Ode to Billy Joe
by Bobbie Gentry (1967)


It was the third of June, a-nother sleepy, dusty, del-ta day-ay-ay-ay—
I was out choppin’ cotton and my brother was bal—in’ hay-ay-ay-ay—
 . | G7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And at dinner-time we stopped and walked back to the house to e-e-eat.
 . | D7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And momma hollered at the back door, “Y’all re-member to wipe your fe-e-eet.”
 . | G7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And then she said, “I got some news this mornin’ from Choc-taw Ri—i—i—idge—
 . | D7\ --- --- --- | C7\ --- --- --- | D7 . . . . . . .
To-day, Billy Joe Mc-Allis-ter jumped off the Talla-hach-ee Bri—idg’e.”

Papa said to Mama as he passed a-round the black-eyed pea-e-ease—
“Well, Billy Joe never had a lick of sense. Pass the biscuits plea-e-ease—
 . | G7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
There’s five more acres in the lower forty I’ve got to plo-o-ow—ow.”
 . | D7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And Mama said it was a shame a-bout Billy Joe any—how-o-ow—
 . | G7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Seems like nothing’ ever comes to no good up on Choc-taw Ri—i—i—idge—
 . | D7\ --- --- --- | C7\ --- --- --- | D7 . . . . . . .
And now Billy Joe Mc-Allis-ter’s jumped off the Talla-hach-ee Bri—idg’e.

Brother said he recol-lected when he and Tom and Billy Joe-o-o—oe—
Put a frog down my back at the Carroll County picture show-o-o—ow—
 . | G7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And wasn’t I talkin’ to him after church last Sun-day night-i—i—ght?
 . | D7 . . . . . | . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
“I’ll have a-nother piece of apple pie. You know, it don’t seem right-i—i—ght
I saw him at the sawmill yesterday on Choc-taw Ridge.

And now you tell me Billy Joe’s jumped off the Talla-hach-ee Bridge.

Momma said to me, “Child, what’s happened to your appearance? I’ve been cooking 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 throwin’ somethin’ off the Talla-hach-ee Bridge.

A year has 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 goin’ round, Papa caught it and he died last spring.

And now Momma doesn’t seem to want to do much of anything.

And me, I spend a lot of time pickin’ flowers up on Choc-taw Ridge.

And drop them in to the muddy water off the Talla-hach-ee Bridge.