

Murder at the North Pole

A Killer Tale

Act 1

IT TAKES 6 ELVES TO BREAK DOWN THE DOOR, and when they reach the big grinding machine at the end of the workshop, they wish that they had had not. Two green and red pointy toes boots are all that is left of him. Green velvet pointy toed boots stained with blood red spatters.

Iggy turns away. “I can’t bear to look,” he says. “What is it?”

Yugo looks up from the grinder. “It can only be one thing.”

“Murder,” says Sam. “Murder most foul.”

Scene 1 - A Workshop at the North Pole, One Week Before Christmas

STORIES ARE LIKE PLAYS, they are told in three acts. The first act introduces the characters, and the problem they will have to overcome. In a love story,

this is the part where the boy meets the girl. In this story, the problem appears to involve murder. Murder most foul.

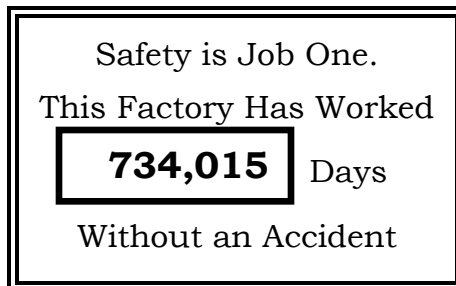
In the second act, the characters confront the problem, often at great peril and some tragedy. This is the part where the boy loses the girl. In the third act, the heroes overcome the problem, learn an important lesson or experience some kind of personal growth and all the various subplots are resolved. The boy gets the girl and they live happily ever after.

You have joined this play at the end of the first act. You came in, shuffling down the row to your seat while everyone twisted in their chairs to make room for you to pass, right at the end of the first act. That is really rude, you know. You should show up on time. You were lucky you were even seated after the lights had dimmed and the show had begun.

But, now that you are here, we might as well rewind things and take you back to the beginning. If you had arrived on time and taken your seat with everyone else, the curtains would have pulled back and you would have seen a chilly winter snowscape, with a cluster of little buildings at the bottom of a steep icy cliff.

A column of white smoke rises gently from the chimney of the nearest building, and as you draw closer to look through the window, you can make out a long worktable, with little men dressed in red and green velvet suits assembling toys.

On the south wall¹ there is a sign that says:



Three elves seated beneath the sign catch your eye. They are building a plastic yellow dump truck that is big enough to seat a toddler. You wonder how it might ever fit down someone's chimney. The slender elf on the left with the pointed nose and dark tangled hair is Iggy. He smiles while he works. He smiles all of the time, even when he is sleeping. He seems to be made entirely of points and angles, from his pointed chin to his pointed shoulders and pointy elbows, one of which has just stuck Yugo in the ribs.

¹ No matter which way you look from the North Pole, you will be looking south. For that reason, every wall in a building at the North Pole is the south wall. The particular south wall you are looking at is the one which is directly opposite the window of the south wall. You are standing on the south side of that wall, looking through the window right now.

Yugo slides a few inches down the bench to make room. He is a sturdy elf, with bright eyes and a thick black moustache that he waxes each morning. Yugo's nimble hands work quickly, adjusting the steering column and the side view mirrors on the dump truck. Yugo is the most clever and inventive of all of the elves at the North Pole. He was the elf who invented the electric cheese knife and banana flavoured peanut butter. Not all of Yugo's inventions are quite so successful, like the inverted aquarium; a fish tank which he built with a reverse gravitational field. The aquarium is placed upside down on the shelf, with all of the water settled at the top of the tank and the fish inside swimming blithely back and forth, with their bellies facing the ceiling. It made for an interesting conversation piece, but proved nearly impossible to clean, because once filled, it was virtually impossible to empty out the water.

Sam sits beside Yugo. He pays no attention to the progress of the dump truck's construction because he is completely engrossed in digging another donut from his lunch bag. Sam is the biggest of the three elves, and is nearly as wide as he is tall. He wears a large red velvet tunic that stretches around each one of his curves and bulges like a sausage casing. His curly red hair frames a puffy face with a round nose and a perpetual scowl. He finally pulls a jelly donut from his bag, and his eyes brighten a little, but he still scowls.

You lean in a little closer so that you can hear their conversation. Iggy looks up and says, "there it is again."

"What is it?" asks Yugo.

"I've got that funny feeling again," replies Iggy. "That feeling that I'm being watched."² He looks over his shoulder towards the south window and shivers.

"I know just what you mean," says Sam. "I get that feeling all of the time. Sometimes I feel like I am nothing more than a character in a story."

"You're right, Sam," says Yugo. "It's like our whole lives are just a series of adventures, told in three acts."

"It seems worse at this time of the year," adds Iggy. "Every Christmas I get the feeling I'm being stared at."

Yugo nods. "It comes every Christmas. And then, something strange will happen and we have to run around to put things right."

"But it always works out in the end," says Sam. "And then nothing much happens for the rest of the year."

² The word for that creepy feeling that you are being watched is "scopaesthesia." It is a form of ESP, because the feeling does not arise from any of the regular senses like sight or hearing. If you experience scopaesthesia, you might be psychic. Or maybe you are like Iggy, Yugo and Sam and you are just a character in a story and somebody is reading you right now.

“Well, I’ve got that feeling again,” says Iggy.

“Me too,” says Yugo.

“Something strange is going to happen,” says Sam. “I can just feel it.”

Sure enough, if you leave that conversation for a moment and look across to the south side of the workshop, something strange is about to start happening.

Scene 2 - A Workshop at the North Pole



YOU WILL NEVER MEET AN ELF NAMED DORIS at the North Pole. You will never meet a Steven or a Ray. Elves always have names like Bingo or Flappy. There are plenty of Chuffles and Gub Gubs and Bobbles, but you will not find a single Nancy anywhere. There are Doodlebeans and Peanuts, but Bobs there are none. You can see Lou Lous and Bozos, but no Shirleys, not a single one. Lippy and Noodles, yes; Jane and Norman, no.

It is only when you have some understanding of the onomastics³ of the North Pole that the following sentence, which has never been written before in the history of the English language, makes any sense at all.

Juggles and Nutmeg were both angry at Tippytoes, and with good reason.

“I could just kill him,” says Juggles. Juggles was dressed in a green velvet uniform, with a pointy hat. He was a middle aged elf who was a few hundred years old, with a medium build and elfin features.

“Not if I get my hands on him first,” says Nutmeg. She was a smaller elf, in a red velvet dress with a thick black belt that exaggerated her slight elfish figure. She had bright eyes and wavy brown hair. Cute, in an elfin way.

And the subject of their conversation? That would be Tippytoes, perhaps the most disagreeable elf who ever spent a day⁴ at the North Pole.

³ Onomastics is the study of proper names. Anthroponymy is the branch of onomastics concerned with the names of human beings. There is no word for the study of the names of elves, but if there were, it would be something like elfonymy. Or maybe elphonymy if you wanted it to look a bit more science-y.

⁴ Days at the North Pole are 6 months long, so it is actually possible to get everything done that you meant to get done that day. It is almost impossible to procrastinate, since putting something off until tomorrow means putting it off for the better part of a year. On the plus side, a good nap can last a week.

You would think, would you not, that elves, especially Christmas elves, are a jolly lot. And generally, you would be right. They work in a big toy factory and sing Christmas carols all day.

Most of them are downright jolly. But just like there are all kinds of people in the world, jolly and otherwise, there are also all kinds of elves. And some of them are just jerks. But the biggest jerk of all, the one that the other jerks look upon with green velvet envy, is Tippytoes.

There are a lot of ways to be a jerk, and Tippytoes excels at all of them. He is rude to his mother, Tippynose and even ruder to his dad, Zippytoes. He is a poor tipper, he takes up two parking stalls when one will do, cuts in line and does not floss. He never washes his hands when he goes to the bathroom. He likes cats better than he likes dogs. He cheats at cards, he cheats on his taxes and he cheats on his girl, which is what has Nutmeg so upset this dark afternoon a few days before Christmas.

“I mean it,” says Nutmeg. “If I get my hands on him, I really will kill him. True fact.”

“You don’t really mean it,” says Juggles, “and anyway, if I get to him first, there won’t be anything left of him for you.”

“That’s not fair,” says Nutmeg, “I should be the one to do it. He’s been carrying on with Poodles behind my back.”

“But I’m the one he swindled in that pyramid scheme,” says Juggles. “He says that the pyramids had been around for centuries and my investment was safe. I lost over 100,000 puffins,⁵ when the pyramid market collapsed.”

Nutmeg nodded. “I bet that he got all of his puffins out of the deal before then,” she says.

“Of course,” says Juggles, shaking his head. “I lost it all and he is sitting pretty.”

“Sitting pretty with Poodles, you mean,” says Nutmeg, smirking.

Your eavesdropping of this conversation is interrupted by the sound of jingle bells ringing near the south entrance of the workshop. All of the elves set down their tools and stand up as Santa Claus steps through the door. He is followed by two other elves who push a wide steel wheeled cart with a large covered object on top.

“Set her down right there boys,” says Santa Claus, gesturing towards a bare spot along one of the south walls. The two elves guide the cart past a row of work benches and stop beside a cabinet with cans of red and blue paint on the

⁵ Puffins are the official currency of the North Pole. There are 100 penguins (often shortened to “pens” or “pence”) to the puffin. Puffin notes are printed in denominations of 1, 5, 10 and 50. Santa Claus himself appears on the ø50 note. A puffin is worth about twenty-two Canadian cents at current rates of exchange.

top shelf. They struggle to lift the big covered object and carefully set it in place.

“Right there, that’s perfect,” says Santa Claus. He turns to the elves who had gathered into a small crowd around him.

Santa Claus claps his big hands together and laughs, “ho ho ho.” It really sounds like that. Then he clears his throat, which also sounds like “ho ho ho” and speaks. “Everyone, gather around,” he says. The elves, who had already gathered around, shuffle closer. “Yes that’s it,” says Santa, and when he is satisfied that the elves can’t creep any more tightly together he reaches a beefy hand and grips the linen sheet covering the large object. “Our engineers in the Advanced Tool Department⁶ have been working on this project for several years. I am pleased to announce that their work is now done and we have a new advanced tool for the workshop. I give you ... the **GrinderMax 3000™!**”

Santa Claus pulls the sheet away with a grand sweeping flourish and reveals the object beneath it. It is a gleaming green metal box with smoothly rounded corners. At the front there is a small conveyor belt that leads to a dark opening. Inside the opening, you can make out all manner of sharply pointed spikes and blades. It looks a little scary, and you notice that there are danger signs and warning labels on either side of the machine and all around the opening:



Santa Claus pats the side of the machine. “The **GrinderMax 3000™** is the most modern and powerful grinder ever built. It can handle all of the scraps and spare parts cluttering up this place. And you know what I always say, don’t you?” Santa Claus looks expectantly at the tightly packed crowd of elves.

“Ho ho ho?” says one elf, breaking the silence.

“Ho, ho, ho,” laughs Santa Claus. “Yes, I do say that a lot, but I always say that a tidy workshop is a happy workshop. And a happy workshop is a jolly one.

