

THE ADVOCATE AND THE ATTENDANT

By

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FADE IN:

INT. WHITE OFFICE - MORNING

In the near future -- in a SMALL WHITE OFFICE, in a typical office building, in a typical downtown, in a typical city -- THE ADVOCATE (male, 50s) sits at a CONTEMPORARY WHITE OFFICE DESK, across from THE ATTENDANT (male, 30s). A LARGE WINDOW to the left of the desk extends from floor to ceiling so that PEDESTRIANS can be seen going about their business. The Advocate is wearing a WHITE SUIT. The Attendant is dressed in BLUE JEANS and a BLACK T-SHIRT.

There is no indication of any kind as to what takes place in this office.

The scene commences in mid dialogue in which a deal or sale of some sort is underway.

ADVOCATE

...Yes, yes. We Advocates do frequently hear such complaints. It is indeed a challenge at times to live among the SUFFERING.

(gazes over his left shoulder at the pedestrians outside his office window)

But fortunately, we have something that can help.

The Advocate reaches for a BOTTLE OF BLACK PILLS from within one of his desk drawers and places it in front of the Attendant. He unscrews the cap, removes a SINGLE BLACK PILL, and maneuvers it delicately between his thumb and forefinger.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

(grins)

One of these should do the trick.

The Attendant picks up the bottle and begins to analyze it.

ATTENDANT

What do you mean exactly by "do the trick"?

ADVOCATE

You simply take one of these, and the Suffering...

(gestures to the pedestrians)

...they go away.

ATTENDANT

They go away?

ADVOCATE

Yes.

ATTENDANT

Where do they go?

ADVOCATE

I'm sorry, let me rephrase that. It's not the Suffering who go away, but your *consciousness*. Upon taking this pill, your consciousness will be transferred to an alternate reality where nothing exists. And where nothing exists, neither do the Suffering.

The Advocate smiles, seemingly satisfied with his own explanation.

The Attendant sits forward, setting the bottle back down on the desk and pondering the Advocate's explanation.

ATTENDANT

(points to the pill)

May I?

ADVOCATE

Of course.

The Advocate hands the pill to the Attendant who SNIFFS at it.

ATTENDANT

(scrunches his face)

Oh, disgusting! It smells like black licorice.

The Attendant continues to examine the pill.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

But you're serious? This little thing can really do what you say?

(gestures to the people beyond the window)

It can *free* me of them -- the Suffering?

ADVOCATE

Yes.

ATTENDANT

So, it's true -- other realities do exist? Not just this one?

ADVOCATE

Yes. Researchers call them parallel worlds or universes.

ATTENDANT

Oh yeah, I think I've heard of that. It's multiverse theory, right? The theory that an infinite number of realities may exist simultaneously.

ADVOCATE

Yes, impressive, Attendant.

ATTENDANT

(smiling)

Well, maybe not too impressive. My understanding of physics, or any kind of science, really, is pretty limited... But I thought multiverse theory was just pop-science fluff.

ADVOCATE

As it turns out, not entirely. It may have started out as the stuff of science fiction, but, over the past fifty or so years, advances in technology have enabled researchers to test once untestable hypotheses, and in this case -- as well as in a handful of others -- validity has been established. What you now hold in your hand is the result of human progress, at least in the realm of science.

ATTENDANT

(looks at the pill)

Wow! I had no idea.

The Attendant stands and walks away from the desk. He continues to examine the pill, holding it up to the FLUORESCENT CEILING LIGHTS.

ADVOCATE

(rising from his chair)

Yes, truly remarkable.

The Advocate moves to the front of his desk and leans there, crossing his arms. The Attendant glances back at the Advocate.

ATTENDANT

You're saying all I have to do is swallow this thing and my consciousness will be transferred to a reality where the Suffering do not exist?

ADVOCATE

(nods)

Where *no one* exists.

ATTENDANT

Amazing! It's exactly what I've been looking for... But what happens here in this reality once my consciousness has left for the other one? Does my body disappear or something?

ADVOCATE

No. Your body will remain. Only your consciousness will have departed.

ATTENDANT

(pauses, laughs
uneasily)

Doesn't a body need a consciousness in order to function? Won't I become a zombie, or some such thing?

ADVOCATE

(laughs)

Ah, no. You won't become a zombie. And truth be told, a body does not necessarily require a consciousness in order to function. I think perhaps you're conflating consciousness with the mind. The *mind* resides over your ability to think, to solve problems, and as you say, to *function* properly. And indeed, if your mind were to somehow leave your body as a result of this process...

