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