“Now let me give you a little demonstration of the power of the **GrinderMax 3000™.**” Santa Claus reaches out to the workbench and picks up the toy truck that Iggy, Yugo and Sam are working on. Sam’s jaw drops in panic, but

⁶ The Advanced Tool Department (ADT) is just one of the many divisions of the North Pole Research and Development Branch (NPRDB). Among many others, there is the Particle Accelerator Team (PET), the Cold Fusion Investigation Unit (CFUI) and the Extremely Contagious and Dangerous Diseases Center (ECDDC). More about them later.

before he can say a word, Santa Claus sets the truck on the conveyor belt and presses a bright red button under a sign that looks like this:



The truck rolls swiftly down the conveyor belt and into the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. The shining spikes and blades spin and whirl, and cut and gouge at the defenceless toy. A moment passes, and then a small cloud of orange dust puffs from the side of the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. It is all that is left of the toy truck.

Sam looks at the orange dust as it settles onto the floor and frowns. On the other side of the tightly packed crowd of elves, Nutmeg looks at the little pile of orange dust and smiles.

Scene 3 - Tippytoes' Apartment



THE AUDIENCE MURMURS SOFTLY during the scene change. People dressed in black race across the stage to move furniture and props around. The walls of the workshop are pulled aside and a new set is lowered in its place. It is the living room of a small apartment in Elves Barracks B, just down the hall from the one shared by Iggy, Yugo and Sam.

It is an apartment like most of the others in Elves Barracks B, with small elf sized chairs and tables. There is a small bookcase against one wall, which holds books with titles like “How to Con Friends and Hoodwink People”, “All’s Unfair in Love and War” and “Revenge For Dummies”.

There is a knock, and an elf enters from stage left and crosses the room to answer the door. He is a slim elf, with greasy black hair that hangs over the collar of his green velvet jacket. He has a dark goatee that is oiled to a sharp point under his chin. He smirks while he opens the door.

“What are you doing here, Chestnuts?” he asks the stocky red suited elf at the door.

“I might ask you the same thing, Tippytoes,” answers Chestnuts.

Yes, that Tippytoes. The one who is unkind to dogs and parents alike and the one who so vexed both Juggles and Nutmeg just a few pages ago. That Tippytoes.

“Forgive me for not inviting you in,” says Tippytoes. “I was just leaving.”

“You’re not going anywhere,” says Chestnuts. He steps through the door and presses a finger into Tippytoes’ chest. Chestnuts squeezes through the door and presses a finger into Tippytoes’ chest. “I’ve just come from Granny Wifflebat’s room at the hospital. I didn’t see you there.”

“I’ve been busy,” Tippytoes yawns. “How is dear old Wifflebats, anyway?”

“Not good. Not good at all,” replies Chestnuts. “The doctors say she may not make it through the day.”

“Well, she is a thousand and two years old,” says Tippytoes. “She’s had a good run.”

“The doctors also told me that you were at the hospital yesterday,” said Chestnuts.

“Maybe I was, maybe I wasn’t,” says Tippytoes. “I can’t remember all the places I’ve been.”

“You were at the hospital. And while you were there, you had Granny Wifflebats sign a new will.”

“Oh that was just one little signature, it was nothing,” says Tippytoes. “I was doing her a favour.”

“Some favour,” says Chestnuts. “She’s left everything to you.”

“That was very kind of her,” says Tippytoes.

“I don’t know what sort of trick you pulled on that sweet old lady,” says Chestnuts. “But I want that will and I want it now.”

“Sorry, old chum, I don’t have it. I’ve filed it with the probate court. Just to help speed things along in case the worst might happen.”

“You’re a fiend, Tippytoes,” says Chestnuts.

“And in a couple of days, I’ll be a rich fiend,” replies Tippytoes. He pulls a green pointed toque from a hook by the door. “I really must be going. Please let yourself out.”

Tippytoes tips his toque at Chestnuts and skips out through the door. Chestnuts calls down the hall after him. “You’d better watch your back, Tippytoes. You never know when the worst might happen to you.”

Tippytoes just laughs and keeps on walking.

Scene 4 - A Street Corner at the North Pole, 30 Minutes Later



ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS INTERSECTIONS in the world is the corner of Santa Claus Lane and Candy Cane Way. It is the busiest intersection at the North Pole, with the renowned Gum Drop Shop on one side of the street and the Ice Breakers Lounge on the other. Traffic crawls slowly back and forth on the snowy streets, stopping frequently for elves hustling up and down the sidewalks and bustling across the road. The storefronts are covered with flashing neon lights and music plays loudly from each doorway. It is exciting, noisy and crowded.

The business of the two elves in this scene requires a much quieter neighbourhood. Razzlebutton looks both ways before he crosses the street, but he need not have bothered. There are no other elves to be seen. Hardly anyone goes to the corner of Peppermint Road and Fruitcake Alley and certainly not during the months-long night of the North Pole.

Razzlebutton stands in the darkened doorway of the old Cookie Exchange building and looks around nervously. He worries about whether there might be a sugar addict hiding in the shadows. They can be dangerous when looking for a sugar high.

An elf steps out from behind a trash bin. Razzlebutton jumps, worried that he was about to be attacked by a sugar addicted elf. But this is no sugar addict. It is something even worse, with a pointed goatee and a sideways grin on his face.

“Tippytoes,” gasps Razzlebutton. “You nearly scared me to death.”

Tippytoes frowns. “Too bad. I’ll try and be a little spookier next time.”

“You promised that there wouldn’t be a next time”

“I’ve never been very good with promises.”

“You’re not good at all.”

“That’s not a nice thing to say.”

“Well, you’re not very nice, either.”

“There is no need for that kind of talk.”

“It’s true. There’s a special place on the Naughty List for elves like you.”

“And here I thought we were friends.”

“I’m not so sure about that.”

“I thought you liked me. I like you.”

“It doesn’t feel that way.”

“But think of all that I’ve done for you.”

“All you’ve done for me is ruin my life.”

“No I haven’t, I’ve saved your life.”

“How can you say that?”

“How can I say that? Imagine if Mrs. Razzlebutton had seen these pictures?”

“I can imagine it all right,” Razzlebutton replies. “She’d kill me.”

“Then you had better make sure she doesn’t get her hands on this.” Tippytoes draws a large brown envelope from his bag and pulls out a half dozen glossy photographs.

“You’ve put me in a difficult position, Tippytoes.”

“Several difficult positions, it appears.” Tippytoes points to the top picture. “That one looks particularly tricky.”

“How much this time?” asks Razzlebutton.

“10,000 puffins.”

“10,000! That’s robbery.”

“It’s not robbery,” says Tippytoes. “It’s blackmail. There’s a difference.”

Razzlebutton digs into his pockets and pulls out a thick stack of bills. He counts through them and then passes the bundle over. The money disappears in the twinkle of an eye and Tippytoes hands the envelope with all of its difficult pictures to Razzlebutton.

“And you’re sure that’s the last of them?” asks Razzlebutton. He holds the envelope in front of his face and tears it in half.

“That’s it. Those are the last pictures I have,” Tippytoes lies. “Cross my heart and hope to die.”

Razzlebutton leans in close to Tippytoes. “You better be telling me the truth this time, Tippytoes. Or you will hope you’d died.”

Tippytoes laughs at this, but his voice cracks a little. Razzlebutton puts the two pieces of the envelope on top of each other and tears them in half again. He stuffs the pieces into the trash bin and turns away.

“I mean it Tippytoes,” he says. “Those are the last puffins you’ll ever get from me. The next time you’ll get something far worse.”

Tippytoes laughs again, but you can see that his heart, which he never really crossed, is not really in it. He looks to either side and exits quickly to the other side of the stage.

Scene 5 - A Workshop at the North Pole, the Next Day



GGY, YUGO AND SAM ARE SITTING AT THEIR USUAL SPOT at their workbench. Iggy twists a steel head onto a toy robot and sets it down on the table. Sam picks it up. He pulls and twists the arms and legs of the robot and then bends and folds it into the shape of a cement truck. Yugo picks up the cement truck and turns it over a few times in his hands. He makes some small adjustments with a screwdriver and then folds the cement truck into the shape of an origami swan. He flicks one of the wings with his finger and it flies across the workshop.

Nearby, an elf places a stack of scrap plastic parts onto the little conveyor belt of the *GrinderMax 3000*TM and presses the bright red button below the Do Not Touch sign. The teeth and spikes spin and whirl and with a percussive whooshing sound, a cloud of fine dust shoots out of the back of the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. Another elf sweeps it up and tips it into a green bin.

“The workshop has never been tidier,” says Iggy.

“The *GrinderMax 3000*TM is really something,” says Yugo.

Sam shudders. “That thing scares me.”

“Oh Sam, there’s nothing to be afraid of,” says Iggy.

“It’s perfectly safe,” adds Yugo.

“Then why does it have all of those ominous looking warning signs all over it?” asks Sam.

Iggy laughs. “That’s what makes it so safe.”

“Nobody could ever get hurt by something with so many red signs and warning labels on it,” says Yugo.

“I’m not so sure,” says Sam, eyeing the *GrinderMax 3000*TM warily.

There is a murmur from across the room. Iggy, Yugo and Sam look up to see Tippytoes enter the workshop from stage right. He makes his way to a seat, not far from the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. The elves on either side of him slide their chairs aside, making much more room than necessary for him to sit down.

An superior looking elf with a clipboard marches up behind him. “You’re late again, Tippytoes.”

Tippytoes looks up from his tools and smiles his crooked smile. “I’m sorry. I was out late last night.” A few other elves look away. They all knew that Tippytoes had been out late at the *Walrus and Ulu*, with plenty of puffins to spend. More than one elf wondered why he always seemed to have so much money.

The superior looking elf makes a note on his clipboard. “You’re going to have to make up the time. Christmas is only six days away and we’re behind schedule. You’re working overtime tonight.”

Tippytoes whines. “But I have a date.”

“Not tonight you don’t. You’re staying here until you’ve made your quota.” The superior looking elf stares at a stack of toy train parts. “You can leave when all of that is done.”

Tippytoes makes a sideways frown and pulls a few parts from the stack and starts piecing together a wooden train. On the other side of the workshop, Nutmeg smiles a little.

Scene 6 - A Workshop at the North Pole, Later That Day



PICTURE IF YOU WILL, A MONTAGE. A montage that bridges the last scene with this one. A montage of elves building toys. They are working hard, but they are jolly, for the most part. The montage plays out to the sound of the Christmas carols the elves sing as they work. Iggy, Yugo and Sam are shown at times, passing toys down a three elf assembly line, with Yugo always providing the finishing touch. The toys accumulate in piles at the end of long tables where they are gathered by still more elves and carried away. Every once in a while, the montage is interrupted by the percussive whoosh of the **GrinderMax 3000™**.

The sky seen through the windows stays dark throughout the montage. At a latitude of 90 degrees, there is no movement of the sun to mark the passing of the day. But if you look to the big clock on the south wall from time to time, you will see the hands sweep around swiftly to mark the hours going by.

As the last notes of a song about frosted window panes and painted candy canes fade away, a horn blows. Time slows down as the montage comes to an abrupt conclusion. The elves all set aside their tools and step back from the work benches. All of the elves except Tippytoes, who looks up at a still imposing pile of toy train parts.

“Another day, another puffin,” says Iggy happily. Iggy always says things happily, for that is his nature. Even if he is speaking of something sad, he says it happily nonetheless. Yugo and Sam find it irksome at times.

“Quitting time at last,” says Yugo. He says it neither happily nor sadly, but he is relieved to have another work day behind him.

Sam grunts. He stretches his arms and legs. Sitting at a work bench all day always makes him stiff. His joints creak and crack explosively with each movement.

“You should see a doctor about that,” says Iggy. He is worried for his friend, but says it happily anyway.

“Nothing that a pint of Chubby’s Finest won’t fix,” says Sam and he grunts again as his knees snap.

