

Ode to Billie Joe

Kathy Mattea

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 we walked back to the house to eat

And mama hollered out the back door, Y'all, remember to wipe your feet

And then she said, I got some news this mornin' from Choctaw Ridge

Today, Billy Joe MacAllister jumped off the Tallahatchie 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 five more acres in the lower forty I've got to plow

And 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 McAllister's jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge

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 of apple pie, you know, it don't seem right

I saw him at the sawmill yesterday up on Choctaw Ridge

And now you tell me Billie Joe's jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge

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, looked a lot like you, up on Choctaw Ridge

And she and Billy Joe was throwing somethin' off the Tallahatchie Bridge

Well, a year's come and gone since we heard the news about Billy Joe

Brother married Becky Thompson, they bought a store in Tupelo

There was a virus going 'round, papa caught it and he died last spring

And now mama doesn't seem to want to do much of anything

And me, I spend a lot of time pickin' flowers up on Choctaw Ridge

And drop 'em into the muddy water off the Tallahatchie Bridge

I drop 'em into the muddy water off the Tallahatchie Bridge