

## **Billy Joe, Jilly Jo and the Flower of Dew**

(An adaption of the Grimm Fairy Tale: "Jorinda and Joringel")



Back in the days when folks were far between in the rugged backwoods of Kentucky, there were rumors of an ugly old woman, living alone way back in the boondocks. Few, if any, had ever laid eyes on her,

Further it was rumored that during the day she became a cat or owl, her yellow eyes seeking prey, but at night she became again that ugly woman whose nose touched her chin.

It was said that there was a spell over her cluster of shacks that froze men in their tracks and kept them away from her huts.

The old wives' tales said that she took her spite out on pretty girls and would change them into birds to sing for her pleasure and that she had many cages in her shacks with beautiful birds in them.

Now the old woman had made her woods one of the prettiest places in those hills - laurel blooms and lacy ferns, dogwood, and Redbud and the Tulip Trees. A fragrant place filled with the singing of birds that enticed young lovers.

Young folks were warned to not go into that neck of the woods, lest her sorcery should capture them. And from time to time, young couples would disappear, most thought they might've just eloped off somewhere, but perhaps there was some truth to these tales.

### **The Young Lovers**

Billy Joe and Jilly Jo were young sweethearts, both in their teens.

Folks were not sure what she saw in him. Billy Joe was gangly, a bit shy and awkward, and everyone thought Jilly Jo was the prettiest girl in these here mountains.

Billy Joe was Jilly Jo's first love and all Billy Joe could think about was Jilly Jo.

Like all sweethearts, they liked to slip off together, holding hands, whispering wishes and dreams.

So one day, caught up with each other, they slipped off from a hill folk social gathering wandering deep into the Spring time woods, holding hands. Eyes only for each other, Not paying attention to where they were going, back into the "toolies." The woods were lovely, flowers, muffled birdsong back in the trees. enticing them even further into the woods.

Hesitantly at first, they share an occasional kiss, or touch.

She daydreamed about their future, as his desire for her grew stronger.

His kisses and touches becoming more insistent - till like a startled bird, she pushed him away - he was coming on too strong and she was tearfully frightened by the churning aroused within them.

Bewildered by her unexpected tears, Billy Joe, with a start, realized that the sun was sinking behind the mountain, and they were lost in the woods. As he looked about, he spotted a cluster of old shacks through the tulip trees, and then he remembered the old tales.

Meanwhile, still teary-eyed, Jilly Jo was nervously singing a sad ballad.

*The Ring dove sang from the Willow Spray. well-a-day well-a-day.  
It mourned for the fate of its' darling mate. Vee-er Vee-er Vee-er.*

when her singing changed into the trilling song of a Verry Thrush, a cascade of notes in the dusk. Billy Joe looked about for his Jilly Jo, but she was no longer there. Just a little brown bird with a speckled breast. on a branch near where she had stood.

#### The Witch casts her spells

Just then a screech-owl swooped around them on silent wings, crying  
"Tu Whu! Tu Whu! Tu Whu!" It flew into a bush and out came an ugly woman with intense blazing yellow eyes.

*"Till my pretty is fast, and into my net is cast, There stay, There stay!  
When the charm is around her and the spell has bound her. Then Go away! Go Away!"*

Billy Joe was powerless, unable to move, not knowing what to do.

*"Into this cage, My pretty one, you belong,  
come sing for me your sweet sad songs"*

as she cast a net over the bird, and put it into a wicker cage. Billy Joe pleaded and begged her to give him back his Jilly Jo, but she just cackled and laughed and warned him

*"Don't ever come back to my shacks - men are not welcome here - You will never see her again."* And she took the cage into one of her shacks and closed its door.

#### Billy Joe Wanders

Finally as the moon shined down, he found himself freed from the spell, grieving over his lost love, and their foolishness.

He wandered a while, trying to think of a way to get her back, or find someone to help. But what could he do? He couldn't go back to his home, after what had happened - who would believe him? They would think he had done something with Jilly Jo.

So he found a village where he wasn't known and got work as a shepherd and farmhand for several years.

