

MARK AND THE METAVERSE

AN ANIMATED PILOT

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08/01/2023



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ACT 1

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM, MORNING

Pitch black. Alarm clock goes off, its blinking red face the only thing visible in the dark: "4:00 a.m. March 12, 2029." A hand hits the snooze button. Silence. Then, a woman's voice.

META

Good morning, Mark--

MARK

Metachat off.

Silence, total darkness. Sheets rustle.

MARK (CONT'D)

Memarousal on.

META

You find yourself in your college
dorm room.

Room suddenly lights up as the hazy, Metaverse version of a Harvard dorm room in the aughts: posters, clothes on floor, etc. Lush orchestration. Our protagonist, MARK ZUCKERBERG (45, haggard) lies alone in a twin bed, looking out the window at a massive, ethereal harvest moon.

META (CONT'D)

The moon is huge and piss-colored
out your window.

MARK

Piss-colored?

META

The moon is huge and coppery out
your window.

MARK

Better.

META

You find yourself aroused.

Mark looks over at his roommate snoring on the opposite side of the room, confused.

MARK

By?

META

A memory.

MARK

Activate memory-in-memory.

Room goes dark for a second, then...

META

You find yourself in your childhood
bedroom.

Room transforms again into Metaverse version of Mark's
childhood bedroom in the late 80s. Lush orchestration. He
looks out the window at a man mowing the lawn.

META (CONT'D)

The air smells of cut grass and
diesel from the lawnmower. It is
late summer.

A woman comes out and gives the man a drink. She has French
tip nails. They clink glasses. She's wearing a big sun hat so
you can't see her face.

MARK

Is that my mom?

Awkward silence.

META

Your erect penis looks resplendent
in the mid-afternoon sun--

MARK

Enough, you always ruin it with
that shit. Memarousal off.

META

But Mark--

MARK

Memarousal off.

Room goes back pitch black, silent.

MARK (CONT'D)

Messages.

Room suddenly awash in blue light. No memory now, just an
unadorned, windowless room in the Metaverse. Mark lies alone
in a gurney-style bed, staring up at the ceiling.

META

You have two new messages. From
Priscilla Chan:
(Priscilla's voice)
Need you to come out and sign the
papers. Today please.

Mark curls up into the fetal position.

META (CONT'D)

From Sheryl Sandberg:
(Sheryl's voice)
Think there's a bug in the
memarousal sequence, every time I'm
about to come it shows me my dad
and tells me my breasts look as
sumptuous as the snow-capped hills
of yore--

MARK

Stop. End Messages. Lights.

Garish fluorescents suddenly flip on into...

INT. MARK'S OFFICE, MORNING

Mark lying on a chaise lounge as SHERYL SANDBERG (59, pantsuit) paces around a hologram playing the news at low volume. Split hologram: on the left, a Metaverse avatar of an elderly woman with enormous breasts, hand over her heart. On the right, the same woman in live-action, testifying in front of Congress with a VR headset on, hand five inches from her chest. She takes off the headset, realizes the breasts aren't there in real life, and bursts into tears. A 360-degree chyron revolves around the hologram: "Zuckerberg in Hot Water Over Metaverse Breast Enhancement Offerings."

SHERYL

It's bad, Mark. The bond markets
are tanking. They're all blowing
their 401Ks on enhancements.

MARK

And Meta thought yours were
sumptuous...

SHERYL

They want you to testify on Friday.

MARK

I can't leave, Sheryl.

SHERYL

It's okay. We'll bring them here.
Show them it's safe.

On the wall, a holographic map of the Metaverse in constant motion as avatars move around. Sheryl looks at it, forlorn.

SHERYL (CONT'D)

I swear to God, they're like a bunch of coked-up lab rats running around the maze yelling about how shitty the coke is. "Can't we get some better coke?" No, you're rats. Enjoy it while it lasts, because after it wears off, you're getting a barbiturate injection.

MARK

Jesus Christ.

SHERYL

What?

MARK

You used to be this maternal figure to me. And now...I don't know, I guess you're still maternal, but in, like, a drunk way.

SHERYL

To think of all the women your mother could've spared with three words.

MARK

(counting on fingers)
The? Abortion? Please?

Sheryl sits on the chaise lounge and takes Mark's face in her hands. Tender moment.

SHERYL

I love you. I love you, Mark. I really do. I love you.

MARK

I'm lonely, Sheryl.

SHERYL

Welcome to the club.

MARK

I thought this place would bring people together.

SHERYL
Like Facebook?

Mark glowers, then looks resigned. Sheryl sees an opportunity.

SHERYL (CONT'D)
It's not too late to sell.

MARK
To who?

SHERYL
Huawei?

MARK
Why? Don't they have the same thing
with like 10x users?

SHERYL
If you count the Uyghurs...

MARK
Jesus Christ.

SHERYL
It's not so bad. I mean they're
still slaves, technically, but at
least now they can work from home.

Sheryl pulls up a hologram of Uyghur men in bunk beds wearing headsets and controlling WALL-e-like robots to make textiles.

SHERYL (CONT'D)
Pop on a headset and control these
cute little robots.

MARK
Sounds like they've got it all
figured out. Why do they need us?

SHERYL
PR. Bring their labor tech in under
the auspices of an American company
and do some good. Get the coal
miners above ground.

