

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FALL

by

BARRY EITEL

Based on "Humpty Dumpty"

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CHARACTERS

HUMPTY - an eggman

MAN - a guard for the king

HORSE - a courier for the king

SETTING

A wall overlooking a courtyard in a fantasy land.

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(HUMPTY sits on a wall. The King's MAN stands at attention nearby as HUMPTY speaks.)

HUMPTY

People say there ain't a frequency difference with digital compression? You can't tell the difference between vinyl and an mp3, hell, a CD and a mp3? I'm sorry you can tell the difference, even if you aren't a true audiophile, you can tell the difference. I can tell the difference so hard it makes my teeth hurt.

MAN

If you say so.

HUMPTY

My God, there's a local radio station and the day mix is almost purely forty-four-point-one CD audio, but their evening mix is computer-based and utilizes more lossy formats. It's terrible. Makes my nights hell. I can physically feel it - I swear to you there is an added fatigued on my ears because of how jagged the compression hits me with this digital evening mix.

MAN

Sounds bad.

HUMPTY

You know, I called the radio station to inquire about this compression issue and their signal chain...at the end of the day, it's a real issue because my ears are running ragged. All other controllable variables being the same, my ears are getting wrecked in my evenings way faster than during my daytime listening.

MAN

If something is that bad, you gotta complain.

HUMPTY

Some of these people sound like cranks, I know, some of them are cranks. Could most people tell the difference between a lossless digital recording and a two-five-six-k AAC file? Sure, probably not...maybe you say you got Lava Power cables and Anjou speaker cables, you can hear anything, but I ain't buying it, dude!

MAN

Couldn't say.

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HUMPTY

OK, though, you turn up the distortion in the mix, you get some noisy rock, get yourself a track where there isn't a bunch of space between the frequencies, I can one-hundred-trillion percent tell the difference between a CD and an mp3. Some music, honestly, who cares? Get that mp3. Open Pandora, press play. But with a track you treasure, it is always better to get it on vinyl...or at least CD. It will pay for itself ten times over in aural pleasure after just a few listens. Trust me.

MAN

Yeah, you're probably right.

HUMPTY

I'm absolutely right, brother. Look, maybe I'm like an old cowboy who can tell a cow from a horse from across a football field. But I don't think I'm actually that special. I think I just trained my ears.

MAN

You are special.

HUMPTY

Here's the ugly truth. The consumers are driving the quality down. Most don't care. This has been rampant since the nineties and now no one knows what is good anymore! I've seen surveys, they have people who listen to a lot of digital music and they actually prefer poor quality mp3s to better ones. They actually like and expect the damn high frequency warble. The world has gone mad!

(The King's HORSE enters.)

HORSE

You said Neil Young's *Tonight's the Night* mint condition vinyl?

HUMPTY

No, no, no, man, *Tonight's the Night* promo LP Japanese limited edition. And mint condition, of course.

HORSE

Yeah, yeah.

HUMPTY

*Tonight's the Night*. Young's tequila-sodden, no-filter response to the deaths of Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten and their

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HUMPTY (cont'd)

roadie Bruce Berry. The moment when his voice breaks in "Mellow My Mind" - maybe the most starkly potent in his catalog.

HORSE

Sure, they had it for five hundred.

(HUMPTY is transfixed.)

HUMPTY

You pick that up for me?

HORSE

No way, dude, I spot you the cash for that and scuff it up, we all know you are blaming me and I'm out five hundred dollars. Get it yourself.

HUMPTY

Leave the wall?

HORSE

If *Tonight's the Night* is that important to you.

HUMPTY

Honestly, it should be that important to every American.

HORSE

It's not that important to me.

MAN

Yeah, sorry, I don't know anything about what you've been talking about.

(HUMPTY takes a deep breath. He prepares to come down from the wall.)

HUMPTY

So it falls to me.

(HUMPTY tries to jump off the wall, but he misjudges the landing and falls.)

HUMPTY

Ahhh!!!!

(The falling becomes stylized - HUMPTY moves to the front of the stage while MAN and HORSE look

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at where his falling body would be.)

MAN

He's falling.

HORSE

He's falling.

(HUMPTY addresses the audience.)

HUMPTY

Is this it? Is this how it cracks up?

MAN

Humpty Dumpty -

HORSE

He falls.

HUMPTY

How have I spent this blessed time on earth? Worrying about audio quality? Complaining about sound quality - at this moment, I should be so lucky to hear a tinny scrap of Swedish produced pop through a 2004 computer speaker...that would contain a whole world to me now. It would be a miracle.

HORSE

Falling -

HUMPTY

Did I waste my time sitting on that wall talking about pointless baubles? Should I have spent more time doing something? Did I do enough to change the world for the better?

MAN

This won't turn out well -

HUMPTY

But I am powerless to do anything in a world, nothing I did or could do matters, how would I ever know? Maybe my time spent arguing about FLAC files and iPods was all I could do, it was all I was destined to know.

HORSE

If he never knew about Neil Young -

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HUMPTY

And now I'm falling, and now I'm cracking, and now I will never be put together again.

(HUMPTY lies down on the stage, apparently broken.)

MAN

He's all over the place.

HORSE

Can you find the pieces?

MAN

Putting him back together again?

HORSE

Impossible.

MAN

Even if we had all the king's horses, and all the king's men.

HORSE

I should have never gone to the record store with his message.

MAN

He wouldn't have had it any other way. It's what he lived for.

HORSE

It's what he fell for, cracked up for.

MAN

What would his life have been, though, without the hope for that limited Japanese edition *Tonight's the Night* LP? It was enough for him to leave the wall. It was a star in his sky, a jewel in his crown.

HORSE

We all have to leave our walls. May we all find something worth falling for.

MAN

Here lies Humpty Dumpty, splattered below where he sat on high, pieces of him scattered around, never to be remolded into the person he was. But so it comes for all us, life cracks up, our yolky souls spill on the sidewalk. How could he know if his brief life amounted to anything, how could we? Can we even know

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MAN (cont'd)

for ourselves? What is the lesson to be learned from this cracked egg of a man?

HORSE

He loved his wall, then he fell from his wall, then he was never to be put back. There is nothing else to know.

(BLACKOUT.)

END OF PLAY