**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*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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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