

Coincidences

Randall Jarrell, John Berryman, Dylan Thomas
were all born in the same year as my mother was.
She was a quilt maker and gardener who eschewed
White Horse brews, although she did serve Cold Duck
occasionally when hosting her Bible study group:
then she would wipe the wine glasses shiny clean,
arrange them on the buffet with the family silver. Platters
of homemade potato salad and bouquets of late asters
would grace her table where the carefully ironed napkins
folded just so were arranged in rhythmic rows.
No suicide thoughts at these affairs, but she was not
a well-known poet seeing darkness like a heavy blanket
draped from snowflake to star, star to snowflake,
or headlights to beams, beings to wet highways,
beings contemplating a rim of suds ringing the last glass
ever. The blanket grew heavier, interminable. Her
bright scraps of fabric and flowers unreachable,
she could not save anyone, even with the prettiest quilt
ever. It was the beginning of the end in August 1914
when my mother was born, perhaps not a good time
for baby poets or ordinary women with skill in
embroidery. Late at night in her kitchen, cleaning up,
she mulled over injustice, Job, the grocery list. Stitch,
stitch, stitch. She never got rich, yet like many a woman
with farmgirl roots, her hands had talents. That's when
she was happy: coaching seeds to grow, sewing little quilts
for my daughter's dolls as she had for my dolls thousands
of nights ago. She was much like them, those stars,
gifted poets who could see the heart inside the husk,
despite their grief, even despite the heavy blanket making
it hard to breathe. Guests leave, what do they leave
behind? Ideas for poems perhaps? In the evening solitude,
after the listeners are gone, what then? She would
clear the table carefully, wash the dishes in foamy suds,
stack them to dry, arrange the wine glasses on a rack
by the sink, while the poets sipped a night cap as they slowly
typed remarkable words. They worked past midnight,
polishing poems, while she slept at last (her rheumatic heart
protesting), gasping for air, perhaps like them, like
famous poets born in 1914. The beginning of the end

in 1914, knowing and not knowing. Some things are important: late nights are devoted to craft (they would all agree.)

Mary K. Herbert