(takes the bottle of
pills from the desk)

...you would become something akin to a zombie, much like a computer without an operating system. But this is not exactly the case regarding the context of what *you* wish to accomplish.

ATTENDANT

(uneasily)

Okay.

He hands the pills back to the Advocate.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Sounds like nothing will really change as far as my life in this

reality is concerned. I'll
continue to be who I am, right? I
just won't be aware of myself,
more importantly, the reason I'm
here.

(points to the Suffering
milling around outside)
I won't be aware of *them*, right?

ADVOCATE
Well, that's not entirely correct.

The Advocate sets both the pill and bottle back onto his desk.

ATTENDANT
Oh?

The Advocate crosses his arms again, then rubs his chin.

ADVOCATE
As an Advocate, my function is to
serve you to the best of my
ability, which necessarily
mandates that I perform my duties
in accordance with the highest of
ethical standards. As such, I am
compelled to inform you that the
moment an Attendant shows concern
for the reality of departure -- as
you have today in this very office
-- I must disclose all I know of
this process. Hence, I must inform
you that once your consciousness
has departed, certain changes will
take place that will noticeably
affect your existence here in the
reality of origin. Although, from
your new vantage point, you won't
be aware of any of this.

The Attendant considers the Advocate's words.

ATTENDANT
Well, I appreciate your candor, of
course. I mean, it's nice to know
that I'm not dealing with some
kind of car salesman.

(laughing)
After all, this is my life we're
talking about.

ADVOCATE
Indeed.

ATTENDANT
So, what kind of changes are you
talking about?

The Advocate walks over to the window. He then turns back to the Attendant.

ADVOCATE

Well, by way of explanation, let me first ask you what you already understand about consciousness -- about *being* conscious.

ATTENDANT

Well, it's like being aware, right? Being aware of my own existence, of my experience of this particular reality.

The Attendant scans the office and then continues.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Like, if right now I *do* actually exist in some other parallel reality...
(raises both hands, indicating the space around the room)
...as well as in this one, *maybe* I'm not aware of the other reality because *maybe* I can only be aware of one reality at a time.

ADVOCATE

Mhm. What else?

ATTENDANT

Well, for me at least, being conscious means to live intentionally, with a sense of purpose. To not take things for granted.
(pauses, then chuckles)
Honestly, I'm just rattling off all the cliché new-age drivel... But this is really kind of hard to put into words.

ADVOCATE

Well, if it were easy, I'd be concerned.
(smiles)
Let me ask you this: where do other people fit into your idea of consciousness?

ATTENDANT

Other people?

ADVOCATE
(indicates the people
outside his office
window)
Yes, the Suffering.

ATTENDANT
Not sure I get what you mean. What
do other people have to do with my
consciousness?

ADVOCATE
Well, you are an Attendant by
nature, yes? You are driven to
attend to those people with whom
you currently find yourself at
odds -- the Suffering -- not
because you expect some future
reward, but because it sustains
your *Being*... this task feeds your
existence.

ATTENDANT
I suppose, yes.

The Advocate walks over to a corner of the room where he
has spotted a SPIDER spinning a WEB on a FIERY, REDDISH-
ORANGE THORNBUSH just outside the window.

ADVOCATE
Ah, how fortuitous. Come have a
look.

The Attendant joins the Advocate at the window and peers at
the spider.

ATTENDANT
Have a thing for spiders?

ADVOCATE
Yes, especially when they appear
at such an opportune time.

The Advocate breathes in deeply as he watches the spider
working on its web.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)
(points at the web)
Why do you think it does this?

ATTENDANT
What? Make a web?

ADVOCATE
Yes.

ATTENDANT
(laughs)

Obviously, to catch prey, to eat.

ADVOCATE

Hmm. So, the spider thinks to itself, "I must spin a web, so that I can catch a fly... so that I can eat"?

ATTENDANT

Well, I think everyone would agree that a *bug* doesn't quite think or plan like that. I'm pretty sure only human beings think that way.

(takes a closer look at the spider)

I guess it makes its web because it's compelled to do so by instinct.

ADVOCATE

Yes, by instinct.
(nods, looks at the Attendant)

Just as you, Attendant, are compelled to *attend* to the needs of others. Attending is a behavior particular to *your* nature, which surfaces as a result of your instinct having been triggered by a particular external stimulus: the suffering of others.

