

Through the Looking Glass: Humpty Dumpty 2011

by Kim Conklin

Humpty Dumpty sat on a fault.

Humpty Dumpty had a great shock.

All of the king's men

Now have to take stock.

"I don't know what you mean by 'safe,' " Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!' "

"But 'safe' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument!'"

"When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master that's all. Words have a temper, some of them—particularly verbs—adjectives you can do anything with—however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability!"

"Would you tell me, please, what that means?"

"Now you talk like a reasonable child. I meant by 'impenetrability' that we've had enough of that subject."

"But does 'safe' mean 'free from harm'?"

"It means that it's generally regarded as meeting the legal standard of safety by the current panel of experts upon evidence published and compiled by the industry in question, but the standard changes depending on conditions and the ability of said industry to meet it."

“That's an awful lot for one word to mean,” Alice began, but she didn't have a chance to finish her sentence, for a heavy crash shook the forest from end to end.