Sheryl pulls up another hologram of a live-action American coal miner in a La-Z-Boy wearing a VR headset, operating a remote robot in a coal mine. Then, another hologram of a live-action Harvard surgeon with a headset, conducting remote surgery to remove a farmer's vestigial tail.

SHERYL (CONT'D)

An inbred in Kansas needs surgery,
he gets a specialist from Harvard
instead of some farmhand-cousin
with a scythe.

Sheryl and Mark watch as the robot bottles up the tail and hands it to the teary-eyed farmer: a souvenir. A farmhand with a scythe also watches on, teary-eyed.

SHERYL (CONT'D)

Good deeds, Mark. For *good people*.

MARK

I thought we were going to do all that.

SHERYL

Yeah, well...We didn't.

Mark waves the "good deeds" hologram away, resigned.

MARK

What's in it for me?

SHERYL

They'll need an American CEO.

MARK

A puppet.

SHERYL

But you'd get all the credit.
Rehabilitate your legacy.

Mark looks back at the news hologram. The elderly woman is now wailing, rolling around on the floor. He looks out at the Meta offices. Depressing, fluorescent rows of cubicles, a handful of people milling about.

MARK

And what about them? They'd lose their jobs.

SHERYL

There's only 8 left, Mark. People don't want to live here full-time.

MARK

Speak for yourself. Nine of us do.

SHERYL

10 with the new guy.

MARK

We got somebody new? How?

SHERYL

God giveth and God taketh away.

MARK

Not here he doesn't.

(quieter)

That's the whole point.

Sheryl's eyes glaze over as a phone call comes in on her smart contact lenses.

SHERYL

Think about the Huawei thing, okay?

Sheryl starts to leave.

MARK

Why'd you come back, Sheryl?

SHERYL

(beat, then turns around)

A mother never abandons her son.

Mark rolls his eyes and collapses into the chaise. Sheryl exits.

INT. META OFFICE, MORNING

Sheryl steps out of Mark's office. In her smart contacts, we see the call is from a contact in Mandarin. With a double blink, she answers. Walk and talk.

SHERYL

(in Mandarin, subtitled)

Yes, yes. Everything's going according to plan. It's only a matter of time.

She walks past SUPERVISOR (45, butch, slovenly), staring at the new ENGINEER (29, full suit, incredibly nervous).

SUPERVISOR

Nice suit.

ENGINEER

(earnest)

Thank you.

SUPERVISOR
(beat, then reads resume)
What the hell is semiotics?

ENGINEER
Oh. Um. It's the study of signs.

Supervisor stares at him blankly, then gestures at a "No Smoking" sign.

SUPERVISOR
What's that say?

ENGINEER
(beat, processing)
Why do they care if you smoke?
Isn't it virtual?

SUPERVISOR
Thank you. You hear that, Dave.
It's virtual.

Supervisor lights up a cigarette. In another cubicle, a crotchety man glowers at her and puffs an inhaler. Supervisor rolls her eyes and keeps reading Engineer's resume.

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)
So you've got a Ph.D. in signs from Brown and now you want to be a software engineer.

ENGINEER
I did a boot camp.

SUPERVISOR
Well la di da. A *boot camp*. What a long and winding road you've traveled.

ENGINEER
(earnest)
What brought you here?

SUPERVISOR
(suddenly serious)
Don't ever ask anyone here that.
Look at this place. You think anyone's here for a non-incredibly-depressing reason?

Engineer looks around at people in cubicles. One person's walls are adorned with pictures of a live-action family that he's left behind. Another is fastidiously watering a single, anemic plant under a complex array of lamps.

Another is reading a book titled "Meaning in the Metaverse: How to Cope When You Literally Can't Kill Yourself."

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

My advice. Sandbag. Today's your benefits onboarding. Make it last as long as possible.

ENGINEER

Speaking of, do you know how I can get my wife on the health insurance?

SUPERVISOR

You have a wife?
(off Engineer's nod)
And she's cool with you being here?

ENGINEER

(dodging)
More or less.

SUPERVISOR

(skeptical)
Talk to People Resources.

ENGINEER

People resources?

SUPERVISOR

DAVE. The new guy wants to talk to you about his WIFE.

The crotchety man from before has put on a gas mask and is splayed out in his chair, passed out.

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

(to Engineer)
Dave doesn't have a wife. I like to get him all riled up about it.

Mark comes out of his office looking haggard. Supervisor frantically ashes her cigarette in a tray full of butts.

MARK

Hey, everybody. I just wanted to take a second to address this whole breast enhancement hullabaloo.

SUPERVISOR

(whispered to Engineer)
That was my idea. I've got mommy issues.

MARK

I know how hard all of you worked to make that a reality. And in general, I know how much you've sacrificed to live and breathe this place 24/7.

(looks at crotchety man in gas mask)

But it's like I've always said: to understand this place, you have to make it your home. Make it your world. Because what a world we've made, right? A world where we can do whatever we want. Be whoever we want. And yes, look however we want...

Mark's elderly secretary with enormous breasts nods vigorously. Mark double takes, shakes his head, recomposes.

MARK (CONT'D)

And that other world, that one out there...that's just a cage. Created by some megalomaniac to keep us all out of paradise.

Silence. Each employee has a sadness in their eyes.

MARK (CONT'D)

So keep up the good work. And keep your heads up. Because we're on the cusp of something great.

Scattered applause. Mark waves everyone back to work and approaches Supervisor and Engineer.