The Attendant peers more closely at the spider, as if through a keyhole, as it continues to construct its web.

ATTENDANT

Okay, I think all that makes sense, but what does my nature, or instinct, have to do with my consciousness?

ADVOCATE

Unlike the spider, which does not require the presence of any other *being* in order to express its nature -- that of making spiderwebs -- expressing your nature as an Attendant *does*.

The Attendant turns to the Advocate.

ATTENDANT

Okay, that seems pretty self-evident: I need others in order to attend... to be an Attendant. I mean, I can't exactly attend to *no* one. How is this related to consciousness?

ADVOCATE

How you express your particular nature -- attending to the needs of the Suffering -- requires an authentic intensity of presence that can only be maintained, well, by love. And this love, it *is* consciousness. When you attend to the Suffering, you are, in effect, loving them. And this wholly selfless act triggers your experience of consciousness -- the highest level of self-awareness.

The Attendant ponders the Advocate's question then turns away and begins to pace around the room. He stops and looks at the Advocate.

ATTENDANT

I think you're really saying my consciousness depends upon the Suffering.

ADVOCATE

Yes.

ATTENDANT

And in the other *alternate* reality, I won't experience them?

ADVOCATE

No.

ATTENDANT

(indicates the black capsule sitting on the desk)

Which means I won't be concerned with them after I take this pill?

ADVOCATE

Yes, that's correct. The Suffering will no longer be of any consequence to you.

The Attendant looks down, then back to the Advocate.

ATTENDANT

(gestures to his own body)

A lot of people have come to expect this empathetic, concerned version of me. They're sure to take notice once that empathy and concern have vanished.

ADVOCATE
(returns to the front of
his desk)
Yes, that is a certainty.

ATTENDANT
(shrugs)
I won't be conscious of this,
right? I won't feel as if I've
abandoned them?

ADVOCATE
You will not feel a thing; you
will not be conscious of any --

ATTENDANT
Then I think we have a deal!

The Attendant approaches the Advocate, extending his right hand.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
If the consequence of taking this
pill is that I will no longer
experience the Suffering -- the
fact that I'm abandoning them --
then... why should I continue to
concern myself with their
existence?

The Advocate SMIRKS at the Attendant's outstretched hand.

ADVOCATE
Put that away.
(meets the Attendant's
eyes)
Have you lost your gift?

ATTENDANT
(withdraws his hand)
What do you mean?

ADVOCATE
If you take this pill, you won't
be conscious of *anything*. Do you
not understand?

The Attendant remains quiet.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)
What is it you think you'll be
able to experience in this
alternate reality, where, as I've
already stated, *no one* and *nothing*
exist?

ATTENDANT
(puts his hands to his
chest)
Myself? Or maybe some solitude for
a change?

The Advocate approaches the Attendant.

ADVOCATE
Let me be absolutely clear: you
will *not* experience anything: not
yourself, not solitude -- nothing.

The Attendant glares at the Advocate. He backs away from
him and returns to pacing the room. Finally, he stops.

ATTENDANT
How is that possible? What does
that even mean?

He walks over to the desk and retrieves the pill.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
You said this *thing* sends my
consciousness to another reality.
So, why won't I be able to
experience myself there?

ADVOCATE
Really?
(shakes his head)
You tell me.

ATTENDANT
(lowers the pill)
What?

ADVOCATE
Who are you?

ATTENDANT
Please stop! Just tell me what you
mean.

ADVOCATE
Who are you in regard to what we
have been discussing?

ATTENDANT
(sighs)
I'm an Attendant. You know this!

ADVOCATE
Yes.

The Advocate gestures to the Attendant's hand, disregarding
his apparent frustration.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

And once you have taken one of these *things*, once you have arrived in the alternate reality, who exactly do you think you will attend to? Were you not listening?

The Attendant remains quiet.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

You yourself just conceded that attending requires the presence of another. In the alternate reality -- *where no one and nothing exist* -- there will be *no* other to attend to, *no* other to love. As a result, you will *not* experience consciousness, you will *not* experience yourself, you will *not* experience --

ATTENDANT

Alright!

The Attendant turns away, irritated. He raises the pill, staring at it intently.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

But that means... taking this pill is really --

ADVOCATE

The annihilation of experience.

The Advocate sighs, keeping eye contact with the Attendant for a long moment. He then returns to his chair.

