

# Natalie Merchant, Ode To Billy Joe

It was the 3rd of June, another sleepy dusty Delta day.  
I was out choppin' cotton and my brother was bailin' hay.  
And at dinner time we stopped and walked back to the house to eat.  
And mama hollered out the backdoor, "Y'all remember to wipe your feet."  
And then she said, "I got some news this mornin' from Choctaw Ridge.  
Today Billy Joe MacAllister's jumped off the Tallahatchee Bridge."

Papa said to mama as he passed around the blackeyed peas,  
"Well, Billy Joe never had a lick of sense; pass the biscuits please.  
There's 5 more acres in the lower 40 I got to plow."  
And mama said it was a 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 Tallahatchee Bridge.

And brother said he recollected when he and Tom and Billy 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 of apple pie; you know it don't seem right.  
I saw him at the sawmill yesterday on Choctaw Ridge  
and now you tell me Billy Joe's jumped off the Tallahatchee Bridge."

And mama said to me, "Child what's happened to your appetite?  
I been cookin' all morning and you havent 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 throwin' something off the Tallahatchee Bridge."

A year's come and gone since we heard the news bout Billy Joe.  
'N brother married Becky Thompson n they bought a store in Tupelo.  
There was a virus goin' round, papa caught it and he died last spring,  
and now mama doesnt seem to wanna do much of anything.  
And me, I spend a lotta time pickin' flowers up on Choctaw Ridge,  
and drop 'em into the muddy water off the Tallahatchee bridge.