SANTA

She has other leadership skills. What do you say, Vixen?

VIXEN

I'd love to lead the herd one day. But I'm not ready yet.

Vixen, Dasher and Telve go out. Rafe rubs his grizzled face with a foreleg, sighs.

RAFE

You think I'm too hard on Dasher. Maybe I'm a poor teacher, but he just won't listen. Thinks he knows it all -- and more!

SANTA

(laughs)

He's just like you were, when you were a young stag.

INT. MATILDA'S GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

The greenhouse has fires at each end, floodlights on the ceiling and rows of plump vegetables. Vixen watches Matilda mist rainbow cabbages with an antique sprayer.

VIXEN

Matilda, why can't I do magic?

Matilda keeps misting. Vixen circles the cabbages.

MATILDA

We've talked about this before.

VIXEN

I can fly better than anyone. What if my magic is hidden from me?

Matilda lifts Vixen's ears and peers inside, accidentally sprays her. Vixen flaps her ears.

MATILDA

I've never sensed any magical Gift in you, not that you need it.

VIXEN

Can you teach me magic, please?

MATILDA

Oh, very well! I'll give you one lesson, tomorrow night.

INT. TELVER'S OFFICE - DAY

Santa calls Vixen in the office. Green marble walls. An etching of a raven-haired elf woman. Contraptions with many moving parts vibrating in corners.

SANTA

Urgent job for you, Vixen.

TELVER

My grand-niece, Feazel, went out to sketch walruses on the ice this morning and hasn't come back. I'm sure it's nothing, but --

SANTA

The Arctic animals have been behaving oddly, and they can be dangerous.

VIXEN

I'll go right away!

SANTA

Be quick. Be careful.

Vixen runs out.

EXT. ARCTIC ICE - DAY

Vixen circles above a small pile of belongings. She lands, picks up a crumpled elven cloak and a torn sketch book. She races home.

INT. TELVER'S OFFICE, LATER - DAY

Vixen gives Telve the cloak and sketch book. He studies the sketches. The walrus has an engaging smile. He wipes away a tear.

TELVER

Feazel's magic is so subtle, she can work spells with a feather.

(MORE)

TELVER (CONT'D)

(chokes)

To lose her to a walrus --

He sits down, shakily.

VIXEN

I saw no sign of an attack, and the only tracks were hers. It's as if she was taken from the air...

SANTA

No Arctic bird could lift an elf!

TELVER

Now I'm *really* worried.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Brown smoke on 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 forward but Dasher leaps in, scoops up the elf kids with his antlers and heaves them out. The shark snaps, almost gets Dasher. He scrambles onto an ice floe.

The shark tips it over, dumps him in the water, lunges. It has odd, violet eyes and a mad expression. Dasher ducks under a floe. The shark crunches it up. He tries to get out but the broken ice won't support his weight.

The shark attacks, misses, turns again. Vixen races to the ice edge, yells:

VIXEN

Dasher, get onto its tail!

Dasher scrambles up on the shark's lashing tail. It flicks back, forward and tosses him through the air.

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

DASHER

I'd never have thought of that.  
Vixen, you're brilliant.

VIXEN

And you're a true hero.

She weaves between scattered chunks of ice, to Santa.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

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, right now.

INT. COMET'S LAB - A BIT LATER

Vixen and Dasher follow Santa, Rafe, Telper and Donner into a cave-like lab. Benches, fish skeletons, lab gear. Photos of fungi, volcanic eruptions, black holes.

VIXEN

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

COMET is a small scientist reindeer with glasses and an artificial front leg. He glares at Dasher, winds up a wooden laptop and yanks down a screen.

COMET

Been warning you lot for years. The more carbon dioxide, the greater the absorption of --

Santa holds up a hand.

SANTA

Please use words we can understand.

COMET

Here's the dumbed-down version. Even Dancer and Prancer will get it.

DASHER

I wouldn't hold my breath.

Comet taps a key on a huge keyboard. On the screen a map, **1980**, shows a satellite view of the Arctic. The ocean is covered in ice. A second map, **NEXT YEAR**, shows the same view but there's hardly any ice.

COMET

Global warming is melting our ice and it'll soon be gone. No more polar bears. No more village!