The Attendant looks around the room as if searching for something, then returns his attention to the Advocate.

ATTENDANT

(whispers nearly inaudibly)

It's SUICIDE?

The Advocate remains quiet, leans forward, and rests his arms on the desk.

ATTENDANT

You're selling me... *suicide*?

Quiet.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

...What? Why all of a sudden speechless? It's true!
(shoves the pill forward in the air)

This thing is suicide!

He drops it onto the desk.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

When you said my body will remain,
you meant my CORPSE! I never said
I wanted to die!

(points to the people
beyond the window)

I just... I just want to be rid of
the Suffering!

Unfazed, the Advocate immediately rises from his chair,
places his hands on the desk, and leans toward the
Attendant, glaring at him.

ADVOCATE

Attendant, you seek to exit this
reality for one where *nothing*
exists. In effect, you seek your
own death, and now you're angry
with me for offering the very
thing you cannot bring yourself to
admit you want. Try being real
with me now. Better yet, try being
real with yourself. Why are you
here?

ATTENDANT

What do you mean? I didn't come
here today to --

The Advocate bangs his fists on the desk.

ADVOCATE

WHY have you *really* come here
today?

The Attendant flinches, shocked. He slowly takes his seat
before the Advocate. He looks out at the people beyond the
window. He shifts forward, dropping his face to his hands
and begins to sob. The Advocate sits and settles back into
his own chair. A calm comes over the room. Only the faint,
muffled sound of the Attendant's crying can be heard. A
minute passes.

ATTENDANT

(whispers)

I want to die.

(cries)

Oh no, I want to die! What am I
doing?

The Advocate watches the Attendant and smiles warmly.

ADVOCATE

(lowers and cocks his
head to the side)

Look at me, Attendant. What brings
you here today is not so much a
matter of wanting to die as much
as it is that you would like to be
free of pain.

The Attendant lifts his head and meets the Advocate's gaze.

ATTENDANT

(crying and wiping his
tears)

Yes, please! I can't do this
anymore. The Suffering won't ever
change! They won't! They'll
continue to do violence to one
another, to themselves, regardless
of my presence!

ADVOCATE

Yes. Most will continue to do so
regardless of your presence. But
not all.

ATTENDANT

(pause)

But you don't get it! Can you
truly understand the futility, the
Sisyphean effort I must
continually exert to... well, to
continue guiding them? My
particular boulder doesn't simply
roll back down the mountain once
I've guided it to the top: it
drags me down with it, breaking me
along the way. I'm broken,
Advocate! What would you have me
do?

The Advocate turns his chair toward the window, and he
looks out at the people.

ADVOCATE

I know what you do is no simple
feat. You have an extraordinary
gift, albeit a painful one. But
Attendant, you must know the
Suffering have been deeply
affected by the conscious being
you are, by your kindness and
generosity -- by your love. And
they have persevered, if only
momentarily, from a pain for which
no reprieve had existed until you
and your kind entered their lives.

The Attendant looks away, shaking his head.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)
Look at me.

The Attendant looks up, tears streaming down his cheeks.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)
When the Suffering come into your presence, they experience the most profound, boundless, and timeless intensity of being, a sensation so contagious that it often infects every other person with whom they themselves come into contact -- others you yourself may not have ever met, nor are ever likely to meet.

The Attendant listens quietly.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)
And I know you often wonder if your gift can sustain them -- if that boulder can somehow remain a little longer at its summit before plunging back down the hill into certain chaos.
(glancing back at the Suffering)
At times it can, at others, no.
(places his hand lightly on the Attendant's shoulder)
But so much better is this world *with* you than *without* you, Attendant.

The Attendant shrugs, running his hands through his hair.

ATTENDANT
But why me? Everyone I come into contact with... how is it they don't ever *feel* how I feel? Why aren't they as frustrated as I am with what seems to be a complete lack of concern for the well-being of others? Why doesn't it matter to them like it does to me?

ADVOCATE
Hmm. Be careful. That's not completely accurate, if at all. It only seems that way to you because most do not experience the world as deeply and intensely as you. But the fact is, you all -- Attendants and Suffering alike --

feel the weight of the world upon your shoulders at some point in your lives; however, most choose to suppress that pain for fear that life might become unmanageable otherwise. And to an extent, this is true. Society is currently structured in such a way that the concealment of existential pain is advantageous, and in many cases, rewarded. To openly suggest that one is unhappy -- a normal experience of human existence -- often makes one a target of ridicule, implies that he or she is not one of the herd. So yes, it is hidden as a result. But, for whatever reason, your nature is *not* to run from the Suffering, but to *reveal* their pain so it can be resolved, attended to.