“A pint of Chubby’s and one of Mrs. Chubby’s pies would hit the spot,” agrees Iggy. Yugo nods and the three of them make their way out of the workshop, behind a long row of elves who are also headed to the *Walrus and Ulu* for pints, pies and the other delicacies that Chubby has on his menu.

In minutes, the only elf left in the workshop is Tippytoes. He grumbles a little to himself as he places another completed train on the table. It is strangely quiet in the workshop with all of the other elves gone. There are no Christmas carols being sung, nor is there the rattle and hum of busy hands all around him.

The quiet is broken by the banging of a shutter. Tippytoes gets up from his chair, crosses to the window and latches the shutter into place. He looks around and frowns. Then he walks around the room, closing and latching all of the shutters as he goes.

“That’ll keep the noises out,” he mutters to himself. He passes the workshop door and turns the heavy deadbolt. It slides into place with a heavy thud. “And that’ll keep everything else out.”

He walks back to his place at the work bench and sits down. He pulls another red steam engine from his stack of train parts and bolts a cowcatcher⁷ to the front of it. He hums a little tune as he works. It is not a hum about that time of year when the world falls in love. It is a rather gloomy hum and it is the only sound you hear as the scene slowly fades to black.

⁷ A cowcatcher is more correctly referred to as the “pilot”. It is that triangular shaped grille that sits in front of the wheels of an old fashioned steam engine. It is designed to clear the track in front of the train of animals and other obstructions. It does not really catch cows -- it knocks them off the tracks so they do not get run over by the train.

FUN FACT NO. 1 ABOUT COWCATCHERS: The cowcatcher was invented by Charles Babbage, an English philosopher and mathematician who is also credited with building the first mechanical computer in 1812. Pretty clever fellow was Mr Babbage.

FUN FACT NO. 2 ABOUT COWCATCHERS: Cowcatcher is also the name of that framework of hoops and struts that is found underneath the large skirts that were fashionable in the 18th and 19th centuries. This type of cowcatcher is of little use in the construction of toy trains and is rarely seen at the North Pole.

Scene 7 - The *Walrus and Ulu*, Interior, Night

THE *WALRUS AND ULU* FILLS UP QUICKLY after the workshop closes. Those who know about those things say that it is the best elf pub at the North Pole. That would also make it the best elf pub in the world. It is one of those places where the walls are cluttered with all manner of miscellanea: a tarnished tuba, an antique handsaw, a shelf with a row of old books and a framed poster of a concert that took place a dozen Christmases earlier (*The Snowplows, Live! with Special Guests, Jimmy and the Penguins!*). A canoe hangs from the ceiling for no apparent reason and just inside the front door stands an enormous statue of a walrus, built entirely of Lego. These are toy people, after all.

You squeeze through the front door and find yourself in a room full of elves. Many of them you have seen before. Juggles is not too far away, sitting at a table with his elfish friends Jellybean, Zub-Zub and Tark. You see Razzlebutton at another table, speaking excitedly to another group of elves. Tippytoes is missing, of course, but he is not missed. You press ahead, past Chestnuts, who is waiting for a table.

You wind your way through throngs of elves. In one corner you find a jukebox that only plays Christmas carols. A little further along you find Iggy, Yugo and Sam at their usual table. It is close to the bar, which is convenient for Sam. It is also, coincidentally, close to the men's room, which is also convenient for Sam.

You lean in a little closer and Iggy says, "There it is again."

"I feel it, too," says Yugo. "It's like someone is leaning in to hear us."

"I can't imagine why anyone would want to eavesdrop on you two," says Sam. He takes a long, noisy drink from his second pint of Chubby's Finest Elflägër.⁸ Iggy takes a sip from his glass of Arctic glacier water. Yugo's mug of chocolate buttermilk is untouched.

Iggy changes the subject. "We made a lot of toys today."

"Yes we did," says Yugo. "But not nearly enough. We are still behind and it is almost Christmas. we should be working overtime instead of hanging out here.

"Union rules," says Sam. He pauses to wipe a brown blob of Chubby's finest Eflföäm from his chin. "Thanks to the Union of Toy Workers Local 34, no elf is allowed to work once his shift is over."

⁸ Chubby's Finest Elflägër is brewed at the North Pole using only locally grown ingredients. Since hops and barley cannot grow in the harsh Arctic climate, it is made entirely from fermented algae and lichen that thrive in icy environments. Chubby's Finest Elflägër is nasty, nasty stuff.

"I sometimes wonder whether that is a good idea, especially so close to Christmas," says Iggy.

Yugo nods. "It just means more work for us in the morning. And every other morning until Christmas."

"Morning is a long time from now," says Sam. He waves to the bartender, and another pint of Chubby's Finest Elflägër is placed before him. He drains the middle third of his glass. This requires him to drain the top third of the glass, first.

There is some commotion at the doorway. Chestnuts tires of waiting for a table and walks out at the same time as Nutmeg comes through the door. She pauses to catch her breath and looks for an empty seat.

"We can't be that far behind, can we?" asks Iggy. He takes another sip of his glacier water. It is cold and wet, as you might expect.

Yugo takes an abacus from his breast pocket and slides beads back and forth. "Let's see. With nearly 2 billion kids in the world, we need at least a hundred million toy trains alone. We still have millions to go. And we haven't even started on the Barbie campers yet."

Iggy whistled softly. "We will get them done. We always do."

Sam decided to drain the bottom third of his Elflägër and get a start on the bottom third of his next one. This meant he had to gulp down the top two thirds first. He burps loudly and says, "I hate the Barbie camper shift. Too many small bits and too much pink."

Iggy smiles. He remembers the Christmas when Sam painted a hundred Barbie campers blue by mistake. Fortunately, Santa Claus was able to deliver them all to a home for colour blind kids, and Christmas was saved. "We don't start the Barbie campers until the day after tomorrow."

"And then Nerf machine guns come afterwards," says Yugo.

"I like making those," says Sam. He eyes the bottom third of his third Elflägër and decides that it too must go. And so it does.

Iggy smiles. He remembers the Christmas when Sam accidentally put real bullets in over a hundred Nerf machine guns. Fortunately, Santa Claus delivered them to a shooting range for disadvantaged police officers and Christmas was saved.

Sam orders another Elflägër, but the crowd at the *Walrus and Ulu* is beginning to dwindle. You see Razzlebutton wave good-bye to his friends and make his way out alone.

Yugo shifts in his seat. "I still can't help feel that something strange is going to happen. Something strange happens to us every Christmas."

"We should get the UTW to look into that," says Sam.

“You’re right, Sam,” says Iggy. “Nothing strange should be allowed to happen at Christmas. That would be a good union rule.”

Yugo looks at his watch. It has a complex face with numerous dials on it. All elf watches are like this. Since all time zones converge at the North Pole, it is difficult to know what time it really is. For example, the men’s room at the *Walrus and Ulu* is in a different time zone than the ladies. Sam once had a date with Nutmeg at 8:00 PM at the *Walrus and Ulu*. She arrived at the door on time, but he was waiting inside, also on time, two hours later. It gets very complicated and, unfortunately for Sam, the date could not be saved.

“We should get going,” says Yugo. “We have a long day tomorrow.”

“Every day is a long day around here,” says Sam. “We’ll just have one more.” He gestures for another Elflägër.

Most of the other elves have left by now. Juggles is gone, leaving Jellybean, Zub-Zub and Tark to settle the bill.

Yugo brings his snowmobile to the front of the *Walrus and Ulu* by remote control, but Sam prevails upon him to wait with him while he has just one more Elflägër. When he finishes, Sam offers to split the tab in thirds and Iggy and Yugo reluctantly agree, because it is late and they are both tired.

Closing time has come to the *Walrus and Ulu*, at least those parts of it that are situated in the early morning time zones. The jukebox plays a hip hop arrangement of *The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies* as you make your way past the giant Lego walrus and out into the cold, dark North Pole night.

Scene 8 - A Workshop at the North Pole, Exterior, A Little Earlier



IT IS THE SAME WORKSHOP THAT YOU HAVE SEEN BEFORE, but this time viewed from the outside. You see it in the distance, and then you zoom in quickly, dashing through the snow that surrounds it and then moving swiftly past a row of shuttered windows.

From inside the workshop, you hear the muffled whoosh of the *GrinderMax 3000™*. And then you hear nothing at all.

It is a silent night.

Scene 9 - A Workshop at the North Pole, the Next Morning



GGY AND YUGO TAKE TURNS WAKING SAM, who pleads with them that he is ill and should be allowed to call in sick, just this once. His complexion matches the green of his crushed velvet pyjamas. But there are millions of wooden trains and Barbie campers and Nerf machine guns to be built and not even the shop steward at UTW Local 34 will let Sam take a sick day so close to Christmas.

There is a crowd of elves outside the workshop when Yugo pulls into the employee parking lot in his gleaming red snowmobile, with Iggy and Sam in the back. They join the growing crows of elves at the workshop door.

“What’s going on?” asks Iggy.

“The doors are locked,” says a tall elf named Fumbles.

“I have a key,” says Yugo, reaching into his tool belt.

“It’s no use,” says Fumbles. “The door is locked from the inside. All of the windows, too.”

“The workshop must be closed,” says Sam. “Let’s all go back to bed.” He turns away and walks back towards the snowmobile.

“That is strange,” says Iggy. “The workshop is never closed.”

“There are trains and campers to be built,” says Yugo. “We have to get inside.”

“But it’s all locked up,” says Sam.

“Then we’ll have to break the door down,” says Iggy. Yugo nods. Sam shakes his head and turns back.

It takes six elves to break down the door. All is calm and all is bright inside the workshop. Whoever locked the doors and shuttered the windows left all of the lights on.

The elves file in and make their way to their seats. Iggy, Yugo and Sam pass the cabinet with cans of blue paint on the top shelf and the **GrinderMax 3000™** on their way to their workbench, and when they reach it, they wish that they had had not. A pair of green and red pointy toed boots stand unevenly on the little conveyor belt that leads into the opening at the front. Green velvet pointy toed boots which are stained with blood red spatters.

Iggy turns away. “I can’t bear to look,” he says. “What is it?”

Yugo lifts up the boots and turns them over in his hand. The name ‘Tippytoes’ is written on a label inside each boot. He looks into the aperture of the **GrinderMax 3000™** and at the angry looking saw blades inside. A red drop falls from one of the saw blades into a thick puddle.

Yugo backs away and sees the little pile of red dust at the side of the **GrinderMax 3000™**, then he looks back to the boots in his hand. The dust and the boots are that is left of Tippytoes.

Yugo turns away from the **GrinderMax 3000™**. “It can only be one thing.”
 “Murder,” says Sam. “Murder most foul.”

Act 2

Scene 1 - A Workshop at the North Pole



YOU RECALL THAT THIS IS WHERE you came in, right as the curtain fell at the end of the first act. You have met the cast of characters, and the problem they have been presented. Now, the second act begins, and the heroes must confront that problem. They have a murder to solve. A murder most foul.

The first act ended badly for Sam and especially badly for Tippytoes, but it is the second act that is always the hardest on the heroes. They might expect to encounter great peril and perhaps some personal tragedy as they confront the problem in the course of this act. By the end all will seem lost.

A crowd forms around the **GrinderMax 3000™**. “I hate this part,” says Sam.

“I know. What a terrible way to go,” says Iggy. He stares aghast at the bloodied **GrinderMax 3000™** and the little pile of dust at the side.

Yugo nods in agreement. “There are no good ways to go. But this might be the worst way.”