(to Donner)

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

DONNER

Because you talk like a dictionary.

Santa stumbles 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 points out a window at the pall of smoke.

COMET  
Well, that isn't helping. Someone  
should check it out.

DASHER  
I'll do it right away!

RAFE  
(wearily)  
It could be dangerous. *I'll go.*

Rafe trudges out. Dasher groans.

VIXEN  
How long before our village falls  
into the sea?

COMET  
Maybe weeks. Maybe... less.

Stunned silence. Vixen paces. Santa takes off his cap,  
runs his fingers through his thin hair.

SANTA  
How can I tell the children there  
won't be any presents this year?

VIXEN  
(raises antlers)  
We have to save Christmas! What can  
I do to help? Whatever it takes.

INT. MATILDA'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Every surface is piled high with books, dried flowers,  
sketches, tools and oddments. Statues carved from ice,  
wood or stone: Arctic birds, village children, a gnome  
with a third eye in its forehead.

VIXEN  
(sighs)  
And a sculptor. You're so clever.

MATILDA  
Don't touch anything.

VIXEN  
Your studio's a bit, um, messy.

Matilda flings her arms wide.

MATILDA  
I'm creative!

VIXEN  
Er, yes.

MATILDA

This is my refuge. It's where I  
come to de-stress.

An eerie, SCREECHING CRY comes from above. A large,  
WINGED SHAPE flits past a skylight.

VIXEN

What was *that*?

MATILDA

Maybe a bat. Ah... remind me why  
you're here.

VIXEN

For a magic lesson. So I can help  
Santa save Christmas.

MATILDA

Right. Now, watch carefully. This  
is a lifting spell. I use a spoon.  
Reindeer move their antlers.

Using a wooden spoon like a magic wand, Matilda circles  
its end around an ice bust of Santa, spirals up.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

Bust of Santa, *rise!*

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

VIXEN

Amazing! Can I try?

MATILDA

Not here. If it *did* work there'd  
be bits of Santa everywhere. And  
remember, successful magic needs  
power *and* self-control.

VIXEN

(miffed)

I *have* self-control.

MATILDA

Possibly a little too much, dear.  
Don't get your hopes up.

Vixen doesn't take any notice, runs out eagerly.

EXT. GREENHOUSES, LATER - NIGHT

Vixen appears, followed by Dasher.

VIXEN

Help me make snowballs. Big ones.

They make a line of large snowballs. Vixen circles one with her antlers, excitedly spirals them upwards.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

Snowball, *rise!*

It doesn't move. She tries again and again. Nothing. Vixen bites her lip.

VIXEN (CONT'D)

I -- can't -- do it.

DASHER

Try it like this.

Dasher swirls his antlers in a figure-eight around the snowball. With a look of utter joy, he cries:

DASHER (CONT'D)

Snowball, *rise!*

Lightning arcs across his antlers and snowballs fly in all directions. One smashes through the greenhouse wall. Inside, a CRY OF FURY (EARTHA POTTS).

VIXEN

Go! Eartha mustn't see you. Not after the great turnip disaster.

DASHER

Her prize turnip was on fire when I got there, honest.

VIXEN

Get out of here!

Dasher bolts. Vixen turns, runs into big, cranky Donner and the pretty, empty-headed twins, DANCER and PRANCER.

Donner looms over Vixen, bares large, square teeth. Remnants of a snowball are smashed across her forehead. Vixen laughs nervously.

DONNER

You think Dasher attacking me is funny?

(shakes snow  
off)

You say you want to be a leader. But when I taught you, you were easily led by that insolent ratbag!

VIXEN

That was ten years ago. We were just silly kids.

DONNER

*Still* aiding and abetting him.

Donner turns and stalks away. Dancer and Prancer follow. Vixen stares after them.

VIXEN

This is so unfair.

INT. TOY WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Elves work at their benches. Telveer checks the level of the bottle, nods. Santa sits at a table piled with envelopes. Matilda sips bi-colour tea. Kegg wanders the table and sniffs for crumbs. Vixen unloads mailbags.

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

Kegg's fur stands up and he leaps towards Santa.

KEGG

Evil! Santa, look out!

