

## Around the Bend

by Jacob Danek

*A frightened man stands still in the middle of a dusty, leaf-covered, forest trail. A traveler, moving at a brisk pace, rounds the bend but stops when he sees the troubled man, who can't seem to decide whether to move forward or turn back...*

I see the dying trees, their leaves black and burnt.  
**I see the dying trees, their leaves ready to be reborn.**

There's something frightening about treading through a fallen forest.  
**There's something beautiful about treading through a fallen forest.**

I seek something new, a change in view.  
**Then why do you stand still, unable to move?**

*The two men are both on an early morning walk. The trail, surrounded by thirsty trees, is parched of water after months and months of drought. Many of the trees have fallen, leaving a graveyard of sticks and stumps, drained of their former glory.*

I need to weigh every option, no matter the cost.  
**I need to move forward, no matter the cost.**

Unable to choose, I try to mix and blend.  
**I make decisions easily, my troubled friend.**

I see the world, and it sees me.  
**The world sees me, and has to agree.**

*The traveler notices creases etched into the man's face, lines drawn deep by the hands of stress and time. His face compares to the dusted forest floor, a floor cracked and dry, parched of the water which once flowed freely over the green.*

Thinking so much, my mind is a mumbled mess.  
**My mind is a clean slate, waiting to be filled.**

I sort through this mess, a feeble attempt to find what I seek.  
**I find what I seek without the meager mess.**

I walk through time careful of where I step.  
**I walk through time not knowing what comes next.**

*Eyes flickering back and forth, the man glances at the dark stretch of trail ahead of him. Following his anguished eyes, the traveler instead sees potential for new adventure and experience.*

In constant fear, I wonder what's around the bend.  
**Fearless, I wonder what's around the bend.**

Unsure of myself, my past, my life, how will I survive?  
**I am sure of what I have done, amazingly alive.**

The past, I believe, was my best.  
**Then this walk is your ultimate test.**

*The man's unsteady hands shake uncontrollably, unable to keep hold of his dusty walking stick. The traveler's hands, steady and poised, are sure of themselves as they rest at his side.*

Not wanting to move forward I stand still.  
**Looking ahead, I see a future of laughter and thrill.**

Looking behind me, I seek to relive and revive what is long gone.  
**The past, gone so fast, needs to be left for the vultures and crows.**

But the past is what I know, what I love, what I need.  
**What you need is to forget, to digress from such a doomed path.**

*The man's voice wavers, his words cracked like the dirt and sod. The forest is silent. A silence that invites thoughts of doubt and fear. The fallen trees cast shadows across the winding trail.*

How will I plan if the path is unlit, so dark and unknown.  
**Why, my troubled friend, do you obsess and try to control?**

The twisting turns of this path confuse and create, a fretfully untamed fate.  
**Look beneath the fear and confusion, letting your feet take flight.**

My feet are tired, frozen in place; my mind takes the wheel and makes its case.  
**You think too much, my troubled friend; leave only footprints to find what you need.**

*A dry, hot wind blows through the forest, whispering to the men with its raspy voice. The traveler pays no attention to the wind, instead focusing on the broken words of the frightened man.*

I do not enjoy bitter surprises which meddle and mistake.  
**Let go of the fear let it's broken wings fly free.**

I do not know how to let go.  
**Then learn, as the world does not wait.**

I do not know how to be free, to be empty of fear.  
**I do not know how you live, so confined in a mumbled mess.**

*The sky fills with black, thundering clouds. Cracks of bright lightning flicker through the sky. Darkness falls over the already unlit forest. A flock of crows spooked by the impending storm, fly from their nests, crying out a desperate warning to flee.*

Where I am now is comfortable, it feels like home.  
**Comfort is deceiving and tricks the feeble few, to stay stagnant, unable to move.**

Making a change is difficult, don't you agree?  
**I agree, my troubled friend, but change is what you need.**

To move forward or to turn back, what a chaotic choice.  
**To move forward or to turn back, what a simple choice.**

*A drop of rain falls from the swirling sky. It falls and falls until it splashes onto the traveler's tanned face. The man, still worrying about every desperate detail, doesn't notice the rain.*

I think I will stay here and let you tread down the unknown trail.  
**Suit yourself, but do not complain, when you fall too far behind.**

I will leave the adventuring for you.  
**I will leave the fretting for you.**

I am safe here, now run along.  
**Safe, so safe in the past's embrace.**

*The drops begin to fall with a newfound fury, washing away the dust and filling the silence with a splattering roar. The mysterious traveler walks ahead, looking over his shoulder to plead once more.*

**Please, my troubled friend, come with me, I'll show you the way.**

*But the frightened man was gone, his footprints washed away. He had turned back. The past and its longing touch had finally consumed him.*

*The traveler simply shrugged and kept moving forward. The rain, coming down in shimmering sheets, washed away the memory of meeting a troubled man. And the forest breathed a sigh of relief, watching its fearless traveler tread lightly into the unknown.*