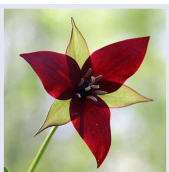
From time to time, he would hear a Thrush's song and think of Jilly Jo, and he would sometimes wander into the woods looking for the shacks and her, but finding neither.

He grew taller, into a strapping young man, hardened by work, still yearning for his first love

#### The Flower of Dew

Then one night he had a dream, of a red blossom with a pearl in its center. He dreamed he picked it, and used it to make things free from witches spell. When he woke, he kept thinking about it, and thought that that pearl could be a drop of dew in a flower in the woods.

He set out to find one - for nine days, he searched. Flowers were plentiful, So many in the woods: Yellows and Whites and Blues - Dutchman's Breeches, Pink Lady's Slippers, Bloodroot and Spiderwort and Trout Lily. But red wild flowers were so few. Especially any with a drop of dew.



Finally, early in the morning, he found one, a Scarlet Red Vasey's Trillium. With a big drop of dew in the center like a pearl. (Also known as the Trinity Flower) A circuit - riding preacher once said its three petals pointed to the Holy Trinity and the red color to the blood of Jesus. He plucked it and headed into the backwoods, to search out his lost love.

### Finding the Witch's Shacks, seeking his love

After a long day of roaming in the hills, drawn by the fragrance of the trees and the songs of many birds singing, he found the witches shacks just as the dusk was settling on the hills.

With the flower in hand, he approached them, Nothing stopped him, he was no longer frozen in indecision, he opened door after door - there were many so cages of birds.

He walked among rooms of cages filled with so many beautiful birds.

There were Scarlet Tanagers, Rose Breasted Grosbeaks, Carolina Chickadees, Nuthatches, Vireos and Bush Tits, Warblers, and Thrushes of all sorts.

Where was his Jilly Jo? That little brown bird with a speckled breast!

And there was all sorts of bird song:

The "*chick burr*" of Scarlet Tanagers, the "*sweetly whistled song*" of Rose Beaked Grosbeaks, The "*raspy songs*" of Warblers, the "*Hear me, see me, here I am*" songs of Blue headed Vireos, the "*Chica dee-dee-dee*" of the Chickadees, the cheery "*Peter Peter Peter*" of the tufted titmouse. The room was filled with all their songs, it was hard to tell them apart.

Which was his Jilly Jo?

### Another Confrontation with the witch

Just then, all the birds went silent as an screech owl swooped into the hut and changed into the snarling old witch woman who screamed at him in rage.

"You don't belong here, you can't have my pretties!"

But with Billy Jo, holding that red flower of dew before him, the witch just cowered helplessly. Though she raged at him, she was Unable to cast a spell. She just crouched in a corner, snarling. Her lustful power over her pretties was now broken.

Just then the trilling song of a Verry Thrush erupted into a cascade of notes and drew him to a cage with a brown bird with a speckled breast. Who had recognized him. Her Billy Joe had come for her at last.

Billy Joe opened the cage and offered the flower to her, and as its beak sipped the dew, his Jilly Jo suddenly stood before him, still as beautiful as ever, now confident in his love for her.

They embraced. (And kissed, of course!!) With the witch helplessly watching, they then opened the cages and set the others birds free. Billy Joe took Jilly Jo home, where they were married, and lived happily together many years.

As did a good many other lads, whose maidens had been forced to sing in that old fairy's cages by themselves, much longer than they liked, waiting for their boys to grow up into men.

Eldrbarry's story, "**Billy Joe, Jilly Jo and the Flower of Dew**" was adapted from several translations of Grimm's "Jorinda and Joringel" (Hunt, Taylor, Zipes, Pullman), and an Appalachian version told by Aunt Lizbeth Fields to Marie Campbell (in her Tales from the Cloud-Walking Country, 1958) There have been numerous illustrated picture books with this particular Grimm Tale, and several video tellings, animations and even films as well.

In adapting this tale, I kept the "Jo" of "Jorinda and Joringel" in the middle names of the young lovers, and built up a bit more heir backstory. I picked up on a theme of love coming to age. The names of Appalachian treee, birds and flowers were used. I used a "bird whistle" twice in the story as Jilly Jo erupts into song.