“I mean that I hate this part of the story,” says Sam. “Things are only going to get worse from here on out. Before long it is going to be hopeless.”

“It always gets better by the end,” says Iggy optimistically.

“Sam’s right,” says Yugo. “This is the part where things start to get worse. They will probably get a lot worse before they get better.”

“A lot worse,” says Sam. “Everything always gets a lot worse.”

Two uniformed elves make their way through the crowd to the side of the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. They are dressed in crushed blue velvet jackets, with glittering gold braided epaulettes on the shoulders. They wear pointy blue caps with gold stars on the brim.

“Inspector Widget of the North Pole Police,” says the first elf officiously, waving a badge for any elf who cares to look. None of them do. Inspector Widget is a big red faced elf, with red hair that is starting to turn gray and a big red walrus moustache that is turning even grayer. In the race to turn gray, the moustache is winning over the hair.

“Sergeant Copper,” says the second uniformed elf, if anything even more officiously than the first. He also flashes a badge that no one bothers to see. Like all members of the NPPD, he also has a moustache, but his is thin and black.

“I’m sorry,” says Iggy. “Are you a sergeant or a copper?”

Copper pushes his badge in Iggy’s face. “I’m a sergeant. My name is Copper. Pay attention.”

“Imagine that,” says Yugo. “A copper named Copper.”

“You watch yer mouth or we’ll run you in,” says Widget.

“Now, what have we got here,” asks Copper. He walks slowly around the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. Yugo passes over the stained boots. Copper turns them over in his hand and clucks officiously.

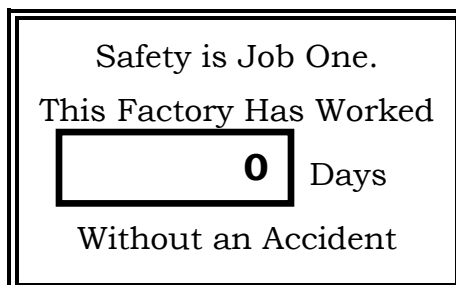
“Looks like a terrible accident,” says Widget.

“Must be,” agrees Copper.

“Looks like we’ve solved another one, Sergeant,” says Widget, with a smile.

“Case closed,” says Copper.

The two police officers turn their backs on the *GrinderMax 3000*TM and walk stiffly towards the exit. One of the elves breaks away from the crowd and steps up to the sign on the south wall. He spins a dial on one side of the sign to adjust the numbers. When he is done, it says:



“Excuse me,” Iggy calls after them. Widget and Copper turn slowly and glare at him.

“What is it?” says Widget gruffly.

“Interfering with police business, it looks like,” says Copper. “Should I run him in, Inspector?”

Iggy clears his throat nervously and says, “are you sure it was an accident?”

“The **GrinderMax 3000™** is a very safe piece of equipment,” says Yugo.

“Just look at all of the warning signs pasted all over it,” adds Sam.

“That’s right,” says Iggy. “Nobody could possibly get hurt by accident with all of those safety stickers.”

“Harumph,” harumphs Widget.

Copper harumphs also. “Still looks like an accident to me.”

“Me too,” says Widget. “Let’s write it up and hit the Donut Shoppe.” The two officers turn and head for the door.

“Wait,” says Yugo.

Widget and Copper turn around. Widget’s face is as red as a Christmas bow. “Run him in, Copper. Interfering with police business.”

Copper reaches for his handcuffs and walks over to Yugo.

“Just wait,” says Yugo. Copper slaps a handcuff on his right wrist. “If Tippytoes had an accident with the **GrinderMax 3000™**, how did he turn it off?”

Widget glares at Yugo and at the little pile of dust at the side of the **GrinderMax 3000™**.

“Hold on, Sergeant. It occurs to me that the unfortunate victim there,” Widget gestures at the pile of dust, “may not have been in any condition, post-accident, to disable the device.”

Copper tightens the handcuffs on Yugo’s wrist. “Somebody else must have done it then.”

“That’s right, Copper. Our victim must have had an accomplice.”

“How could an accident victim have an accomplice?” asks Iggy.

Widget pulls at his red-gray moustache. “It may not have been an accomplice, Copper. It seems to me it might have been something more along the lines of a perpetrator.”

“A perpetrator, sir?”

“Yes, Copper. A perpetrator. In layman’s language, a murderer.”

“Not an accident then?” says Copper.

“It appears not,” says Widget.

“That’s going to be a lot of paperwork, sir.”

“I’m afraid so,” says Widget.

“Do you still want to run this one in, sir?” Copper pulls on Yugo’s handcuffs.

“That would be even more paperwork. Better let him go.” He leans into Yugo and points a thick red finger at his chest. “But don’t you be making any travel plans. Right now you are officially a person of interest in this investigation.”

Copper removes the handcuffs and Yugo rubs his wrist.

“We’re going to need crime scene tape, Copper,” says Widget. “Lots and lots of crime scene tape.” Copper pulls out a big roll of yellow plastic ribbon and stretches it from one end of the workshop to the other.

CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS - CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS - CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS - CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS

“But what about the toys?” asks Iggy.

“This is a crime scene, son,” says Widget. “Nobody is making any toys in my crime scene until we get to the bottom of this business.”

Copper starts waving the crowd of elves away. “Everybody move on,” he says. “There’s nothing more to see here.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam are pushed out of the workshop, along with the other elves. Sergeant Copper chains the door shut behind them.

“I knew things were going to start getting worse,” says Sam.

Scene 2 - Iggy, Yugo and Sam’s Apartment, Later that Morning



“WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?” says Iggy. The elves have returned to their modest apartment in Elves Barracks B. You see that it is a tidy home; Iggy keeps it that way. The floors have been recently waxed and all of the dishes have been washed and put away. Through the doorway into Iggy’s room you see a little bed, neatly made, and a small chest of drawers. Iggy’s Bachelor of Toy making (BTm) degree hangs above it in a modest black frame. The door to Yugo’s room is closed, but if you could look inside, you would see a log worktable covered with electronic whatsits and gimdoodles. The only other clutter you can see in the apartment is a single rumpled sock that pokes out like a red velvet tongue from beneath the door that leads into Sam’s room.

Iggy and Yugo sit at a little table in the kitchen. Even though it is pitch black outdoors, Sam has closed all of the blinds and is lying on the sofa with a thick quilt covering his face.

“We are going to have to solve this crime ourselves,” says Yugo.

Sam groans from under his quilt. “You’re right about that. Widget and Copper couldn’t solve the Sunday crossword in the North Pole Times, never mind a real mystery like this.”

“But we don’t know anything about solving mysteries.”

“It can’t be that hard. We just need to put ourselves in Tippytoes’ shoes.”

“I don’t want to do that. Those shoes are covered in blood.”

“We aren’t going to wear his shoes. We just have to imagine ourselves in those shoes.”

“I don’t even want to do that.”

“But how did the killer do it? All of the doors and windows to the workshop were locked from the inside. Nobody could have gone into the workshop.”

“And nobody could have gone out, either.”

“It’s impossible.”

“It can’t be. But once we you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Sherlock Holmes said that once.”

“He knew quite a bit about solving mysteries, so he must be right.”

“And this is a real mystery.”

“I’ll say.”

“And what of the blue paint?”

Even though Iggy, Yugo and Sam know which one of them is speaking at any point in this conversation, by now it is probably getting difficult for you to keep them straight. Did Iggy say that last one, or was it Yugo? Sam? It is hard to say, but that last one was probably Yugo. Still, it would be useful, you may be thinking, to slip in a “Iggy says” or “Yugo replies” or “Sam groans” here or there, just to keep it all straight.

“What blue paint?” says Sam. His head was spinning with the after effects of Chubby’s Finest Elflägër, locked rooms and now blue paint.

“Did you notice that there were only blue paint cans on the cabinet beside the **GrinderMax 3000™**?” asks Yugo.

“No, but what of it,” asks Iggy.

“I’m not sure,” says Yugo. “But it’s curious don’t you think?”

Iggy shook his head. “I can’t understand why anyone would want to push Tippytoes into the *GrinderMax 3000*™.”

“Who wouldn’t want to push Tippytoes through the *GrinderMax 3000*™?” says Sam.

“He didn’t have many friends,” says Yugo.

“He didn’t have any friends,” says Sam.

“Everyone has friends,” says Iggy.

“Not Tippytoes,” says Sam. “He was the most unlikeable elf at the North Pole. Probably the most unlikeable elf anywhere.”

“He was dating Nutmeg, wasn’t he?” asks Iggy.

“Yes, but he was also dating Poodles behind her back,” says Yugo. “She was pretty angry when she found out about it.”

“She probably did it, then” says Sam. “You know what they say, ‘Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.’⁹”

“She certainly had her reasons for getting back at Tippytoes,” says Yugo.

Iggy wonders aloud. “Would those reasons lead to murder?”

“There’s only one way to find out,” says Yugo. “Let’s go pay her a visit and see what she has to say. If nothing else, maybe she can explain the blue paint.”

Sam groans, pulls his quilt back over his head and closes his eyes tightly. “Do we have to? Nutmeg can be a bit ...” he pauses for a moment. “a bit needy.”

Iggy pulls on Sam’s arm which lies limply on top of the quilt. “Come on, Sam. We have a mystery to solve.”

⁹ Nobody actually said this. This expression is derived from the play *The Mourning Bride*, written by William Congreve in 1697. The relevant lines are spoken by Zara in Act 3, Scene 8, where she says:

*Vile and ingrate! too late thou shalt repent
The base Injustice thou hast done my Love:
Yes, thou shalt know, spite of thy past Distress,
And all those Ills which thou so long hast mourn’d;
Heav’n has no Rage, like Love to Hatred turn’d,
Nor Hell a Fury, like a Woman scorn’d.*

Zara later kills herself after she mistakenly discovers her boyfriend, Alphonso, has been killed. The mistake occurs because Zara only saw a headless corpse of a man whom she assumed was Alphonso. It turns out that Zara was not scorned at all, she was just kind of dumb.

Scene 3 - A Coffee Shop Near Nutmeg's House



UTMEG AGREES TO MEET THEM AT THE HOT COCOA CAFÉ. The Hot Cocoa Café is the sort of a place where a small hot cocoa is called ‘tall’ (an English word which means large), a medium hot cocoa is called ‘grande’ (a French word which means large), and a large cocoa is called ‘groot’ (which is Dutch for large) Each cocoa is served in the same sized cup, with the only difference being the price paid by the customer. What goes into each large cup is determined by a complex code that takes years to master. In the Hot Cocoa Café the phrase ‘groot short half soy half milk with cream mocha vanilla latte with splenda and decaf skim extra hot wet caramel latte with whip, light foam, and extra caramel sauce and a pinch of nutmeg with an extra shot of vanilla’ makes sense. Measured by the ounce, the price of a groot short half soy half milk with cream mocha vanilla latte with splenda and decaf skim extra hot wet caramel latte with whip, light foam, and extra caramel sauce and a pinch of nutmeg with an extra shot of vanilla is approximately the same price as an ounce of weapons grade uranium on the black market. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the Hot Cocoa Café does a thriving business. Especially when elves have an unexpected day off in the week before Christmas.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam step through the doors of the Hot Cocoa Café. They see rows of elves perched over their laptops updating their Elfbook.¹⁰ Nutmeg is the last elf in the row. She logs into her Elfbook site, and then checks in to the Hot Cocoa Café. She quickly types ‘Nutmeg hopes that one of these three gentleelves will buy her a hot chockey’ into her status bar and presses enter.

“Hey Nutmeg,” says Iggy. “Thanks for meeting us.”