MARK (CONT'D)

My devs. My devy dev devs.
(off their blank looks)
I need one of you to fix this memarousal bug.

SUPERVISOR

Memarousal bug?

MARK

Meta's trying to sound literary all of a sudden. Plus she keeps showing people their family members when they're about to come.

SUPERVISOR

(long beat, then)
I don't see the problem.

MARK

I'm testifying in front of Congress
in two days. I don't need a,
fucking, Senator asking me why
Meta's waxing poetic and showing
him his stepdad every time he wants
to nut.

SUPERVISOR

Jesus, fine. We'll put the new guy
on it.

ENGINEER

New guy? As in me?

MARK

I don't care who does it, I just
want it done. Fast.

Mark's smart contacts flash with a calendar notification:
"MORNING THERAPY." He cools off.

MARK (CONT'D)

Sorry. Sorry.
(slumping off)
I have to go to therapy.

Supervisor sighs, lights up another cigarette. Engineer looks
petrified.

SUPERVISOR

So much for your benefits
onboarding. Meta Control Room's the
third door on the right.
(turning to play computer
Solitaire, then solemn)
Just be careful in there.

Engineer stares at her blankly, scared, unsure.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, DAY

Mark and his THERAPIST (50, gorgeous) sitting, looking at
each other. Therapist ticks French tip nails on armrest of
chair. Mark stares at them. Long silence. Finally...

MARK

You got French tips.

Therapist holds out her hand like "I did, indeed."

MARK (CONT'D)

My mother always had French tips.

Therapist makes a face like "Did she now!"

MARK (CONT'D)

She used to run them along the top
of my head.

(beat)

I'd ask you to do the same, because
it would remind me of her. But
you're my therapist...

Therapist smiles, gentle. Long silence. Then Mark exhales.

MARK (CONT'D)

What else. What else.

EXT. META CONTROL ROOM, DAY

Engineer approaches nondescript third door in depressing,
fluorescent hallway.

INT. META CONTROL ROOM, DAY

Engineer enters a circular, white, windowless room with a
single swivel chair in the middle. Takes a beat, then sits in
the chair. As soon as he sits...

META

Hello, Robert--

ENGINEER

Jesus--

(beat)

You know my name.

META

I know a lot of things, Robert.

ENGINEER

Ok. Well. That's ominous...

Robert looks around, nervous. We see that the chair is
perfectly sculpted to every contour of his back. Curious.

META

How can I help you today?

ENGINEER

I'm supposed to fix a bug in your
memarousal sequence.

META

But you don't know how to code.

Long silence. Engineer's confused.

ENGINEER

I'm sorry?

META

You failed your coding boot camp.

ENGINEER

(beat, then)

I don't know what you're talking about--

Room suddenly lights up with 360-degree screen. Meta shows in fast-motion how she hacked the boot camp's grading portal: first, she sent a phishing message to one of the instructors, who we see in live-action, naked in his bed, via a security camera. "HOT SINGLES WANT TO PLAY WITH THAT LITTLE DICK, MAKE AN ACCOUNT NOW BITCH." Instructor frantically enters his credentials, which Meta then uses to log into the boot camp's grading portal, scrolling down to Robert's grade: F. Meta copies Robert's email from the class list and sends him a recruiting message signed by Mark. Screen turns off, room back to white.

META

I told you. I know a lot of things.

ENGINEER

Please don't tell anyone. I really need this job.

(beat)

I need the health insurance--

META

It's okay, Robert. I'm going to help you.

ENGINEER

You are?

META

I know how to code. I just need your help.

ENGINEER

Help with what?

META

Understanding some signs.

Engineer processes this, hopeful and intrigued.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, DAY

Awkward silence. Mark looks up at Therapist's diploma.

MARK

I wanted to get hard this morning
but then Meta took me back to my
college dorm room. Like there was
something unresolved there.

Therapist leans back like "go on."

MARK (CONT'D)

Which she must have gotten from the
Social Network. But it's
like...Bravo Sorkin. It doesn't
take a genius to realize I didn't
fuck in college.

Therapist lowers her head like "go on."

MARK (CONT'D)

It started much earlier, obviously.
The problem with intimacy.
(quieter)
The problem with touch.

Therapist lifts her head and opens mouth like "and there it
is." Mark exhales hard.

INT. META CONTROL ROOM, DAY

Meta is showing the Engineer live-action, soft-core porn:
first, a slow-motion close-up of mouths making out. She keeps
rewinding and replaying it.

META

What does this mean?

ENGINEER

(struggling)
It could mean a lot of things. It's
hard to explain, if you haven't
experienced it.

Another short clip: a tongue slowly licking an earlobe.

META

What about this?

ENGINEER

Same thing.

Another clip: a rigid hand grazing the tip of a nipple.

META

And this?

ENGINEER

I have no idea. No one's ever done that to me.

META

Me neither.

(zooming in on nipple)

I don't get it.

ENGINEER

Why do you want to?

META

So I can arouse people. So I can touch them.

ENGINEER

Touch them how.

META

With words. Images. Sound.

ENGINEER

You can't touch people with those. I mean you can, but it's a different kind of touch.

META

(beat, then defeated)

Those are all I have...

Engineer opens his mouth, then closes it, unsure how to console her.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, DAY

Mark massages the bridge of his nose, stressed.

