**Excerpts from “To This Day” *by Shane Koyczan***

I’m not the only kid
who grew up this way
surrounded by people who used to say
that rhyme about sticks and stones
as if broken bones
hurt more than the names we got called
and we got called them all
so we grew up believing no one
would ever fall in love with us
that we’d be lonely forever
that we’d never meet someone
to make us feel like the sun
was something they built for us
in their tool shed
so broken heart strings bled the blues
as we tried to empty ourselves
so we would feel nothing
don’t tell me that hurts less than a broken bone
that an ingrown life
is something surgeons can cut away
that there’s no way for it to metastasize

it does

she was eight years old
our first day of grade three
when she got called ugly
we both got moved to the back of the class
so we would stop get bombarded by spit balls
but the school halls were a battleground
where we found ourselves outnumbered day after wretched day
we used to stay inside for recess
because outside was worse
outside we’d have to rehearse running away
or learn to stay still like statues giving no clues that we were there
in grade five they taped a sign to her desk
that read beware of dog

to this day
despite a loving husband
she doesn’t think she’s beautiful
because of a birthmark
that takes up a little less than half of her face
kids used to say she looks like a wrong answer
that someone tried to erase
but couldn’t quite get the job done
and they’ll never understand
that she’s raising two kids
whose definition of beauty
begins with the word mom
because they see her heart
before they see her skin
that she’s only ever always been amazing

he was a broken branch
grafted onto a different family tree
adopted but not because his parents opted for a different destiny
he was three when he became a mixed drink
of one part left alone
and two parts tragedy
started therapy in 8th grade
had a personality made up of tests and pills
lived like the uphills were mountains
and the downhills were cliffs
four fifths suicidal
a tidal wave of anti depressants
and an adolescence of being called popper
one part because of the pills
and ninety nine parts because of the cruelty
he tried to kill himself in grade ten
when a kid who still had his mom and dad
had the audacity to tell him “get over it” as if depression
is something that can be remedied
by any of the contents found in a first aid kit

to this day
he is a stick on TNT lit from both ends
could describe to you in detail the way the sky bends
in the moments before it’s about to fall
and despite an army of friends
who all call him an inspiration
he remains a conversation piece between people
who can’t understand
sometimes becoming drug free
has less to do with addiction
and more to do with sanity

… every school was a big top circus tent
and the pecking order went
from acrobats to lion tamers
from clowns to carnies
all of these were miles ahead of who we were
we were freaks
lobster claw boys and bearded ladies
oddities
juggling depression and loneliness playing solitaire spin the bottle
trying to kiss the wounded parts of ourselves and heal
but at night
while the others slept
we kept walking the tightrope
it was practice
and yeah
some of us fell

but I want to tell them
that all of this sh\*\*
is just debris
leftover when we finally decide to smash all the things we thought
we used to be
and if you can’t see anything beautiful about yourself
get a better mirror
look a little closer
stare a little longer
because there’s something inside you
that made you keep trying
despite everyone who told you to quit
you built a cast around your broken heart
and signed it yourself
you signed it
“they were wrong”

…we stem from a root planted in the belief
that we are not what we were called we are not abandoned cars stalled out and sitting empty on a highway
and if in some way we are
don’t worry
we only got out to walk and get gas

but our lives will only ever always
continue to be
a balancing act
that has less to do with pain and more to do with beauty.

WN Prompts:

* *Write your own, “To This Day” (it could be funny or serious)*
* *Write about the author’s message and purpose for writing this poem.*
* *Write about what lines will stay with you.*
* *Write about the issues of bullying, teasing, acceptance, and/or beauty.*
* *Write about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

Directions: Look through your silent reading book and find several quotes that use great literary devices. Try to mix it up and see my sample if needed.

Literary Devices

*The Great Gatsby*

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| Quote/Literary Device and Page # | The Lit Device I see is…And why the author uses it… |
| **Example:****“He is a stick on TNT lit from both ends” ( Koyczan 3).** | *This is a mixture of metaphor and hyperbole.* *The author uses these techniques to help us see how frustrated and angry the boy is. Although he is not literally TNT, he could explode at any moment and the fact “both ends” are lit really helps the audience see how much the bullying has impacted him and in a very negative way.* |
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