“Can I get you a hot chockey?” asks Yugo.

¹⁰ Elfbook is a popular social networking website frequented by elves at the North Pole. The most recent entries you see when you look at Iggy’s Elfbook page are:

- Banjo is going to a sausage party
- Foo-Foo needs fairy slippers for the fairies on her farm
- Sam likes Jimmy and the Penguins
- Sam likes Occupy Santa Claus Lane
- Jinxen is finally out of Northrend. I hate snow. Screw you, Arthas.
- Sam is WTF? Darth Vader is Luke’s dad? Why didn’t anyone tell me?
- Yugo likes www.iggyyugoandsam.com

Elfbook really is a colossal waste of time.

Nutmeg nods and then Sam says, "I'll have one, too. Groot. With a half frap full whip and a double cap."

Yugo heads over to the counter and places his order. A great deal of buzzing and clanking follows and then the barista sets four hot chockeys in a row on the counter (including one in a groot cup with a half frap full whip and a double cap).

Nutmeg takes a sip of her hot chockey. She wipes some whipped cream from her lip and says, "I suppose you're here to talk about Tippytoes."

"We're trying to figure out what happened," says Iggy.

"Shouldn't you leave that to the NPPD?" asks Nutmeg.

"We just want to help," says Yugo.

"And if we leave it to the NPPD, this will end up in the cold case files," says Sam. "And there's no colder case than a North Pole cold case."

"I didn't do it, you know," says Nutmeg.

"We never said you did," says Iggy.

"Yes, but you were thinking it," says Nutmeg.

"It might have crossed our minds," says Yugo.

"Well, it can uncross your minds," says Nutmeg. "It's not that I didn't think about it. I wanted to when I learned that he was seeing Poodles on the side."

"So, what changed your mind?" asks Sam.

Nutmeg stares off into the distance and then takes another sip of her hot chockey. "I finally realized what a big jerk he was and how much better off I am without him."

"So you didn't push him into the *GrinderMax 3000*TM"

"Nope. I did scratch all his DVDs and put them back in the case. And I put some holly berry jam in his underpants. And I hacked into his Elfbook page and replaced his profile picture with the back end of a reindeer," says Nutmeg. "That made me feel better. True fact."

"He was a bit of a reindeer's butt," agrees Sam.

"Tell me about it," says Nutmeg. "Did you know he stole a bunch of money from Juggles? More than 100,000 puffins, I heard."

Yugo raises an eyebrow. "That's a lot of puffins."

"True fact," says Nutmeg. "And I know he had been spending a lot of time with Granny Wifflebats. I'm sure he was trying to get his greedy hands on that fortune."

Iggy whistles. "That is also a lot of puffins."

“True fact,” says Nutmeg. “You should talk to Chestnuts. I know he’s pretty upset about the whole business.”

Yugo makes a note on a napkin. “Thanks Nutmeg. You’ve given us a lot to think about.”

Iggy sets down his empty cup. “I guess that’s everything then.”

“Just one more thing,” says Yugo. “Do you know anything about the blue paint?”

“Blue paint? What about it?” asks Nutmeg.

“The cabinet beside the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. It had blue paint on the top shelf,” says Yugo.

Nutmeg just shrugs.

“It’s time we got going, then” says Yugo.

“See you later, Nutmeg,” says Sam.

The three elves get up from the table and head for the door. Nutmeg sighs. “Why do I always end up with the wrong guy? I would have dated you, Sam, if you hadn’t stood me up at the *Walrus and Ulu* that time.”

Sam pauses in the doorway and turns his head. “I explained that. It was time zone confusion¹¹. You know that happens a lot around here.”

Nutmeg smiles slightly. “I should have believed you.” She traces a circle on the table top with her finger and then says softly, “Maybe we can try again sometime?”

Sam blinks. “Um sure, maybe,” he says. “I’ll call you.” He turns and walks quickly to catch up with Iggy and Yugo.

Nutmeg opens her laptop and logs into her Elfbook account. She updates her status to read ‘Nutmeg is in a relationship’.

True fact.

¹¹ The medical term for the confusion caused by rapidly crossing time zones is desynchronization. Symptoms include headaches, fatigue, irritability and having absolutely no clue what the heck time it is.

Scene 4 - A Street About 3 Blocks From the Hot Cocoa Café



YUGO STEERS THE SNOWMOBILE THROUGH THE SNOW piled up on Mistletoe Road with ease. Why wouldn't he? He was driving the finest piece of snowmobiling machinery ever built by man or elf. Yugo's snowmobile was a shiny red marvel. It cruises through piqsirpoq¹² and qimuqsuq as easily as it glides over shlim. It is fully enclosed, with room for 5 elves to sit in air conditioned comfort on genuine pleather seats.

"Where to now?" asks Iggy.

"I guess we should go talk to Juggles," says Yugo.

"100,000 puffins is a lot of puffins," says Sam. "I could see pushing someone through the *GrinderMax 3000*TM for 100,000 puffins.

Iggy winces. He is about to say something when red and blue lights start flashing behind the snowmobile.

"Now what?" Yugo asks to no one in particular. He guides the snowmobile to a stop beside a large pile of mungin¹³. A black and white snowmobile with flashing red and blue lights pulls in behind them.

"It's Copper and Widget," says Sam. He looks for a way out of the snowmobile. He curses when he realizes that Yugo has the child lock feature engaged, and he cannot get out unless Yugo opens the door.

Inspector Widget raps his knuckles against the ballistic glass of the driver's window. "Open up. NPPD."

Yugo presses a green button on the door handle and the ballistic glass slides down silently. A gust of Arctic wind blows into the passenger cabin of the snowmobile. In an instant, warm comforting air blows out of the 36 vents located throughout the snowmobile. It might be -43°¹⁴ outside, but within the snowmobile, the temperature remains perfectly comfortable.

¹² It is said that the elves of the North Pole have over 100 words for different kinds of snow. This is an urban legend. In fact, the elves of the North Pole have nearly 500 words for different kinds of snow. Piqsirpoq is that big pile of snow your neighbour throws into your yard from his driveway. Qimuqsuq is about 2 feet of wet heavy snow that the TV weatherman never say coming. Schlim is a dusting of snow that you scarcely even notice.

¹³ That pile of gray lumpy snow the snowplow leaves behind right at the end of your driveway.

¹⁴ -43°C is the same as -45.4°F or 230.1°K. By any measure, it is really freaking cold.

“Yes, I thought it was you,” says Widget with a sneer. “License and registration, please.” Yugo taps a few commands into the dashboard computer and in a moment his snowmobile operator’s permit appears on a small screen, alongside his blue registration documents, his pink insurance documents and his yellow birth records. He presses a glowing orange button and copies of each document are instantly and perfectly reproduced by the onboard printer. Yugo pulls the documents from the printer and passes them through the open window.

Inspector Widget eyes them closely and grunts. Sergeant Copper’s face appears in the open window. “That’s some sort of fancy snowmobile you got there, son.”

“I’m very proud of it, yes,” says Yugo.

Copper pulls his truncheon from his belt. “Are these wings on the side?” He taps it gently against the snowmobile’s stubby silver wings. Yugo says nothing and grips the steering wheel tightly.

“What kind of a snowmobile has wings on the side?” asks Widget.

The answer is obvious to you. The kind of snowmobile that has wings on the side is a flying snowmobile. Yugo’s snowmobile does things that other snowmobiles can only dream of in their wildest, happiest, most carefree snowmobile dreams. With the push of a yellow button, or the flick of a blue switch, the snowmobile can glide through the air or under the water. There is no place on Earth so high or so deep that Yugo cannot reach it in his snowmobile. It also runs very well indeed on snow.

“You wouldn’t be thinking of leaving the North Pole in this thing now, would you?” asks Copper. He taps the door of the snowmobile once more with his truncheon. Yugo flinches and grips the steering wheel a little tighter.

“Didn’t I tell you not to make any travel plans?” says Widget. “You’re still our number one suspect in the Tippytoes case.”

“Our only suspect,” adds Copper.

“And it seems that you are something of a flight risk, with your fancy flying snowmobile,” says Widget.

“We can’t have that, can we sir?” says Copper.

“No we can’t,” replies Widget.

“Should I run him in, sir?”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” Widget answers. “But we are going to have to seize this fancy snowmobile. To prevent you from wandering off, you understand.”

Yugo grips the steering wheel so tightly that Iggy and Sam have to work together to pry his fingers free. “Come on, Yugo,” says Iggy. “We’d better do what they say.”

“They’ll run you in if you don’t get out,” says Sam.

Yugo nods and Iggy and Sam help him out of the snowmobile. Widget gives Yugo back his papers and slips into the driver’s seat. Copper scrambles around and climbs into the other side.

The snowmobile’s doors slide smoothly shut on their well oiled hydraulics. Widget smiles and waves from the other side of the ballistic glass. He pushes the flashing red button beside the steering wheel. The snowmobile lurches forward and stalls. It takes Widget a few moments to get it going again, but it finally starts and the two policemen drive away unsteadily down the snow packed street.

Iggy pats Yugo on the back. “We’ll get your snowmobile back.”

Sam just shakes his head. “Things always get worse by this part of the story.”

“It’s not all bad,” says Iggy. He points to the empty black and white snowmobile with the flashing red lights. “They left their ride behind.”

Yugo chokes back a tear as he watches his snowmobile disappear over the horizon. “No, it’s not bad at all,” he says.

“How so?” asks Sam.

Yugo lifts up a slim black object. “I can bring it back whenever I want with this remote control.” His thumb dances across the surface. He smiles slightly. “The child locks are turned on,” says Yugo. “It will take them hours to get out.”

Scene 5 - Elves Barracks A, Exterior, Thirty Minutes Later



JUGGLES WALKS OUT THE FRONT DOOR OF ELVES BARRACKS A just as Iggy, Yugo and Sam pull up in a black and white snowmobile. He looks at them furtively and walks away briskly in the opposite direction.

Sam presses a black button. A siren wails loudly and the red and blue lights start flashing. Juggles turns around and raises his hands slowly.

“I’ve always wanted to do that,” says Sam.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam step from the snowmobile. When he sees them, Juggles lowers his arms.

“You guys scared me to death,” he says. “I thought you were cops.”

Iggy raises an eyebrow. Yugo raises two eyebrows. Sam would have raised three eyebrows if had that many. He settles for both eyebrows and three chins.

“Why would you be scared of the police?” asks Iggy.

“I’m not,” says Juggles. “But that siren is really loud and those lights are really bright.”

“Sorry about that,” says Yugo. He retreats to the black and white snowmobile and turns off the siren.

“That’s better,” says Juggles.

Sam steps forward. “We know about the stolen puffins. Is that why you did it?”

“Did what?” asks Juggles.

“Did Tippytoes,” growls Sam. “Pushed him through the *GrinderMax 3000*[™].”

Juggles takes a step back. Sam takes another step forward. Juggles steps back again. Sam steps forward. Another step back. Another step forward. Step back. Step forward. Back. Forward. Back.

Now Juggles is backed up against the brick wall of Elves Barracks A. He holds up an arm to keep Sam from taking another step forward. “Look Sam, I hated Tippytoes as much as the next elf, but I wouldn’t push anyone through the *GrinderMax 3000*[™]. Not even him.”

Iggy and Yugo take a few steps forward. “We heard you lost a lot of money on one of Tippytoes’ schemes,” says Iggy.

“Who hasn’t lost money on one of those deals?” says Juggles.

Iggy and Yugo look at each other. Sam lowers his head and absently traces lines in the snow with this pointy toed boot.

