

Fear and Courage - Nicholas Underwood
1st Place
Shady Springs High School, Raleigh County
Grades 9-10

He awakes. Not from slumber, but from a daze. He stands in the beaming sunlight of a humid summer day. As he stands, a gentle, cool breeze blows against his cheek. The breeze serves an important purpose to him, for it calms him. Fear, he feels, fear of the beast that lay before him. This beast is not of flesh and bone, but of steel. Pure, cold steel cast from the iron taken from the bosom of the earth. What a monster man has created.

He takes a step. The beast roars and sends a gust of wind that forces him back. The fear he feels, lies deep within him and grows larger with each passing second. He ponders the possible perilous partaking he is possibly about to perform. It haunts him, the roar of the beast. It strikes pure terror into his soul that no average man could withstand. But he must obtain courage, to progress forward and confront the beast. Somewhere, lost in the sea of his mind is the courage to face the beast.

He takes yet another step. The beast, enraged, sends another roar from the fiery pits that are its lungs. But he does not tarry. The courage that was lost within him now finds an opening. Now, hastily, he moves forward. The cool breeze returns to comfort him. It extinguishes the fear he once felt. With the breeze at his back, he proceeds into the beast lair. What a wretched place the lair is. Garbage from times long past is strewn everywhere. The air is foul and filled with stenches that would make even swine keel over and perish. The air fills his lungs and begins to smother him. Gasping, he longs for the fresh air he had just moments before.

The gentle summer breeze, astoundingly finds its way into the lair. It softly brushed against him. As he breathes, it rushes into his lungs like a river flooding into a valley. It relieves him, the breeze does. The breeze has utterly eliminated the foul air that was filled the lair. He presses on

quickly, for he has little time. The beast roars on. Completely enraged, it begins to feel fear. Fear that it may not be able to stop him from completing his goal. Fear that by sundown it shall be defeated and he will rise from the ashes victorious.

The best wonders. How could it possibly bring man to his knees? What act could force so much fear and terror into the tiny souls of man that he never return to face the beast again? An idea arises within the beast's mind. An idea so sinister and wicked that on thinking it the beast shudders from fear. But would it work? Would it be so effective as to send man home with tears in his eyes? Time grows slim for the beast. It must act now if it is to drive man away.

He steps forward now quicker than ever, the beast still roaring in rage. Out of sheer desperation, the beast grabs him. He struggles to break free as the fear that once left him now fills his soul again. His struggles are in vain for the beast's grip is strong. There is no escape once the beast grabs hold, its grip so strong that it turns rocks to dust. The beast raises him high into the air. The beast sees terror in the man's eyes, smiles, and then jerks the man towards the earth.

He screams as the beast twists and turns him in every direction. The force the beast exerts on the man pushes him to speeds at which not even light can keep up. Vigorously the beast tosses him from one direction to another. His body cannot take much more. It was not designed to withstand forces of this magnitude. Within seconds, the beast grows tired. It lowers the man gently back to earth. As the beast sets him down, it falls into a slumber. It waits for the next unlucky soul to awaken it again.

As he steps away from the lair of the beast victorious and back out into the gleaming sunlight of that summer day, the breeze returns to him and softly brushes his cheek as it once did so long ago. He looks up to the blue sky, covering his eyes from the sunlight, and sighs. He turns to his left, and sees his friend. As he looks at his friend, his friend whispers, "See? The rollercoaster wasn't that bad." Smiling, he replies, "I guess not. What to go again?"