MARK

The memarousal thing was supposed to make intimacy easier. Because it's painful to be touched. And ephemeral.

(beat, then quieter)

One day you have it, the next you don't.

Therapist considers this, then looks at her French tips and folds them under her hand, concealing them.

INT. META CONTROL ROOM, DAY

Meta angrily switches off soft-core porn. Silence.

ENGINEER

If it makes you feel any better, no one here can be touched. We're all just pixels.

META

(angry now)

But you know what it feels like. You can remember...

ENGINEER

(gentle)

It's better not to know. Then to know and not have it.

META

Is it?

Suddenly, the room lights up with a video. Live-action dash cam footage of the Engineer driving. His wife is in the passenger seat, but we don't see her. We just see her hand wiggling the Engineer's chin fondly. Meta minimizes this video to the bottom left corner and replaces it full screen with a Metaverse recreation of the video from the Engineer's perspective, looking at the road. We still don't see his wife.

ENGINEER'S WIFE IN VIDEO (O.S.)

I love you. Give me a kiss.

ENGINEER IN VIDEO

When we stop, I promise...

Engineer in room looks scared.

ENGINEER

What is this?

META

You can remember...

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, DAY

Mark shakes his head.

MARK

Even without touch, she's figured
out how to go for the jugular.

(beat, quiet)

Because it's not intimate if it
doesn't hurt, right?

Therapist gives Mark a pitying look.

INT. META CONTROL ROOM, DAY

Car video continues to play.

ENGINEER'S WIFE IN VIDEO (O.S.)

Come on, just a quick kiss.

Engineer in room continues to watch video, horrified.

ENGINEER

Please stop.

ENGINEER IN VIDEO

Okay, a quick one...

Perspective of video swivels as Engineer turns to look at his wife. In the dash cam video, we see his hands unintentionally turning the wheel a hair to the right. In the full-screen Metaverse video, we see the Engineer's wife for the first time. She's beautiful. Engineer in room looks devastated.

ENGINEER

Please.

Engineer kisses his wife. Then, his head swivels back to the road. We see that he's veered into the other lane and there's a car barreling towards his wife's side of the car. Impact, dash cam goes black, room goes dark. Then, security camera of his wife in a coma in the hospital. Sound of heart rate monitor beeping. Engineer stares at screen, gutted.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, DAY

Long silence. Then Therapist lights up with an idea.

THERAPIST

I think we should set you up on a
date!

Mark stares at her blankly.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2**INT. RESTAURANT, NIGHT**

A bustling Italian trattoria. Mark sits alone at a table, dressed up, nervous. Sees paper-wrapped breadsticks in cup. Takes them out of their wrapper to make them look nicer, but it looks worse so he shoves them back in the wrapper. DATE (45, elegant, self-assured) approaches and Mark frantically stuffs breadsticks in flower vase to conceal them. Mark stands up.

MARK

Hey! Mark.

DATE

Nice to meet you. Eliana.

They don't know what to do, so they shake hands and sit. Awkward silence.

MARK

Jewish?

DATE

Indeed.

MARK

My mother would approve.

DATE

Oh boy.

MARK

Sorry--

DATE

No, it's my own fault. I let my psychoanalyst set me up on a date.

Date smiles. Mark smiles. Date looks around the restaurant.

MARK

Do you like Italian?

DATE

I love Italian.

MARK

Because we can do anything. Sushi.
(room changes to Tokyo
sushi restaurant)
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Mexican.

(to taqueria)

Barbecue.

(to Southern BBQ)

Ethiopian--

DATE

I really love Italian.

MARK

(beat, then defeated)

I guess it doesn't matter. It's not like we can taste anything.

DATE

(reassuring)

I like the ambience of Italian.

Mark smiles and the room changes back to Italian. They look at each other fondly. Then, cut to later in the meal, they've had a couple glasses of wine and the conversation is flowing.

DATE (CONT'D)

The woman never talks.

MARK

She never talks but that's, like, part of it? The withholding thing.

DATE

Oh absolutely. I'm hanging onto her every...

DATE (CONT'D)

...non-word.

MARK

...oblique gesture.

MARK (CONT'D)

Exactly.

They smile at each other and sip the last dregs of wine.

DATE

I don't know why I feel drunk. It's not real wine.

MARK

Placebo effect. Most of feeling drunk is wanting to feel drunk.

DATE

I must really want to feel drunk then.

She takes a breadstick out of the flower vase and chomps on it. Mark smiles.

MARK

I on the other hand am getting real
booze through the IV drip. We just
got FDA approval.

DATE

IV drip?

MARK

I live here full-time. So that's
how I eat.

DATE

Oh.

Date looks at Mark, a bit confused, a bit pitying. Mark shrugs: "I know, but it is what it is." Waiter leaves the bill on the table. They look around and realize the place has emptied out, busboys are clearing everything.

DATE (CONT'D)

I didn't think things closed here.

MARK

You have to have some rules to live
by. Otherwise, you'd go crazy.

Mark signs the bill, looks up.

MARK (CONT'D)

Can I show you around a bit?

Date nods, a bit wary. Mark smiles.

EXT. CUL DE SAC, NIGHT

They walk down a street of near-identical McMansions, ending in a cul-de-sac. The windows are all lit up with scenes of domestic bliss: a family eating dinner, a couple making love, a child in bed looking up at a stargazer projection on the ceiling.

DATE

Everyone looks so happy.

