

## How To Digest Bunny Wisdom

Even though it's already been cracked into four distinct pieces, the mirror lying in the middle of this forgotten street distracts you with the way it shimmers in the bright sunlight like something indecent. You look down on it, troubled by the vacant stare reflected in the cracked surface at your feet. The face you see is undoubtedly yours, perhaps more tired and distant, but the harsh light makes your eyes look dead. For a moment you wonder what you're doing there, before you suddenly crush the shards of mirror under your heel and let the bright sunlight explode in a million fragments of light on the dusty pavement.

"You can't change a person," you say loudly to no one, "at least not where it really matters." You haven't changed in years, not since she spat on your shoes and ran out into the rain, not even a raincoat on to keep her dry. In this strange country, wearing your strange tourist clothes and tired eyes, you look slightly altered, taller even, but that's not enough to make a difference. You were an asshole then, and you're still an asshole now.

You walk away from crushed mirror, feeling lost and ecstatic at the thought of being lost. Lost is what you have instead of something more permanent or meaningful. Lost makes you feel adventurous and free, and you quickly leap up the white set of stairs in front of you. These steps, like the ones before, lead to the same intricate passages, endlessly twisting and endlessly similar. All the whitewashed walls look the same in that impossible, blinding sunlight.

You'd gladly ask for directions back to the plaza even though you don't speak the language and would rather keep away from the locals. Unfortunately, you haven't seen anyone in hours, not even a kid into whose hand you could shove a few miserable banknotes to lead you back. You quicken your pace, trying to escape the maze of monotonous passages and desolate doorways that always lead to yet more stairs. With your left hand you wipe away the sweat from the corners of your eyes, the sweat that has been drenching your body for hours. You never imagined you could sweat this much.

When you open your eyes you see another flight of stairs and you run up two stairs at a time, eager to get somewhere. The stairs lead you into a courtyard enclosed by the same immaculate walls. And in the courtyard, a man dressed in coveralls and wearing a straw hat stands on top of an improbably long ladder and paints a window. He looks peaceful and serene, and because he's the first person you've seen since breakfast you smile broadly as you approach him.

When you get close enough to see what he's doing, you realize that he's not painting a window but an elaborate mural. The window in the picture looks real enough to jump through: the sky is dazzling blue and infinite, and leafy branches grow wildly on the other side of the window like fingers that reach for the sun. The painter ignores you as you stand puzzled at the foot of his ladder. You wonder, "What kind of man would do that?" After painting another perfect streak of blue, he stops to admire his sky. The window is almost complete.

"Hello!" you shout, a bit too loudly, at the man standing above you. His brush touches the wall again to paint a puffy cloud in the background. Ordinarily, you'd stop to admire his

concentration, but right now you simply want to find your way back to the hotel. You are thirsty and tired.

"Which way? Out?" you scream hoping he has at least a rudimentary grasp of English.

"Hotel!" you say as he enlarges the puffy cloud in his painted sky, still oblivious to your existence. You're about to shake the ladder when he puts down his paintbrush and extends one bony arm towards the left corner of the courtyard.

He looks down at you, still pointing, and smiles. Reassured, you smile back and wave your hand, and for a second you consider kicking his ladder just to see the look on his face. But instead you run towards the end of the courtyard, and oh, the look of disbelief when you encounter yet another solid wall! Tears of frustration mix with the warm sweat on your skin, and you wipe them away again brusquely and run along the wall looking for some sort of crack through which you might crawl. The whitewashed wall is imposing and unmoving, even when punched repeatedly, angrily.

Determined to finally kick down his ladder, you run back towards the painter. By now he finished painting the cloud and the window and he sits at the foot of the ladder methodically cleaning his hands. The window looks real and exquisite, and even that painted cloud looks as though it's about to fly away. You want to strangle him.

"You lied!" you shout at him even though he's standing only a foot away from you.

"Yes." He looks tired, or maybe just bored. You're a bit taken aback and soften your voice.

"Why?"

"If there was a door there, and there isn't, it would only lead to your old self and still nothing would change. I wanted to paint you one, but you came here looking for something different, some spark of life that you once had inside you."

You always hated people who talked vaguely and philosophically about things they didn't know shit about, their meaning veiled in heavy symbolism. You meant to say that much, but before you can throw out your retort, he just drops the rag in the dust and climbs up the ladder as you watch speechless. Once he reaches the painted window, he extends his arm confidently, grabs the latch painted on the wall, and with a slight tug opens the painted window. You can feel a light breeze wash over you, and you grab the ladder putting your foot on the first rung.

"Stop," you say, "come back!"

He puts one foot over the ledge and smiles sadly at you. You've dealt with anyone who tried to jump through a mural so you begin to climb after him, with a look of desperation and mild confusion in your eyes. But instead of waiting for you, he elegantly shifts his weight, kicks the ladder away and flies out the window, over the branches, and into the painted sky.