“See what I mean?” says Juggles. He crosses his arms and smiles smugly.

“But still,” says Iggy. “100,000 puffins is a lot of money.”

“It sure is,” says Juggles. “And that’s why I couldn’t possibly have done it.”

Yugo blinks. “I don’t understand.”

“Tippytoes told me he could get it all back. With interest, too” says Juggles. “All he needed was another 10,000 puffins. I was going to pay him out of my Christmas bonus.”

Iggy looks askance at Yugo. Yugo looks back, likewise askance. You can tell that they are both thinking of sayings about fools, puffins and early partings.

“And now that he’s gone, I’ll never get my money back. I’ve lost everything,” says Juggle.

Sam motions to Iggy and Yugo. They huddle together. “He think he’s innocent,” says Iggy.

“Me too,” says Yugo.

“He’s way too dumb to have done it,” agrees Sam.

They break out of their huddle and smile at Juggles. “I guess that’s everything then,” says Iggy.

“We’ll be on our way now,” says Yugo.

“I feel bad for Razzlebutton,” says Juggles.

“Why is that?” asks Sam.

“He told me that Tippytoes had some rare photographs for sale. He seemed really interested in them for some reason. Now I guess he’ll never get them.” Juggles shakes his head sadly.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam exchange another series of raised eyebrows and askance looks and then climb back into the NPPD snowmobile. As they pull away, Yugo slaps his forehead with the palm of his hand.

“I forgot to ask him about the blue paint,” says Yugo.

“Why do you keep going on about blue paint?” asks Sam.

“Something about it just doesn’t add up,” says Yugo.

“Nothing about this adds up,” says Iggy. “It looks like everyone who might have done it is innocent.”

“Nutmeg said we should talk to Chestnuts. Maybe he’s involved in this,” says Iggy.

“My money’s on Razzlebutton,” says Sam.

“He didn’t have any reason to kill Tippytoes,” says Iggy. “You heard Juggles. Razzlebutton wanted to see Tippytoes to buy some rare photographs.”

Yugo nods. “Tippytoes was a toymaker and a scoundrel, but I never knew him to have any appreciation for art.”

“The only pictures that Tippytoes would have for sell would be pictures that the buyer didn’t want anyone else to see,” adds Sam.

Iggy looks confused for a moment. Then he says, “you mean?”

“Yes, exactly,” says Yugo.

“We should go see Razzlebutton,” says Sam.

Yugo turns onto Peppermint Lane and speeds up.

“Can I turn the siren on again?” asks Sam.

Scene 6 - A Cosy Sitting Room, Interior, Soon Afterwards

RAZZLEBUTTON TAKES A SIP FROM HIS MUG OF CRANBERRY TEA when he hears a knock at the door. You are looking into the sitting room of his modest house in Arctic Acres. It is small and tidy, in the elf fashion. A fire burns in the little stone fireplace. A row of framed pictures decorates the mantle. More photographs decorate the wall next to the fireplace. Many of these feature portraits of smiling elves. Most of them include a blonde female elf and a pair of smaller elves, dressed in blue and pink velvet suits.

Many detective stories take place entirely in drawing rooms like this. The detective, often a foreigner with peculiar habits, convenes the suspects around him in a comfortable room like this. The suspects may not find it so comfortable, as it is usually the very room where the victim himself was found, with a letter opener stuck in his chest. In fact, sometimes the corpse is still sitting in his chair, looking peacefully asleep, except for the letter opener sticking out of his chest. Then, using only his intuition and deduction, the detective carefully eliminates all but one of the suspects, the last of whom he tricks into making a full confession.

This story is not like that. But, every mystery story should have at least one scene that takes place in a drawing room, and this is it.

Razzlebutton opens the door and Iggy, Yugo and Sam walk into the room. Iggy bows slightly as he crosses the doorway. Yugo and Sam both eye the framed pictures on the wall.

“What brings you three here?” asks Razzlebutton. It is a fair question. Iggy, Yugo and Sam have never visited his cosy sitting room in Arctic Acres before.

Iggy speaks first. “We’re looking into the ... ,” he pauses.

“... unfortunate circumstances of Tippytoes,” continues Yugo.

“He was killed in a *GrinderMax 3000*™,” concludes Sam.

Razzlebutton says nothing for a moment. He tries to appear nonplussed, but he comes across as very plussed indeed. “It was most ... unfortunate,” he finally says. “Can I offer you fellows some tea? It’s cranberry mistletoe. Mrs. Razzlebutton’s favourite.”

Iggy nods and Razzlebutton starts pouring tea.

“We heard that you were looking for Tippytoes to sell you some photographs,” says Yugo.

Razzlebutton’s arm jerks and he spills cranberry tea on the table. “Excuse me,” he says. “There’s a bit of a draft.” He shudders again.

“I expect there is often a draft in Arctic Acres,” says Sam.

Razzlebutton ignores Sam's remark and sips his tea. "You are correct. I am a collector of vintage photographs. Tippytoes said he had come across a set of old heliographs, which he claimed were the only pictures ever taken of Black Peter¹⁵ himself. Portraits like those are priceless to a collector like me. Let me show you."

Razzlebutton bends over a small ottoman. He lifts the top of the ottoman, revealing a hidden compartment inside. He reaches in and pulls out a stack of black and white photographs. He passes them to Iggy, Yugo and Sam. "These are of poor quality. I was hoping that Tippytoes had something better."

The three elves page through the photographs. They are grainy images of elves in old fashioned dress, looking sternly at the camera. It seems that elves were not as jolly in the old days as they are today.

"You really just wanted old photos?" says Iggy. He passes the portraits back to Razzlebutton.

Razzlebutton takes the photos back and nods. He places them carefully back in the ottoman.

"I guess we were mistaken then," says Yugo.

"We thought that Tippytoes had some pictures he was using to blackmail you," says Sam.

"Oh my goodness no," says Razzlebutton. He chuckles. "Blackmail me? That's preposterous. I'm a happily married elf."

Iggy looks over at the family pictures that decorate the cosy little sitting room. He sets down his tea and says, "we're sorry for the misunderstanding. We'll be on our way."

Yugo and Sam pass their teacups back to Razzlebutton and quickly make their way out the door.

"I'm so embarrassed," says Yugo, once the door has closed behind them.

Sam grunts. "I'm not so sure. I have a hard time believing that Tippytoes wasn't up to something."

On the other side of the door, Razzlebutton pulls a crushed velvet handkerchief from his pocket. His hand shakes as he wipes the handkerchief across his forehead.

He pockets the handkerchief and makes his way back to the ottoman. He opens it up and pulls out the stack of old photographs. He sets these on the

¹⁵ Black Peter is known in Dutch folklore as the evil assistant of Santa Claus (or as the Dutch mispronounce it, Sinterklasse). According to the Dutch, good girls and boys get a present from Santa Claus, while bad boys and girls get a beating from Black Peter. This is where the expression "Nobody misbehaves in Amsterdam on Christmas Eve" comes from.

floor and reaches back into the ottoman. He pulls out a smaller stack of coloured photographs. He steps over to the fireplace, looks about warily and, one by one, feeds the colour photographs into the fire.

Scene 7 - The *Walrus and Ulu*, Interior, Daytime



SAM FINISHES HIS SECOND ELFLÄGËR and orders another. “Are you sure Chestnuts is going meet us here? We’ve been waiting for ages.”

Iggy looks at his watch. “It’s been ten minutes.”

“He’ll be here, just be patient,” says Yugo.

The three elves have returned to their usual table equidistant from the bar and men’s room. The *Walrus and Ulu* is a different place in the middle of the day than it is in the evening. This is not literally true, of course. It is, in fact, exactly the same place it was the night before. It has the same kitsch on the walls and the same Lego walrus at the door. It is just as dark outside now as it was then. But it feels different than it did the last time you were here.

The lights have been turned up and the jukebox has been turned down. Only a few of the tables are occupied. There is no crowd at the bar and no elves waiting at the door. You do not lean to hear the conversation now, without the chatter and laughter of a few hundred other elves.

Sam looks around uncomfortably.

“What is it?” asks Iggy.

Sam shakes his head and returns to his Elflägër. “I don’t know. I just have a funny feeling. I hope he gets here soon.”

The words have only just left Sam’s mouth, to be replaced by another sip of Elflägër, when Chestnuts appears at his side. “Is this seat taken?” he asks.

Iggy rises to greet him. “Thanks for coming, Chestnuts.” He shakes his hand and gestures to him to sit down.

“Can we get you an Elflägër?” asks Sam. “It’s Chubby’s finest.”

Chestnuts makes a face. “No thanks,” he says. “It’s a little early for me.”

“It’s five o’clock on this side of the table,” says Sam. He waves to Chubby to bring him another.

“So, what is this all about?” asks Chestnuts.

“We’re trying to sort out what happened to Tippytoes,” says Iggy.

Chestnuts smiles. "You don't think that Widget and Copper are up to the job?"

Yugo shakes his head. "I'm afraid not."

"Those two can't even figure the way out of a locked snowmobile," says Sam.

"So, it's up to us to figure it out," says Iggy.

"I don't think I can help you," says Chestnuts. "I don't know anything about what happened."

"Nutmeg told us that Tippytoes was trying to get his hands on Granny Wifflebats' money," says Yugo.

Chestnuts snorts. "He already did. He tricked her into signing a new will right before she fell into a coma."

"That's a dirty trick," says Sam. "Granny Wifflebats must be a thousand years old."

"1007 next month," says Chestnuts.

Iggy whistles. "You must have been pretty upset about that."

"I have to tell you, I was really upset when I heard about it. I felt like I had been roasted on an open fire. I even went and told Tippytoes off. But that's all I did."

"You certainly had motive enough," says Yugo. "Granny Wifflebats is one of the richest elves at the North Pole."

Chestnuts' face brightens up. "Not at all. When I went to visit Granny Wifflebats this morning, she was feeling much better. The doctors think she might make a full recovery."

"That's great news," says Iggy.

"It sure is," says Chestnuts. "So, you see, I've no reason to do anything to Tippytoes. And anyway, I was here at the *Walrus and Ulu* when it happened."

"I don't remember you being here," says Yugo.

"That's right," says Sam. "You left early when you couldn't get a table."

Chestnuts looks a little flustered. He pauses and then says, "you're right. I did leave early. But I went straight to the hospital to see Granny Wifflebats. I didn't go anywhere near the workshop." Chestnuts gets down from his bar stool. "So, if that's everything, I'd better get back." He turns and walks quickly out of the *Walrus and Ulu*.

Iggy looks at Yugo. "I guess that's another dead end. Granny Wifflebats is going to get better, so Chestnuts didn't have any reason to kill Tippytoes."

"Not anymore," says Yugo. "But you heard him. Chestnuts didn't know that Granny Wifflebats was going to get better until this morning."

“By then, somebody had already fed Tippytoes into the *GrinderMax 3000™*,” says Sam.

“And he did leave early last night,” says Iggy.

Yugo just nods.

Scene 8 - A Black and White Snowmobile, In Transit



THE ELVES ARE ON THEIR WAY HOME FROM the *Walrus and Ulu* when the police radio speaker crackles and the scratchy voice of a dispatcher asks them to report in. Iggy, Yugo and Sam all look at each other nervously. It dawns on them for the first time that the NPPD might not see the black and white snowmobile as a fair trade for the snowmobile that Widget and Copper took. It occurs to them, all at once, that the NPPD might have a different view of the entire matter. They might regard the black and white snowmobile that Yugo is even now driving up Mistletoe Way as stolen property.