Santa flings the letter away, but it hangs in the air and a fiery figure erupts from it. Kegg goes flying. Santa staggers back against the bottle of magic. The figure rakes him with flaming talons.

Gold light streams from the bottle *through* Santa, to the figure. It swells. Santa falls, his coat ablaze. Vixen races across, turns to charge the fiery figure.

TELVEER

No! You can't fight dark magic.

Vixen skids to a stop. The figure lunges at Santa again. Telveer blasts it with his sword-wand.

TELVEER (CONT'D)

Dark phantom, begone!

The figure sinks through the floor. Telveer incinerates the letter with a red beam. A distant CRY (FEAZEL).

Santa slumps on a chair, holds his chest. Matilda peels off his charred coat, pats out small flames, hugs him. Vixen and the elves watch anxiously.

MATILDA

Telveer, you were formidable.

TELVEER

Not a 'silly old elf' after all.  
What was that all about, Santa?

Santa turns painfully. The level in the bottle of Christmas magic has fallen by half. He chokes.



SANTA

It stole our magic. We'll have to ration it, to finish Christmas.

MATILDA

If Kegg hadn't sniffed out evil --  
Where is Kegg?

Kegg peeps out from a bowl of gherkins, fakes a grin.

KEGG

Just checking the provisions, as  
your official taster!

MATILDA

Are you hurt?

Kegg lays a paw across his eyes in a theatrical manner. Then slumps and sighs, the classic ham actor.

KEGG

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

MATILDA

(kisses Kegg)

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.

VIXEN

First Feazel disappears, now this.  
Someone's taking advantage of our  
thin ice to attack Christmas!

MATILDA

Who would do such a wicked thing?

TELVER

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

Vixen, uneasy now, returns to the mailbags.

INT. GRIM CHAMBER - NIGHT

A gloomy, smoke-wreathed hall. Quartz crystal crocodile skulls; stacked spheres of green malachite; a lapis lazuli coffin full of egg-shaped moonstones.

Snear, a hooded, human man, shivers by a fire. His pointed nose reflects the light like crystal. A broken wand cut from a single emerald lies on a table in a splash of tangerine silk.

A KNOCK on the door. He turns that way.

SNEAR  
Bring her in, Nocty.

Nocty enters in human form. Long-limbed, walks on tiptoes. Triangular head. Skin like a bat's leathery wing, an electric-blue luminosity. She towers over the elf girl, Feazel, who struggles in her grip.

Feazel is a mixture of rage and fear. Burns coil up her right arm. A twinkling collar around her neck.

FEAZEL  
My people need me. Let me go!

Snear taps an ugly yellow ring. BZZZT, the collar SHOCKS Feazel. She yelps.

SNEAR  
When I've no more use for your magic.

FEAZEL  
Please, no. I'm a good elf!

NOCTY  
(grins)  
You'll soon be as wicked as me.

SNEAR  
More coal on the fire, elf.

Feazel hurls coal at the fire. Snear sets a glowing ruby down on the table.

SNEAR (CONT'D)  
Did the cursed letter work?

Feazel resists, gives in, hovers a hand over the ruby.

FEAZEL  
(sullenly)  
It stole half of Santa's magic.

SNEAR  
*Only half?* Is that enough?

Feazel blinks. A secret smile, quickly hidden.

FEAZEL  
Yes, but that wand is evil.

SNEAR  
And once it's repaired I'll be more powerful than Santa and Tilver put together. Do it.

FEAZEL  
Never!

Reflections shift under Snear's hood. A crackly laugh. He taps his ring, BZZZT. Feazel moans.

SNEAR

If you want to be free of the collar, repair my wand.

Snear points to the ruby with a crystalline finger.

Feazel shudders and touches the ruby to the broken emerald wand. CRACK! The ruby SHATTERS.

SNEAR (CONT'D)

*What did you do to it?*

FEAZEL

You stole Santa's magic, and *good* magic won't repair an evil wand.

SNEAR

You knew it all along, curse you!

FEAZEL

(innocently)

I was just obeying orders.

Savagely, Snear wraps the broken wand in its silk.

SNEAR

I *will* defeat Santa, and steal Christmas. Nocty, implement Plan B -- Con Spire.