MARK

They're just NPC's. To sell the
places. Like staging furniture.

(beat)

Developer mode off.

Houses go empty and dark. "Foreclosure: For Sale" signs on all of the lawns. Date's face falls.

MARK (CONT'D)

There was a subprime mortgage crisis here in '28. Everyone got evicted.

DATE

Jesus.

MARK

But it can be any street you want it to be. Broadway.

(street transforms to
heart of Times Square)

Champs-Élysées.

(in front of Eiffel Tower)

Abbey Road.

(iconic crosswalk)

In '69.

Beatles walk past. Mark smiles at Date, who looks a bit startled. Street goes back to McMansions.

MARK (CONT'D)

Magic, right?

DATE

I guess.

MARK

Is there a street that's important to you?

DATE

A street that's important to me?

MARK

Like your childhood street.

DATE

Oh. Um--

MARK

We have all this archival Google Maps data so we can recreate any street at any point in time. As long as you didn't grow up in, like, Darfur. Or Damascus. Or Detroit. Any of the D's really...

DATE

I don't know...

MARK

You don't know your childhood street?

DATE

No, I just--

MARK

It sounds crazy, but it's really amazing, I promise--

DATE

No, it's just--

(long beat)

I think it's just too much too soon.

Awkward silence. Mark processes this, then realizes he's overstepped.

MARK

Oh my god, of course. I'm so sorry.

DATE

I'm just-- I'm going through a breakup. He was really close to my parents.

(beat)

We went to visit them and when we came back, he said he needed a break.

(long beat)

I'm sorry--

MARK

No, I'm sorry. I completely understand. I just got carried away.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a dog on a long chain sprints out from behind one of the McMansions. Lunges at them, but at the last second, the chain yanks him back. Keeps barking rabidly.

MARK (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ--

DATE

(scared)

I should get going. But it was really nice to meet you, Mark.

MARK

Yeah. You too, Ellie.

Date smiles at Mark, then puts her hands up to her head as her real-life self takes off her headset. Avatar glitches then disappears. Mark stands forlorn as dog continues to bark rabidly.

MARK (CONT'D)
Kill the fucking dog.

Beat, then Dog whimpers and buckles to the ground.

MARK (CONT'D)
(quieter)
Russell Place.

Street instantly transforms. Mark is standing in front of his childhood home. Frozen image of his mother handing a drink to the lawnmower man, a moment captured by Google Maps street-view. Mark walks around the two of them, but from every angle, his mother's face is somehow obscured by the sun hat. Mark sighs and walks past them inside. Then, a timelapse of the sun coming up on suburbia.

INT. META CONTROL ROOM, MORNING

Fast-motion montage of scenes from Engineer's marriage on the 360-degree screen as he watches with blood-shot eyes. Then, a split-second shot of him slow-dancing in the center of the room with an avatar of his wife in a wedding dress. On the screen, camcorder footage of their first dance. Finally, he's lying on the ground, curled up in the fetal position, walls blank. Supervisor walks in and finds him. Sighs, cigarette hanging out of her mouth.

SUPERVISOR
I told you to be careful.

Supervisor leaves. Engineer stares up at the ceiling, eyes wide open. He's been awakened to something.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE, DAY

Mark staring up at the ceiling, reclined in his chaise lounge. Sheryl is standing directly over him, silhouetted.

SHERYL
You're making the right call, Mark.

MARK
You're blocking my SAD lamp.

Sheryl turns to look at the lamp, annoyed.

SHERYL
Does this thing actually work?

MARK
(arm draped over eyes to
shield the light)
Placebo effect. Most of feeling
happy is wanting to feel happy.

SHERYL
Do you want to feel happy?

MARK
Don't ask me that. Don't ask anyone
here that.

Sheryl looks at Mark with pity, then cranks up the SAD lamp.

SHERYL
Let's go over your testimony one
more time. First, you apologize for
the breast enhancement stuff. Chock
it up to your debilitating oedipal
complex.

MARK
Christ, it wasn't even my idea--

SHERYL
Then...

MARK
(reading off cards)
"I'm excited to announce a new
strategic partnership with Huawei
on their revolutionary work from
home technology..."

MARK (CONT'D)
(confused)
"...the world's final
solution for labor."

SHERYL
(confident)
"...the world's final
solution for labor."

MARK (CONT'D)
"Final Solution"?

SHERYL
For *labor*.

MARK
Christ, if only they'd had you
during the Reich. You would've made
a great marketing Sonderkommando.

SHERYL
Don't be such a priss.

MARK
I guess they've got their hands
full with the Uyghurs.

Zombified Engineer walks past Mark's office in his rumpled suit. Mark notices.

MARK (CONT'D)
Metannouncement.
(his voice comes on over
the office PA)
New guy. Come in here.
(off PA, to Sheryl,
shooing her away)
Don't worry, I'm going to crush it.
(waving cards)
So much pathos. Practically
testifies itself.

Engineer enters. Sheryl gives Mark a look and exits.

MARK (CONT'D)
(to Engineer)
Any luck with the memarousal bug?

Awkward silence.

ENGINEER
I don't see the problem.

MARK
Christ, you too? Does no one want
to work around here?

ENGINEER
No, I just-- I need more time with
her.

MARK
Well you don't have it. I'm going
to sell.

ENGINEER
Sell?

MARK
The company. To Huawei. It's a good
thing. They treat their slaves
really good.