Dazzled by your fall, you quickly jump to your feet even before he disappears into the painted cloud, and lean the ladder against the wall. Ignoring the pain in your leg you climb after him, determined to find a way out. Once on top of the ladder, you get to verify that the window is merely painted on, the latch just a dark line of paint against the blue sky. The window refuses to open even when confronted by your fists.

You want to scream, but you decide it won't do any good. On the painted window you find a note: "Only By Going In Will You Find A Way Out."

"In?" you wonder as you climb down the steps gingerly, the note clutched in your hand. You decided that you dislike the painter for leaving you such puzzling notes and audaciously flying out a painted window. Once you reach the ground, you finally kick the ladder, and it falls, like before, with a loud thump raising dust into the air.

Leaning against the wall, you unbuckle your pants to have a closer look at your injured leg. Your hip is bleeding and bruised. Suddenly you feel indescribably sad, tears swelling up in your eyes and your lips quivering uncontrollably. For some reason, you start thinking about her, before she spit on your shoes, and how she often tried to make you feel better by playing with your genitals and anus.

In a moment of intuition, you squat on the ground and gently press a finger against your anus. Pretty soon you have two, then three saliva coated fingers probing your insides, and it doesn't take you long before you can insert your whole hand into your orifice. You bend over and to your surprise you find that you can fit your head between your legs.

"Only by going in will you find a way out," you repeat the painter's advice, staring prudently at your cavity. Because your back hurts rather intolerably, you pull your shoulder between your legs with a giant heave you plunge your head in while holding your anus open with both hands.

Your insides are dark and moist, and you pause to allow your eyes to adjust to your darkness before proceeding further. You push your neck in as well, and find that with a bit of effort you can also pull in your arms. Crawling forward on your elbows is difficult at first, but gets easier as the passage gets more slippery.

You finally manage to pull your legs in, and you search into your shirt pocket for a pen-light. Once you turn it on, you notice a pair of legs stuck ahead of you. Startled -- you didn't think anyone crawled up here before -- you edge forward cautiously just to be kicked in the head by one of the legs.

You are mortified when you realize that the painter has crawled in here ahead of you when you weren't looking, and is now proceeding to kick you in the head repeatedly. You never expected such violence, and in your own body too!

"I didn't think you'd make it here, but I'm glad you did," he says as he delivers another resounding blow.

You reach up and grab his foot, but he quickly yanks it away and start climbing further up your bowels. You chase him, but the stench coming from the painter or your lower intestines (you can't be sure), is slowing you down. Somehow, you manage to lose sight of him as you make your way through the endlessly twisty passages, all alike. Deep within, you can hear the steady pulse of your heart shaking your blood, and you feel more confident, more alive somehow. "This is my body," you remind yourself. "I'll squish him like the little bug he is."

In a few moments you reach a relatively large opening (the stomach you decide), and find the painter dressed in a bunny costume sitting comfortably on one of your ulcers. It hurts to even look at him.

"You should watch what you eat," he says in a friendly and somewhat disarming way. You point your pen-light at him and glare.

"What are you doing here?" you ask.

"There's all this bitterness and regret locked up in your belly," he says ignoring your question. "You've been tightening all muscles, cramping down on everything for so long your whole body turned against you. No wonder she thought you were a tight ass."

"What would you know about that?" you ask, suspecting that he won't answer this question either.

"That was years ago. It's time to let it go. No need to keep it bottle up inside like some sort of secret you don't dare reveal. She tried to love you. She tried so hard until it hurt and then she tried some more. But it's hard to love something that's dead inside. Hallow. She had no choice but to run out in the rain the way she did. "

"But I loved her."

"Only with your mind, with your analytical and cruel self. Never with your heart. There's this whole world of sighs that you don't even see, this world of possibilities, of meaning and depth. He starts to flail his hands with flourish. "One of these days you'll have to give in and accept that change happens and it requires imagination. It's not bad, it's not good, but it's change and it keeps you alive."

For a while you sat in silence, listening to the heaving of the lungs the way the heart echoed and blood rushed around you. When you look down, you see that your stomach acids started to dissolve your left shoe.

"I'm tired," you say, slightly overwhelmed by everything. "I think I have to go away for a while."

"You go ahead," the man dressed in the bunny suit said, pointing upwards. "I'll sit here for a while and dissolve in your gastric juices."

You leave him behind and continue to climb until the fleshy walls narrow around you and you step into a moist tunnel you assume is your oesophagus. The beating of your heart is louder and more immediate and you can feel it trembling near you, shaking your entire body. Finally, much to your surprise, you can see light at the end of the tunnel. That's about all you can see as you're vomited out onto the dusty street. Oblivion.

Much later, when you open your eyes again, you see the sun going down above the high walls and the painter squatting at the end of the courtyard painting you a door. "No need," you say, smiling at him and wiping off your shit and vomit from your clothes. You feel like a changed man as once more you lean the ladder against the wall and climb towards the window. This time, you're sure you can fly even through a painted window.