“We should report in,” says Iggy.

Yugo stops the snowmobile and slowly reaches for the radio microphone. “What should I say?”

“Tell them that this was all your idea and that Sam had nothing to do with it,” says Sam.

The radio crackles again. “Report in please. All units report in.”

“You have to say something,” says Iggy.

Yugo looks at some numbers on the dashboard. He presses the red button on the side of the microphone and says, “unit 12 reporting in.”

“We copy unit 12,” says the dispatcher through the radio static. “Please report to the main square, downtown.”

“We roger that,” says Yugo. The radio goes silent and he places the microphone back onto its cradle.

“Zuzu’s petals!” Sam curses. “We’re doomed.”

Scene 9 - The North Pole, Downtown. Daytime.



YUGO PARKS THE BLACK AND WHITE SNOWMOBILE at the edge of the main square at the centre of town. It is a large plaza, paved with bricks that look like peppermint candies. Holly wreaths hang from hundreds of lampposts, which are needed to light the square. Although it is midday, the sky is black and filled with stars that look like snowflakes and snowflakes that look like stars in the lamplight. Hundreds of elves have gathered around a raised platform in the middle of the plaza.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam make their way to the front of the crowd. It is not easy to weave your way through the crowd after them. You are all standing there when a brass band strikes up the first few bars of *Here Comes Santa Claus* and then Santa Claus himself steps onto the platform.

You and the elves around all clap enthusiastically. Santa Claus raises a red mittened hand and smiles. The cheering continues, but Santa Claus' dimples seem less merry than usual and his eyes scarcely twinkle at all. Then he steps up, lively and quick, to a microphone at the middle of the platform.

"Thank you all for coming," he says in his deep, rumbling voice.

"Ho ho ho!" yells an enthusiastic elf from somewhere behind you.

Santa Claus shakes his head. "I'm afraid that I am not bringing you tidings of great joy today."

The crowd goes quiet. You could hear a pin drop, if someone were of a mind to drop one.

"As you know, there was an unfortunate incident this morning at the workshop. The North Pole Police Department has been brought in to do a full investigation. Until that investigation is completed and the elf responsible has been apprehended, the workshop will remain closed."

The crowd rustles anxiously. You could not hear a pin drop anymore, though you could probably still hear a bowling pin drop.

"Toy production this year was already behind schedule," continues Santa Claus. "Right now there is no word when the workshop will reopen. It is therefore my sad duty to advise that Christmas will have to be cancelled this year."

The crowd gasps as one. All except Sam. He just stands there with his arms crossed. "I knew it. I just knew it."

"What's that Sam?" asks Iggy.

"It always happens like this," explains Sam. "Things just keep getting worse and worse. By this part of the story, we've confronted the problem and it has

proven to be insurmountable. We've experienced hardship and loss. Then we always get hit with the big one."

"The big one?" asks Yugo.

"You know the one," says Sam. "The part where we learn that if we don't solve the problem, there won't be any Christmas this year. The part where we learn that it is up to us to save Christmas."

Act 3

Scene 1 - Iggy, Yugo and Sam's Apartment, Later That Afternoon



AND SO YOU COME, AT LAST, TO THE THIRD and final act of this little play. This is the part of the story where the heroes face their final challenge and complete their journey.

The third act begins with the heroes at their lowest point. They may be in the grasp of a giant spider or frozen in carbonite. But in this act, the heroes will overcome these hurdles. They will do so by taking some enormous risk or by facing their greatest fear. Then, just when defeat seems assured, through perseverance or good fortune, they will prevail. The boy will win the girl back, the villain will be defeated or, in a detective story like this one, the mystery will be solved and the culprit unmasked.

Everything in the third act is bigger and more dangerous than the things that have happened before. After all, this is when the hero and the villain have their final confrontation, and it has to be a good one. More things get blown up in the third act than any other. A lot of movies turn orange in the third act from all of the explosions going on.

The third act usually has a big, noisy ending, but it often begins quietly, with the heroes reviewing their progress and their slim hope of success. This serves to remind the reader of just how bleak things are at that point.

And this is where we find Iggy, Yugo and Sam at the beginning of the third act. Seated around the little table in their tidy apartment in Elves Barracks B, where they are deciding their next course of action.

“Let’s recap,” says Iggy. When you hear an elf say something like that, you know that act three has begun.

“Right,” says Yugo. He walks over to the end of the room where a whiteboard is propped on an easel. Yugo picks up a duster from the ledge and erases some parabolic partial differential equations that he was working on for fun.

He replaces this:

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{dT}{dt} &= k(\sin(2\pi \omega t) - T) \\ \frac{dT}{dt} + kT &= k \sin(2\pi \omega t) \\ \mu(t) &= e^{\int k dt} \\ &= e^{kt} \\ T(t) &= \frac{1}{\mu(t)} \int \mu(t) k \sin(2\pi \omega t) dt + \frac{C}{\mu(t)} \\ &= e^{-kt} \int e^{kt} k \sin(2\pi \omega t) dt + \frac{C}{e^{kt}} \\ &= \frac{k e^{-kt}}{k^2 + 4\pi^2 \omega^2} \left(k e^{kt} \sin(2\pi \omega t) - 2\pi \omega e^{kt} \cos(2\pi \omega t) \right) + \frac{C}{e^{kt}} \\ &= \frac{k}{k^2 + 4\pi^2 \omega^2} \left(k \sin(2\pi \omega t) - 2\pi \omega \cos(2\pi \omega t) \right) + \frac{C}{e^{kt}} \\ &= \frac{k}{\sqrt{k^2 + 4\pi^2 \omega^2}} \left(\frac{k}{\sqrt{k^2 + 4\pi^2 \omega^2}} \sin(2\pi \omega t) - \frac{2\pi \omega}{\sqrt{k^2 + 4\pi^2 \omega^2}} \cos(2\pi \omega t) \right) + \frac{C}{e^{kt}} \\ &= \frac{k}{\sqrt{k^2 + 4\pi^2 \omega^2}} \sin(2\pi \omega t + \delta) + \frac{C}{e^{kt}}\end{aligned}$$

where $\tan \delta = -\frac{2\pi \omega}{k}$

With this:

- Tippytoes RIP
- snowmobile impounded
- workshop closed
- Christmas cancelled

“It looks bleak,” says Iggy.

Yugo taps his marker on his chin and then adds

- blue paint?

to the bottom of the list.

“I think that covers it,” he says. He sets his marker down.

“What the trug?” asks Sam. “Why is blue paint on the list?”

“It bothers me,” says Yugo. “I think it’s important.”

“We aren’t any closer to solving this mystery,” says Sam. “Was it Nutmeg in the workshop with the *GrinderMax 3000*™? Or was it Razzlebutton in the library with the candlestick? I don’t have a clue.”

“We need a break in this case,” agrees Iggy.

“We are going to have to make our own break,” says Yugo.

“How are we supposed to do that?” asks Sam. “We’ve already talked to everyone.”

“Any one of them might have done it,” says Iggy.

“They all had reason to,” says Yugo. “But none of them could explain the blue paint.”

“Here we go with the blue paint again,” says Sam. “What is it about the blue paint?”

Yugo stares at the whiteboard for a few moments. Then he steps away and walks out of the room. He pulls his red velvet cap and jacket from his hook by the door.


“Where are you going?” asks Iggy.

“To the workshop,” says Yugo. “That’s where we’ll find the answers to all of this.”

Iggy jumps down from his stool and heads for the door. He turns and looks back at Sam. “Are you coming?”

Sam just stares back hard. Finally he grunts and slips from his stool. “Fine,” he says. “But I’m sure that nothing good will come from this.”

Scene 2 - A Workshop at the North Pole, Exterior.

GGY, YUGO AND SAM CREEP AROUND THE OUTSIDE of the workshop. All of the doors and windows are locked, and the whole building is surrounded by a strip of yellow crime scene tape.

CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS - CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS - CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS - CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS

Yugo pulls out his thick pocket knife and opens it, producing a magnifying glass, screwdriver, bottle opener, nail file, wrench, compass, sewing needle, pliers, corkscrew, tire gauge, laser pointer, and a fish scaler before finally finding the knife blade.

He flicks his wrist and slices through the crime scene tape.

“What are you doing,” says Sam in a panic. “That’s official crime scene tape. You can’t cut that!”

“Too late,” says Yugo. He folds up the knife blade, fish scaler, bottle opener and all the rest.

“We’re done for,” says Sam.

Yugo turns his attention to the door. “This shouldn’t be too much trouble,” he says to himself. He reaches into his tool belt and draws out a handful of picks and probes.

“What do you mean by that?” says Sam. “This is going to be so much terrible trouble that they will have to invent a new word for it.”

“How about terribubble?” says Iggy helpfully. “That would be a good word for terrible trouble.”

Sam glares at him. “Fine,” he says. “You mark my words. There is going to be terribubble.”

Yugo wiggles his lock pick carefully. There is a loud click. Yugo smiles as the door swings open. “After you,” he says.

“Oh no,” says Sam. “You go first. I insist.”

“Please. Be my guest,” says Yugo.

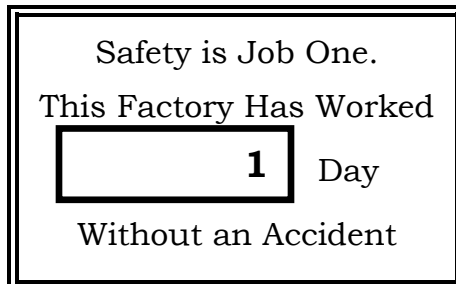
“I couldn’t possibly,” says Sam. “You first.”

“I’ll go first,” says Iggy. He steps over the severed crime scene tape and through the open door. Sam stares at Yugo until he gives up and goes first, with Sam trailing a few steps behind.

Scene 3 - A Workshop at the North Pole, Interior, Seconds Later.



IGGY ENTERS THE WORKSHOP, with Yugo and Sam close after him. Yugo pulls a flashlight from his tool belt and leads the elves to the far end of the workshop. They pass a sign that says:



before they reach the *GrinderMax 3000*TM, which stands ominously, surrounded by another barrier of bright yellow crime scene tape. Someone has drawn a chalk outline around the little pile of red dust on the floor beside the *GrinderMax 3000*TM.

Yugo turns his flashlight from the *GrinderMax 3000*TM to a nearby cabinet with three cans of blue paint on the top shelf.

“Just as I thought,” says Yugo.

Suddenly, the workshop is filled with light and an officious voice booms out, “Stop right there and put your hands up.”

Sam does not hesitate and throws his hands as high in the air as he can. Iggy and Yugo slowly turn to see Widget and Copper creep out from behind a shelf of spare toy parts, before they, too, raise their hands into the air.

“What did I tell you, Copper?” says Widget.

“You were right,” says Copper.

“Criminals always return to the scene of the crime,” says Widget. “It’s the oldest trick in the book.”

“And all we had to do was hide out here and wait for them to show themselves,” says Copper.

“Wait a minute, we’re not criminals,” says Iggy.

“We’re here to solve this crime,” says Yugo.

“I don’t know either one of these guys,” mumbles Sam. “I’ve never seen them before in my life.”

“There’s no use denying it,” says Widget. “We’ve got you dead to rights.”

“This workshop was locked up tight, from the inside,” says Copper. “But you figured out how to get inside.”

“Just like you did last night when you crept in her and did in poor Tippytoes,” says Widget.

Copper steps forward and presses his truncheon under Yugo’s chin. “We’ve had our eyes on this one all along, haven’t we Inspector?”