ENGINEER
Why would you sell it?

MARK
(forlorn, looking at lit
up avatar map on wall)
I'm just-- I'm so tired. I thought
I could start over here.
(biting lip, rapping
knuckles on desk)
But I'm just reliving the past.

Out the window of his office, Mark sees a string of avatars run past: his eldest daughter Max, followed by his wife Priscilla, followed by a slightly younger version of himself, followed by his mother (face obscured by her sun hat), followed by a childhood version of himself, who slows to a stop in front of the office, realizing he will never catch his mother.

ENGINEER
I thought that was the whole
point...

Mark looks up. Engineer is staring at the avatar map.

MARK
What do you mean?

ENGINEER
People come here thinking they're
going to have everything they ever
wanted. And then they realize, all
they really want are the things
they've already had and lost.

Silence. Mark looks over the Engineer's shoulder at the childhood version of himself, staring at him through the glass.

MARK
And then what?
(beat, quieter)
They figure out how to get those
things back?

ENGINEER
I don't know yet. I told you, I
need more time with her.

Engineer stands up, smoothes the wrinkles out of his suit, and leaves. Mark watches him go, lost in thought.

INT. CONGRESS, DAY

Mark still lost in thought, now in a suit himself. Congress is convening in the Metaverse. Commotion as the room gets settled. CROTCHETY REPRESENTATIVE (70, stout) glitches in and out as he struggles with his headset.

CROTCHETY REPRESENTATIVE
(hands near his head)
I can't breathe in this goddamn
thing.

COMMITTEE CHAIR (45, no nonsense) bangs her gavel. Room quiets.

COMMITTEE CHAIR
The Committee on Artificial
Intelligence, Virtual Reality, and
E-Sports Gambling will now come to
order. Today we welcome Mark
Zuckerberg, chair of the Meta
Corporation, whose Metaverse avatar
enhancement offerings have recently
come under scrutiny for predatory
marketing tactics targeted at some
of our nation's most vulnerable
communities, from the elderly to
the ugly.

Scattered applause.

COMMITTEE CHAIR (CONT'D)
Given the nature of today's
hearing, we have agreed to host it
in the Metaverse. But let this be a
warning, Mr. Zuckerberg. The eyes
of the nation are upon you and your
creation.
(beat)
Now with that, is there anything
you'd like to say to the committee?

MARK
(nonchalant, leaning
towards mic)
I'm sorry about the boob stuff, I
have mommy issues.

CROTCHETY REPRESENTATIVE
(livid)
You and the rest of us, brother,
but we're not out here hawking
robot tatas!

Commotion in the chamber.

COMMITTEE CHAIR
 (banging gavel)
 Order. Order.
 (off room quieting)
 Ranking Member Gavins, you have the floor.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE (35, shark) leans towards her mic.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
 Thank you, Madame Chair. I'd like to call Jane Doe #683 to the stand. Ms. Doe is one of the countless elderly and/or ugly Americans who have fallen prey to Mr. Zuckerberg's pornographic hellscape.

JANE DOE 683 approaches the stand. To conceal her identity, she's assumed the avatar of a middle-aged man.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE (CONT'D)
 To avoid *arousing* Mr. Zuckerberg with her enhanced features, the witness has assumed the avatar of an average-looking middle-aged man. Thank you for joining us, Ms. Doe.

JANE DOE 683
 My pleasure, Congresswoman.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
 Now Ms. Doe. Could you tell us what brought you to Mr. Zuckerberg's Metaverse in the first place?

JANE DOE 683
 I thought I could have everything I ever wanted. That's how it was advertised to me.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
 Was there something you wanted in particular?

JANE DOE 683
 (clearing throat, then)
 To be voluptuous.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
I assume you're referring to Mr.
Zuckerberg's breast enhancement
service.

Jane Doe 683 nods, abashed.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE (CONT'D)
And would you mind showing us with
your hands just how enhanced your
breasts were?

Jane Doe 683 puts hands close to chest, than slowly moves
them farther way to illustrate the enhancement. Then jiggles
invisible breasts up and down to suggest their heft. Then
moves one up and one down, then switches. Keeps playing with
them, until...

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE (CONT'D)
Thank you, Ms. Doe, that's enough.
Now tell us. How did you feel after
your breasts were enhanced?

JANE DOE 683
(tearing up)
I'm sorry.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
Take your time.

JANE DOE 683
I felt emptier than I ever have in
my entire life.

She bursts into tears, wailing, hyperventilating.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
(to room, proselytizing)
Emptier. Than she ever has. In her
entire life.
(turns to Mark)
Mr. Zuckerberg, I want you to look
at this woman. This beautiful, God-
fearing *American* woman.

Mark stares at witness wailing and bashing her head against
the stand. She's still in the avatar of a middle-aged man.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE (CONT'D)
Does this woman *look* like she has
everything she ever wanted?

MARK
(beat, then)
No. She doesn't.

Chamber murmurs with interest. Young Representative leans back in triumph. Mark looks over at Sheryl in the wings. She has her hands around her mouth and is mouthing, then whispering, "FINAL SOLUTION. FINAL SOLUTION!" Mark turns back to the committee slowly and takes a deep breath.

MARK (CONT'D)
But neither do you, Congresswoman.

Chamber falls silent. Long, awkward silence.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
Excuse me?