(smiles)

I liken your behavior to your soldiers who are trained to run *toward* the sound of battle, rather than *away*.

ATTENDANT

You flatter me, Advocate. But really, I'm no soldier.

(pleading)

I can't keep this up -- it's killing me... I desperately need to know what to do.

ADVOCATE

Well, you could start by letting others in from time to time -- by doing exactly what you are doing here with me now: revealing your *own* pain.

ATTENDANT

How? I've never done that until this moment.

ADVOCATE

(smiles)

I know. But you can learn, given time. Sharing in this manner is also a gift.

ATTENDANT

A gift?

ADVOCATE

Yes, Attendant. Don't forget that you yourself were born unto the Suffering -- you are one of them. When you share your pain with others, you honor their existence by having allowed them some access to your own. Of all the gifts an Attendant can give, this is the most difficult, yet most profound -- relation through reciprocity.

ATTENDANT

Attending to my pain will be hard for them. They aren't Attendants.

ADVOCATE

Initially it may be difficult for them, but they too are human and hence at some level, they'll be able to empathize. They may not be able to *teach* you as you teach them, but you don't require such lessons -- for now, you need only be heard. This they can do. And so you inform them that they don't have to understand why you feel the way you feel. You merely want that they should listen to you, that they understand that this is what works to keep you here so that you can continue to be the effective Attendant you are. Once they are aware of these things, then it will be much easier for them to hear your pain, however intense that pain may be.

The Attendant stands and approaches the window. He looks out across the Suffering. He turns to face the Advocate.

ATTENDANT

Attendants need attending to, is that it?

ADVOCATE

(smiles)
Indeed.

ATTENDANT

Anything else?

ADVOCATE

Yes. You should not refrain from doing the very thing you believe is the cause of your pain. Attending is not the problem, but

the very basis of your
existence -- purpose.

ATTENDANT

But for such a long time it's felt
like a burden.

ADVOCATE

Yes, you have become entangled
with that *boulder* of yours.

(smiles)

Hence, you must learn to distance
yourself from it as it plunges
back down the mountain... You must
learn to let the Suffering fail
from time to time, Attendant. You
allow them their suffering.

ATTENDANT

But that's not what an Attendant
does. We are here to lessen their
burden.

ADVOCATE

Listen to your *own* wisdom:
Attendants *lessen* the burden of
the Suffering -- they do not
eliminate it. If you were to
somehow magically remove their
pain, they would not have learned
how to endure on their own. Such
dependence would only breed more
helplessness -- more suffering.

ATTENDANT

So, I should let them *struggle*?

ADVOCATE

Yes. You will take them to the top
of the mountain and then, as
difficult as it may be, you will
get out of their way so that they
can attempt to live what you have
taught. This will effectively
create -- at the same time -- the
distance and separation you need
to attend to yourself, to be
heard, whenever such a time should
present itself.

ATTENDANT

So, *distance* is the answer.

ADVOCATE

(nods)

In little amounts at first, then
larger ones as they progress.

ATTENDANT

I understand, but how will I know when it's time to close that distance? To step in?

ADVOCATE

(smiles)

You already know. Your instincts remain intact, Attendant. You are not broken. Not suicidal.

ATTENDANT

But... I *wanted* to die. I can't believe I didn't see this before coming here.

ADVOCATE

You seek freedom. There is no shame in that. Hopefully now, however, you see that there is another way to experience freedom. A way that ensures your continued existence, even the possibility of a contented one.

The Attendant returns to his chair and sits, a peace coming over him.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

How do you feel now?

ATTENDANT

It's odd. I feel relieved in a way, like I've finally shared some deep, dark secret, and it's okay.

The Attendant's gaze falls upon the bottle of pills. He looks back at the Advocate.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Do you actually sell any of these things?

ADVOCATE

(picks up the bottle of pills)

Actually, I've never sold a single one.

He pops the pill into his mouth and chews, scrunching his face. The Attendant's jaw drops.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)

(laughs)

How fitting that a fake suicide pill should taste like black licorice.

He reaches for the bottle of black pills and removes the cap.

ADVOCATE (CONT'D)
(looks at the Attendant)
Have one?