

## TOAD DILLARD

When my mother was 17 and got the mumps Toad Dillard dedicated to her on the radio "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone" it rumored all over Paris, Texas that she was going to marry my father and pretty soon she did and Toad Dillard told her any old time she needed him just to let him know.

A year later and pregnant with me, out dancing with my father at a roadhouse she got huffy when he drank too much beer and started picking on her so she asked Toad Dillard to drive her home and when she took his arm

my father punched him in the nose but passed out cold before Toad Dillard could punch him back. On the way home even though neither of them were drunk my mother and Toad Dillard got into a head-on collision with another Model A Ford and the other people were killed, my mother got knocked out plus a cut on her head and Toad Dillard walked away not one bit hurt.

For years it was the town scandal, for 20 years my father brought up Toad Dillard's name every chance he got, and after my father died 35 years later my mother went back home to Paris to visit kin and saw Toad Dillard again. He'd farmed cotton all his life, had a pecan-pie-sweet Texas wife, 4 kids and 13 grandkids and my mother was pleased with her city life in California with only one child and 3 grandchildren and its preferred, perfected neatness.

## DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

Depending on whether or not I've got to tell the truth like on a passport or job app sometimes I say I was born in Long Beach, California, instead of Paris, Texas, because it's a long story why I don't talk like a Texan and how I got here to Long Beach, but just about every day I wish I could go

to Paris, Texas, where, so I've  
been told, they grow roses  
pretty enough for flower shows,  
and cottonwood and pecan trees.  
I'd like to see fireflies and  
buttermilk skies, compare the  
rocks, leaves and dirt of Paris  
to those in Long Beach.

Other than the winter when  
I was born I've only been  
to Paris once, and on the way,  
right in the middle of Texas  
near Denton or Sweetwater, someplace  
in the middle of the night and  
where there's not a tree or  
hill, just flat land falling  
off the thousand corners of the earth  
my father parked the car  
on the side of the road  
and he, my mother and I  
got out to look at the stars,  
the sky a big, round dome full of  
so many sugar-crystal stars that  
the sky dripped white as cake icing  
and my father stood in front  
of the car lights as if on a stage  
and sang that song which should be  
Texas' state song, sang as loud  
as he could into the big, round night,  
"The stars at night are big and bright,"  
and then he clapped his hands 5 times  
and went on singing,  
"deep in the heart of Texas...."

#### NEPENTHE

My father always said that my  
mother was so pretty because she  
was a Texas girl and Texas had the  
most pretty women in the whole world  
and this would please my mother so  
and make her smile she'd let him  
embrace her in front of me, she'd  
sit on his lap, no mention ever  
that when a Texas girl she'd  
picked cotton, wore flour sack dresses  
and couldn't go to school winters  
because she had no shoes, the bad  
and the sad things never mattering,  
the hard times easy as Eden  
once you're grown and pretty  
and sitting on a happy man's knee.