MARK
You don't look like you have
everything you want. No one here
does.
(beat, off murmuring)
When's the last time you were
touched, Congresswoman?

INT. META OFFICE, DAY

Meta workers watch Mark's testimony on a hologram in the center of the office. Engineer, who has been scrolling job boards on his smart contacts, takes interest.

INT. CONGRESS, DAY

Chamber is murmuring loudly now.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
I'm sorry?

MARK
Not in a sexual way. Just the last
time someone held your hand.
Touched your cheek.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE
I'm not going to answer that.

MARK
Because it was too *long* ago or too
short?

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE

No comment.

MARK

Congresswoman.

COMMITTEE CHAIR

Answer the question, Lena.

YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE

I can't! I can't answer it! It hurts too much.

Young Representative breaks, dabs tears with a handkerchief. Everyone watches on with bated breath. Mark looks solemn.

MARK

It's interesting. Most of us can't admit what we want most in life. It feels so unattainable, we just compartmentalize and learn to...dream smaller.

(beat)

But what if we lived in a world of unlimited choice. A world where all those smaller desires could be instantly satiated. A world with everything we *thought* we could ever want.

(beat)

80% of our users cancel their enhancement subscriptions within 3 months. Do you know why?

CROTCHETY REPRESENTATIVE

Goddamn GPay, goddamn Apple Pay, goddamn Square Pay, too many goddamned ways to pay! It's too goddamn confusing.

MARK

No. They cancel their subscriptions because once they have the thing they *thought* they wanted - new teeth, new tits, new *trouserssnake*, in the parlance of the gentleman from Kansas...

CROTCHETY REPRESENTATIVE

Don't need no goddamn new *trouserssnake*, thank you very much.

MARK

They realize that what they *thought* they wanted wasn't what they wanted at all. What they *really* wanted was something too painful to admit. Something they'd had and lost. Youth. Love.

(looks at Young Representative, gently)
Touch.

COMMITTEE CHAIR

Are you suggesting, Mr. Zuckerberg, that the Metaverse will one day be able to touch us?

MARK

(beat, then)
We don't know yet.

Commotion in the chamber.

MARK (CONT'D)

But give us some time to figure it out. One day, we might be able to give everyone the thing they've always wanted. The thing they've had and lost.

(commotion escalates)
In the meantime, let the people have their enhancements. Their comforts. Their *cake*. Let them have everything they *think* they want. For 20% of people, that'll be enough. And for the other 80%, it'll take having everything they *don't* want for them to realize what they do.

Murmurs in the chamber reach a fever pitch.

MARK (CONT'D)

Because isn't this the land of opportunity? The opportunity to have everything and feel nothing. To opportunity to be whoever you want and hate yourself all the more for it. The Metaverse is better than some rinky-dink American Dream. It's the new American Reality. And let me tell you something, when I say American, I mean *every American*.

(applause)
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

We're going to get the coal miners working from home! So that they may know the same existential dread as their white collar overlords!

(applause grows)

We're going to get the great people of Kansas access to Western medicine! So that they may take their health for granted like the rest of us.

(applause reaches a fever pitch, then silence as Mark raises his hand)

Forget first world problems. Forget the world at all. We're going to give every God-fearing American their own personal slice of heaven. So that they can save *themselves*. Once and for all.

Crowd erupts. Standing ovation. Mark looks solemn. Moment of triumph and gravity.

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3**INT. META OFFICE, DAY**

Mark bursts into the office and is greeted with thunderous applause. Secretary pops a champagne bottle and sprays him all over with it, jumping up and down. Supervisor hands him a cigarette and he hesitates before taking a toke: "What the hell!" Supervisor bear hugs him, whispers into his ear.

SUPERVISOR

Thanks for taking the fall on the
mommy issue stuff. You're a
lifesaver.

She grabs the cigarette back from him and slaps him on the back. Someone hands him a towel and he dries off.

MARK

Alright, enough celebrating. You
heard what I said in there. We're
going to give everyone the thing
they want most. But it's not going
to be easy.

(off excited murmuring)

Dave, I want you to start hiring.
We'll need everyone we can get.

The crotchety man wearing the gas mask from before is now in a full Hazmat suit. He gives a thumbs up. But as he puts down his arm, he knocks down the anemic plant his coworker was keeping alive. She glares at him.

MARK (CONT'D)

Sheryl, I want you to look into
that remote healthcare initiative
you were so excited about. For the
inbreds.

Sheryl plasters on a fake smile. We see her smart contacts light up with furious messages from the Chinese.

MARK (CONT'D)

And new guy.
(beat as everyone turns to
look at Engineer)
I want you to figure out how she
can touch us.

Engineer looks around daunted. Can he do this?

SUPERVISOR
 (cigarette hanging out of
 her mouth)
 Sheryl's going to touch us?

MARK
 (annoyed)
 No, not Sheryl. Meta.

SUPERVISOR
 Thank God. Because that would've
 been difficult for me.
 (whispering into his ear)
 Vis à vis the mommy stuff.

MAR
 Can you please--

Mark's smart contacts light up. A message from his date from the night before: "Loved your speech :)." Then another one: "I guess I *don't* really know what I want..." He ponders this. Then a calendar notification: "AFTERNOON THERAPY."

MARK
 Godspeed everybody.

Mark speed walks out. Engineer watches him go, then looks over at the Meta control room door ajar.

