

NIGHTMARE ON 34TH STREET

written by

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**INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

A Christmas card of a living room glows with the twinkling technicolor tree lights. An assortment of expertly dressed presents—except for one abomination of a wrap job.

THUD. Ash sprinkles down onto the fireplace logs.

SWOOSH-THUNK! Two black boots land hard, sending a log rolling across the room.

A GRUNT. A shimmy. Until—POP! Out comes out SANTA fucking CLAUS (??), a Coca-Cola ad in the flesh.

He adjusts his coat. Double-checks a NICE LIST. His finger stops on "Susan Walker". He nods, pleased. He looks at his sack of presents.

RUSTLE.

Santa freezes.

RUSTLE.

His eyes dart around the room.

Suddenly, the poorly wrapped gift EXPLODES OPEN. Out jumps SUSIE WALKER (7), wide-eyed and breathless.

Santa nearly shits himself.

Susie's mouth drops open like a nutcracker.

SUSIE  
(awed)  
I-I knew it.

SANTA  
Oh, dear. Aren't you supposed to be  
asleep, little miss?

SUSIE  
Santa. You're real.

SANTA  
Well, I-

SUSIE  
(over-excited)  
You're real! You're real!

SANTA  
Shhh!

He presses a finger to his snowy beard, crouching to meet her sparkling gaze.

SANTA (CONT'D)

I'm as real as magic is, and as long as you believe, there will always be wonder waiting under the tree. Now, how about we keep this our little secret, hm?

Susie nods, puppy-eyed.

Santa winks, taps the side of his nose, and in a swirl of glittering smoke, rockets up the chimney.

Susie scrambles to the window: Santa's sleigh rides a trackless roller coaster across the full moon.

**INT. SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY**

Susie stands stiffly in front of the class, her PowerPoint slide glowing behind her: "*Santa is Real.*"

The room erupts into hyena-like laughter. Even the TEACHER (42) lets a chuckle slip.

KID

SHE THINKS SANTA IS REAL!!!

SUSIE

(defensive)

HE IS REAL!

The laughter crescendos, echoing, morphing into a singular, taunting DRONE.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

He's REAL! He's REAL!

**INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Christmas Day once again. New presents.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

- Susie (now 8) springs up from inside a poorly taped gift box, eyes wide with anticipation. The room is still. No Santa.

SUSIE (V.O.)

HE'S REAL!

- Susie (now 10) popping out from under the tree skirt, scans the empty living room. Her face falls.

SUSIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HE'S REAL!!

- Susie (now 12), bleary-eyed, crawls out from beneath the couch cushions. Her eye twitches as she stares at the morning light.

SUSIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HE'S REAL!!!

**INT. CAR - DAY**

MELANIE (38) and CARTER (40), Susie's parents, drive in silence. Snow pelts the windshield. A delayed swipe of the wipers.

Susie (now 14), in the back, tests the restraints of her seat belt.

SUSIE  
(insistent)  
He's real! I saw him! You guys  
believe me... don't you?

No response.

**EXT. CHILDREN'S PSYCH WARD**

The car rolls to a stop in front of a weathered building, adorned with a single, wilted wreath, which does little to disguise that this is a psych ward for kids.

Melanie guides Susie from the car.

MELANIE  
Of course we do, Sweetie.

**INT. CHILDREN'S PSYCH WARD - NIGHT**

A dim room, sterile and cold.

Shock therapy.

Susie writhes, strapped to a bed. Electrodes are pressed against her temples. The ZZZZTS of the shocks in tune with Jingle Bells.

ZZZT ZZZT ZT. ZZZZT ZZT ZT. ZZZT ZZT ZT ZT ZZZZZZZZZT.

SUSIE (V.O.)  
HE'S REAL!!

ZZZT ZZZT ZT. ZZZZT ZZT ZT. ZZZT ZZT ZT ZT ZZZZZZZZZT.

SUSIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
HE'S REAL!!!!!!

**EXT. MALL - FRONT - NIGHT**

The cold air clings to faux snow-covered windows, where animatronic decorations flicker inside.

The mall's sliding doors open, and two SECURITY GUARDS (30s) force Susie (now 35), disheveled and unrecognizable, through them. She thrashes, kicking and screaming.

SUSIE  
(wild-eyed, frantic)  
HE'S REAL!!

SECURITY GUARD  
Grow up, freak!

SUSIE  
(desperate)  
I SWEAR! PLEASE BELIEVE ME!

Passersby glance at her with disgust as she collapses to her knees, sobbing in the light dusting of snow. She tilts her head back, her cries echoing into the night.

SUSIE (CONT'D)  
(shrieking)  
HE'S REAL!!!!!!

**INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

A flickering TV screen shows a live Santa tracker, the sleigh icon moving steadily across the globe.

A frail, trembling finger traces Santa's path on the screen with unsettling precision.

Reveal: Susie (82), hair a wild mess of gray, eyes sunken with exhaustion. She hobbles back from the TV and collapses into a rocking chair.

She scans the room—a picture-perfect holiday scene. Every decoration meticulously placed, just as she remembers.

She begins to rock, staring at the empty fireplace.

In the corner, an off-tune radio CRACKLES to life.

RADIO  
 (warped, distorted  
 singing)  
*You better watch out,  
 You better not cry,  
 Better not pout,  
 I'm telling you why:  
 Santa Claus is comin' to town.*

THUD.

Ash flutters down onto the unlit fireplace logs.

SUSIE  
 (whispering to herself)  
 He's... real.

SWOOSH-THUNK! A swirl of soot. Emerging from the haze: Santa. He brushes off a puff of ash from his red suit with a hearty CHUCKLE.

SANTA  
 Well, well... if it isn't little  
 Susie Walker.

Susie's eyes light up once again.

SUSIE  
 Santa!

Her trembling lips spread into a smile.

SANTA  
 Have you been keeping the Christmas  
 spirit alive, Susie?

Susie nods.

Santa boops her on the nose.

REVEAL:

The festive room is gone. In its place: a decrepit, abandoned shack. Wind HOWLS through fractured walls. The ornaments are cracked, the tinsel tarnished.

Susie sits in the rocking chair, a needle hanging loosely from her arm. Her wide-eyed stare is vacant yet blissful.

SUSIE  
 Yes!

Her eyes grow heavier with each blink.

SUSIE (CONT'D)  
You're real. I knew it.

RADIO  
(warped, distorted  
singing)  
*Santa Claus is comin' to town.*

Susie goes limp.

**CUT TO BLACK.**