

Sandy Rankin

Mona Kay Reads Neruda, 11th Grade Speech Class

Neruda's poem made her cry the first time she read it, alone in her bedroom. *Pablo Neruda must have known what it is to love someone who hurts you and hurts you.*

In her notebook, *Neruda*, she wrote, *Neruda*, over and over until her crying stopped.

In class the following day, Mona Kay deliberately raised her voice at just the right place, knowing the power of crescendo. *The night is shattered.* A night like the nights her boyfriend swore

he would never hurt her again. Afterwards, tucking loose strands of her damp hair behind her ears, telling her she was pretty, he wanted to feel himself inside her so much it hurt.

Softly then, almost a whisper, she read, *In the distance someone is singing.*
This is all.

In the back of the room the teacher leaned forward, elbows on her thighs, chin resting on her left thumb. The girls sat unusually still.

The one boy who took Speech, 6th period, looked out the window. After class, he asked if he might phone her. *No*, she said, *No*,

relieved she could say
(because the boy was nice, but not very cute
and she didn't want to hurt his feelings),

my boyfriend would be mad at me.

That same night, her boyfriend asked her about school, had she talked to any boys? She wasn't a good liar.

He punched her in the stomach, so the bruises wouldn't show. He had never gone that far before.

It was under the tall pines where he had first kissed her, first lay her down and loved her. Neither having gone that far before.

While she crouched on the ground where she had once lain naked and afraid but happy, he smashed the passenger window of his truck

with his fist. The broken glass shone white in the waxing of the moon.

She heard singing in the distance. The night wind stopped revolving.

Mona Kay walked towards the singing.

"There's someone else, isn't there?" he called out.

"It's more than three miles back to town!"

When she didn't stop to hesitate or look around, he leaned his forehead against his truck and he cried. She had never walked away before.

She shivered slightly, like a planet that looks like a star.