“He’s been trouble right from the start,” says Widget. “Terribubble.”

“Should I run him in, sir?”

“Yes Sergeant. By all means. Run him in. And run his accomplices in, too.”

Copper pulls his handcuffs from his belt and reaches for Yugo’s wrist.

“I am running you in for the murder of Tippytoes in the worst degree, with malice very much aforethought and with intent to cause the most grievous of bodily harm,” Copper says in his most officious tone. “You have the right to

remain silent, but if you do, we'll hold that against you, so you might as well confess."

Yugo shakes his head. "You can't arrest me for the murder of Tippytoes."

"We can and we just did," says Inspector Widget. "You'll do 200 years for this."

"You don't understand," says Yugo. "You can't arrest me for the murder of Tippytoes, because Tippytoes isn't dead."

Iggy gasps.

"Nice try punk," says Widget. "But Tippytoes is dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. Old Tippytoes is as dead as a door-nail."

Sam nudges Iggy. "What's so dead about a door-nail? I'm inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade."

"The wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile, Sam," says Iggy.

"Shut up your prattle," snaps Copper.

"Permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Tippytoes is as dead as a doornail." Widget gestures to the little pile of red dust beside the **GrinderMax 3000™**.

"But that's not Tippytoes," says Yugo.

"Of course it is," says Copper. "It has an official NPPD chalk mark all around it. We only do that with dead bodies."

"Ones that are dead like doornails," says Widget.

"But it's all red," says Yugo. "And Tippytoes was dressed in green. His green boots were still on the conveyor belt."

Widget pauses for a moment. "Don't mean nothing. You'd be all red too after you'd been run through the **GrinderMax 3000™**."

"And you've proven that you can break into a locked workshop," says Copper. "Only the killer knew how to do that."

"Pshaw," pshaws Yugo. "That was nothing. Anyone can break into a locked workshop. It's getting out again that's hard."

"Not a bit," says Widget. "You just walk out then open door."

Yugo winces as Copper locks a handcuff tightly around one wrist. "Sure, anyone can do that. But the workshop door was locked from the inside. We talked to a few people who had good reason to kill Tippytoes, but none of them could have done it, because none of them could have locked the door from the inside after they had left."

Copper and Widget exchange a puzzled glance.

"And then there is still the problem of the blue paint," says Yugo.

“Yeah, what about the blue paint?” asks Sam. It is not clear whether his question is directed at Inspector Widget or at Yugo.

“The blue paint is the key,” says Yugo. He pulls free from Copper’s grip and walks over to the cabinet. “The only paint on the top shelf of this cabinet is blue. Usually there are a few cans of red paint here. But they’re gone.”

“So what happened to them?” asks Iggy.

“What difference does it make?” asks Sam.

“It makes all the difference, Sam. Tippytoes was working alone last night because he was late for his shift. At some point he decides to stage a fake accident. He must have known that lots of elves were angry with him and decided he should get away. So he took off his boots and gathered up the cans of red paint from the cabinet.” Yugo walks over to the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. “Then he placed his boots on the conveyor belt and splashed a bunch of red paint around, to make it look like there was an accident.”

“So what did he do with the empty paint cans?” asks Iggy.

“It’s elementary, my dear Iggy,” says Yugo. He threw the paint cans into the *GrinderMax 3000*TM, pressed the switch and then ‘whoosh!’ Yugo points to the pile of red dust at the side of the *GrinderMax 3000*TM.

Widget and Copper look from Yugo to the pile of red dust and then back to Yugo.

“That’s a pretty tale,” says Widget. “But if Tippytoes is alive, where is he?”

“Yeah, where is he?” says Copper. “If you can’t tell us that, then we’re gonna run you in.”

“Crap,” says Sam.

Yugo just smiles. “Oh that’s easy. Tippytoes is alive and he’s somewhere in this workshop right now.”

Scene 4 - A Cabinet a Few Feet Away, Interior.



Scene 5 - A Workshop at the North Pole, Interior.



“WID YOU SAY SOMETHING?” says Iggy.

“That wasn’t me,” says Sam. “I said ‘crap’ a couple of scenes ago.”

“Then who was it?”

Yugo smiles, more broadly now and walks back to the cabinet with the blue paint on the top shelf. He pulls open the door with a triumphant flourish and says, “Inspector, Sergeant, I give you Tippytoes.”

The elves all look at the open cabinet, where Tippytoes sits barefoot with a look of dark poison on his face.

“Crap,” he says again.

Copper reaches into the cabinet and yanks him out with a rough pull.

“What’s all this then?” demands Widget. “Faking your own death? Shutting down a perfectly good workshop 5 days before Christmas? You’re in trouble, young man.”

“Terribubble,” says Copper. “You want me to run him in, sir?”

“By all means, Sergeant. Run him in.”

“Why did you do it, Tippytoes?” asks Iggy.

Tippytoes shrugs. “You’ve got me dead to rights. Guess there’s no harm in telling you.”

If this were a Christmas special on television, the image on the screen would ripple out of focus, only to sharpen again at the conclusion of Act 1, Scene 6. You would see Tippytoes seated at his workbench, bolting cowcatchers to little red steam engines. He hums a little tune as he works, but you can’t hear it, for the soundtrack is comprised of Tippytoes’ narration.

“I was sitting over there, all by myself building toy trains. Hundreds of them. It’s not the most exciting work, you know.”

Sam nods. He knows.

“Then it occurred to me that I don’t really like building trains and I don’t really like elves and I don’t really like Christmas. I haven’t made that many friends over the years, but I realized while I was sitting by myself that I had sure made a lot of enemies. Nutmeg hates me for running around on her with Poodles. But who could blame me? Nutmeg is kind of needy.”

“True fact,” Sam says.”

“Juggles thought I’d swindled him in that pyramid scheme. Of course, I did, and he didn’t take it too well. And Chestnuts was mad at me for duping

Granny Wifflebats out of her fortune. That crazy old bat had too much money, anyway. Then there was Razzlebutton. I had him in a difficult position, too.

“It was clear to me then that sooner or later one of them would do me in. Or one of the dozens of other elves I’ve cheated over the years. So I decided that I’d stage a fake death before somebody else staged a real one for me. I figured I might settle down in Florida and work in a theme park. That’s a good living for an elf.”

In the flashback scene, Tippytoes gets up from his chair. He gathers the red paint cans from the top of the cabinet and carries them to the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. He pulls off his boots, splashes paint over them and throws the empty cans into the opening at the front of the *GrinderMax 3000*TM. He presses the button under the picture that says:



There is a percussive ‘whoosh’ and then a puff of red dust appears from the side of the *GrinderMax 3000*TM and settles into a little pile on the ground.

“It happened just like Yugo said,” says Tippytoes, continuing his narration. “The paint and the boots and the ‘whoosh’”. Then I climbed into the cabinet to see all the excitement. I’d planned to slip out once the workshop shut down for the day, but the place got locked down and covered in crime scene tape. I couldn’t get away. So I had no choice but to wait it out.”

The screen ripples out of focus again and in a moment returns to the conversation in the workshop. Copper is roughly slapping a pair of handcuffs onto Tippytoes’ wrists.

“A clever plan,” says Widget.

“Maybe too clever,” says Copper.

Tippytoes snorts. “It was a perfect plan. And I would have got away with it, too, if it wasn’t for those meddling elves.”

“Run him in, Sergeant,” says Widget. “One count of felonious fakery, and four counts of weaselling, swindling and cheating in the first degree.”

“Come along,” says Copper. “You’re spending the next twenty Christmases in the ice house.” He pulls Tippytoes alongside him as he goose steps out of the workshop.

“I guess our business is done here, Inspector,” says Iggy.

Widget growls softly. “Just keep your noses clean, all of you. We’ve got our eyes on you.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam turn and walk slowly to the workshop door.

Widget calls after them. “Yugo!”

Yugo turns his head. “Yes, Inspector?”

“If you ever get tired of building toys, you should consider a career in the NPPD. We’re always looking for a few good elves.”

“Thanks Inspector,” says Yugo. “But I don’t think I’m cut out for police work. I’m going to stay here in the workshop. There’s an awful lot of toys we have to build before Christmas.”

Scene 7 - The *Walrus and Ulu*, Interior, Later That Day After Work



IGGY, YUGO AND SAM ARE SITTING AT THEIR USUAL TABLE in the *Walrus and Ulu*, convenient to both the bar and the men’s washroom.¹⁶ This is the denouement of this story, which is the scene that takes place after the plot reaches its climax late in the third act and which resolves any outstanding storylines and explains the how the outcome of the events in the third act affects the characters. This is where the hero rides off into the sunset, or where the boy, who has reclaimed the girl, carries her off the factory floor in his arms.

“That was the longest day,” says Iggy.

“It was a good thing that Union of Toy Workers Local 34 invoked the Christmas Emergency clause in our labour agreement,” says Yugo. “Otherwise we couldn’t have worked the extra shifts we needed to get back on schedule.”

Sam grumbles, “it wasn’t that good a thing. I’ve got blisters on my screwdriving fingers.”

“At least you haven’t lost your grip on your Elflägär,” says Iggy.

“And with all of the cowcatchers you bolted on today, we’re even ahead of schedule,” says Yugo. “Looks like we’ve saved Christmas again.”

¹⁶ The sign on the men’s room door has a picture of an elf with two legs above the word “ælf”, which means male elf. Even though female elves also have two legs, the women’s washroom has a sign of a picture of an elf, whose legs have been replaced with a triangle, above the word “ælfen”.

“We always do by the end of these things,” says Sam. He slides off of his stool and walks up to the bar to refill his Elflägër. He is carrying his new glass back to the table when he runs into Nutmeg.

She waves at him and smiles. “Hey Sam. Are we still on for Christmas Eve?”

“I guess so,” says Sam.

“That’s just great. Don’t be late this time.”

“I wasn’t late last time. I told you it was desynchronosis.”

“Whatever, you big lug.” Nutmeg gives Sam a playful punch in the arm. “I’ll be waiting for you right by the big Lego walrus at 7 PM, North Pole Standard Time. I’ll be wearing my new pointy cap. True fact.”

“True fact, says Sam. He raises his glass and rejoins Iggy and Yugo at their table.

“I wonder how Tippytoes is making out in the ice house?” says Iggy.

“It can’t be very nice to spend Christmas in jail,” says Yugo.

“I bet he’s having a great time,” says Sam. “There’s no toys to build and everyone else in there is a criminal. He’s going to have Christmas dinner with a bunch of other elves just like him.”

“Hey look,” says Iggy. “There’s Granny Wifflebats.”

You follow Iggy’s gaze to the front of the *Walrus and Ulu*, where Chestnuts leads an ancient elf on his arm through the crowded room. Granny Wifflebats is incredibly old, but she is light on her feet. His eyes, how they twinkle and her dimples, so merry. Her droll little mouth draws up like a bow as she passes by Iggy, Yugo and Sam.

Juggles waves and invites them to join the table he shares with Razzlebutton. Chestnut helps Granny Wifflebats into her seat and then orders a large Elflägër for himself and an even larger one for Granny Wifflebats.

The *Walrus and Ulu* is a scene of comfort and joy. Christmas carols like *Don’t Call Me Mrs Christmas*¹⁷ boom out of the jukebox and all of the elves are merry. Sam orders another Elflägër and says, “You know that feeling we’ve all had for the last couple of days, like we were being watched?”

“What about it?” asks Iggy.

“I think it’s going to stop now.”

¹⁷ What a great tune. Seriously.