

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' hay
And at dinner time we stopped and walked back to the house to e
at
And Mama hollered out the back door "y'all remember to wipe you
r feet"
And then she said "I got some news this mornin' from Choctaw Ri
dge"
"Today Billy Joe MacAllister jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge
"

'n' Papa said to Mama as he passed around the blackeyed peas
"Well Billy Joe never had a lick of sense, pass the biscuits, p
lease"
"There's five more acres in the lower forty I've got to plow"
'n' Mama said it was shame about Billy Joe, anyhow
Seems like nothin' ever comes to no good up on Choctaw Ridge
And now Billy Joe MacAllister's jumped off the Tallahatchie Bri
dge

'n' Brother said he recollected when he and Tom and Billie Joe
Put a frog down my back at the Carroll County picture show
And wasn't I talkin' to him after church last Sunday night?
"I'll have another piece-
a apple pie, you know it don't seem right"
"I saw him at the sawmill yesterday on Choctaw Ridge"
"And now ya tell me Billie Joe's jumped off the Tallahatchie Br
idge"

'n' Mama said to me "Child, what's happened to your appetite?"
"I've been cookin' all morning and you haven't touched a single
bite"
"That nice young preacher, Brother Taylor, dropped by today"
"Said he'd be pleased to have 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 was throwing somethin' off the Tallahatc
hie Bridge"

A year has come 'n' gone since we heard the news 'bout Billy Jo
e
'n' Brother married Becky Thompson, they bought a store in Tupe
lo
There was a virus going 'round, Papa caught it and he died last
Spring
And now Mama doesn't seem to wanna do much of anything
And me, I spend a lot of time pickin' flowers up on Choctaw Rid
ge

And drop them into the muddy water off the Tallahatchie Bridge