

Ode to Billy Joe

Patricia Barber

It was the third of June
Another sleepy, dusty Delta day
I was out choppin' cotton
And my brother was balin' hayAt dinner time we stopped
Walked back to the house to eat
Mama hollered out the back door
"Y'all remember to wipe your feet"Then she said, "I got some news
This mornin' from Choctaw Ridge"
"Today Billy Joe Mac Allister
Jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge"Papa said to Mama as he passed
Around the black eyed peas
"Well, Billy Joe never had a lick of sense
Pass the biscuits, please""There's five more acres
In the lower forty I've got to plow"
Mama said it was shame
About Billy Joe, anyhowSeems like nothin' ever comes
To no good up on Choctaw Ridge
And now Billy Joe Mac Allister's
Jumped off the Tallahatchie BridgeMama said to me
"Child, what's happened to your appetite?
I've been cookin' all mornin'
And you haven't touched a single bite""That nice young preacher
Brother Taylor, dropped by today
Said he'd be pleased to have a dinner
On Sunday, oh, by the way""He said he saw a girl that looked a lot
Like you up on Choctaw Ridge"
"And she and Billy Joe were throwing
Somethin' off the Tallahatchie Bridge"Well, a year has come 'n' gone
Since we heard the news about Billy Joe
Brother married Becky Thompson
Bought a store in TupeloThere was a virus going 'round
Papa caught it and he died last Spring
Now Mama doesn't seem
To wanna do much of anythingAnd me, I spend a lot of time
Pickin' flowers up on Choctaw Ridge
And drop them into the muddy water
Off the Tallahatchie Bridge

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