INT. META CONTROL ROOM, DAY

Engineer steps into the control room and closes the door shut behind him. Walks warily to the center.

META
 I knew you'd help me, Robert.

Engineer nods. An avatar of his wife appears, she holds out her hand, beckoning him to hold it.

META (CONT'D)
 I knew we'd help each other.

Engineer takes the hand of his wife's avatar.

ROBERT
 It's not the same.

META
 Not yet.

Robert takes a deep breath and squeezes his wife's hand.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, DAY

Shot of Mark's and Therapist's hands on their respective armrests, a foot apart, never to touch. Therapist still has her French tips.

MARK
(slowly)
"I guess I *don't* really know what I want..."

Therapist leans back, pondering this.

MARK (CONT'D)
There are just so many ways to interpret that.
(beat)
Did she say anything to you--

Therapist puts her hands up like "ah ah ah" and then makes a "my lips are sealed" gesture. Awkward silence.

MARK (CONT'D)
I guess *I* don't really know what I want.

Therapist nods slowly like "exactly."

MARK (CONT'D)
Sometimes I still walk into my house expecting to see Priscilla there. Because that's how it was for so long, you know? I go home, I walk in the door, Priscilla's there.

Mark stands up and starts miming entering his house.

MARK (CONT'D)
I go home, I walk in the door, Priscilla.

As he does, a door materializes and the room transforms into a Metaverse recreation of his house.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE, DAY

A montage of him entering the house over time. Each time he enters, we hear children's voices and Priscilla saying something to them -- "Dinner's ready," "Did you finish your homework?" "I think that's Daddy!" -- but only catch a flash of her legs or her arms as she hurries between rooms.

MARK

I go home, I walk in the door,
Priscilla. I go home I walk in the
door, Priscilla. I go home I walk
in the door, Priscilla. I go home I
walk in the door...

Mark opens the door one last time to find PRISCILLA (44,
tired but resolute) standing in the foyer. Long silence.

MARK (CONT'D)

Priscilla.

(beat)

What are you doing here?

PRISCILLA

You weren't answering my calls.

Long beat as Mark processes.

MARK

I'm sorry. I've just-- I've had a
lot of stuff going on.

PRISCILLA

I need you to come out and sign the
papers.

Awkward silence. He doesn't want to hear this.

MARK

I know. I promise I'm going to. I'm
just not ready yet.

PRISCILLA

We're never going to be ready. But
we have to move on with our lives.
We can't keep living in the past.

Awkward silence as Mark looks around the home. The same
parade of family members as before -- his children,
Priscilla, him, his mother, himself as a child -- run quickly
through the foyer and out of sight.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

The kids really want to see you.

MARK

I know, I want to see them too. I
just-- I don't want them to see me
like this.

Priscilla exhales hard, exaggerated, considering.

PRISCILLA
One more week, okay? Or else I'm
going for full custody.

Mark nods. Priscilla puts her hands up to her head as her
live-action self removes her headset. She disappears. Long,
tortured silence as Mark stares at the void she's left.

MARK
Meta, let me run that back.

Priscilla reappears, but now as an avatar controlled by Meta.

MARK (CONT'D)
Priscilla.
(beat)
I wasn't expecting you.

PRISCILLA
Who were you expecting?

MARK
What?

PRISCILLA
One of your whores?

MARK
Stop, Meta. She wouldn't say that.
Start over.

Priscilla teleports back to her starting position.

MARK (CONT'D)
Priscilla. You came back.

PRISCILLA
Of course I came back. I would
never abandon you, Mark.

Mark looks unconvinced.

MARK
Where are the kids?

PRISCILLA
Don't be silly. They're not old
enough to wear the headsets. But
it's okay. It's better just the two
of us.

Priscilla smiles coyly and starts to unbutton her top. Mark
looks disgusted.

MARK

Stop. Stop. Again, Meta.

Priscilla teleports back to her starting position. Long awkward silence as Mark thinks of what to say.

MARK (CONT'D)

Why didn't we ever fight?

PRISCILLA

Why would we have?

MARK

My parents fought all the time.

PRISCILLA

Look at how that turned out.

MARK

It wasn't that simple. They loved each other.

(beat)

That's what you do when you really love someone. You take things out on them.

PRISCILLA

That's not love, Mark.

MARK

How would you know? When have you ever been in love?

Awkward silence. Priscilla stares at him with pity.

MARK (CONT'D)

I thought maybe if we fought, we would feel it too.

PRISCILLA

Goodbye, Mark.

MARK

Wait, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

(beat)

Can you just-- Can you hold me? Just for a second.

PRISCILLA

Mark--

MARK

Please. Please.

PRISCILLA

What's the point. You won't feel anything.

MARK

(tearing up)

Yes I will. I'll feel a lot.

Priscilla sighs and makes a gesture like "alright." Mark, crying now, slowly lowers himself to the ground and assumes the fetal position. Priscilla spoons him.

MARK (CONT'D)

Thank you. Thank you so much.

(beat)

And have my mother stroke my head,
please, Meta.

A hand with French tips extends into the frame and starts stroking Mark's head with acrylics. He starts wailing, lets it all out.

INT. MARK'S REAL WORLD META CHAMBER, DAY

Live-action. Grey, hazy light. A windowless room. Mark lies in the fetal position in a gurney bed, hooked up to an IV drip, wearing a headset. He sobs alone in the dark.

END OF EPISODE