

## Bounty

Something jolted me to my core yesterday, and dislodged the wad of self-pity that has been parked in my throat for the better part of this year. As I was leaving Petaluma Bounty farm, I drove very slowly, on account of cavernous potholes, until mid-way down the dusty road, where I passed a clumped-up, unidentifiable form in a wheel chair. Coming closer, I could see a very old woman, contorted into a strange, angular composition. She was an ancient arrangement of bones and hair with one leg and maybe 3 teeth, uneven shoulders swathed in rags, the whole bundle suntanned beyond recognition. When I passed her, she gave me a hearty wave and despite the almost complete absence of teeth, a smile as beautiful as I have ever seen. I smiled and waved back without hesitation, without the impact of her spirit having totally registered yet. It hit me a few moments later as I approached the stop sign, where I broke down and wept from a mix of emotions I could not contain - absolute love for this soul who is barely living by most standards but gives love and friendly kindness from her heart none the less, mixed with the deepest pain I have ever felt over certain fragile emotions seemingly denied for a lifetime. I had been feeling in my heart like that human clump looked from a distance, until I got closer and she graced me with a smile made all the more precious by the fact that it shone from a face so battered by life. What is wrong with me that I cannot seem to clutch at one speck of joy when I have so much more than this weathered, one-legged sprite? I know it is complete exhaustion at having been here so many times, like a salmon who finally says, "Oh, fuck it," and lets the bear have his dinner. I can't struggle against this current anymore, so I pray for bear. Or I did, until I reached the big red stop sign at the end of this road.

There is a subtle but powerful source of communication that runs through our mundane lives. It can easily go unnoticed, drowned out by the din of monkey mind, mental lists of errands, I'm out of ginger ale, I have to get gas... To pick up the messages in this invisible current, a jolt is necessary, like a cosmic shock treatment to shut the monkey up for a second. Like a genuine smile from a most unlikely friend who delivers a gentle admonishment through her happiness. In increments, I saw what was left of her body, and then her face, and then her soul. I was primed for the message, I slipped into my worn-out old tape, and the next thing I saw was the word STOP.