

Billy

by David Head

Geraldine said she couldn't understand her son. She and Charles had awlays been good to the boy, but somehow he had "turned out wrong." His two older brothers, Geraldine said (and she had told Billy countless times) had exactly the same hardships as Billy, but now one was a respectable Certified Public Accountant, while the other was going to get his M.D. degree shortly. And where was Billy? Gone off to Chicago for a year to music conservatory, then completely disappearing for six months, and then suddenly reappearing, with that beard, those ridiculous clothes and a completely insufferable, nasty attitude. "Had he been a problem child all along?" People asked her. "In a way, yes." Billy had always stuttered, she imagined as a result of some birth defect, and it seemed that the only way he could really express himself fluently was in his music. He loved the piano. "But that was where his problem began," she said. "Billy kept wanting to play this modern stuff—'experimental jazz' he called it. Of course we put our foot down, and insisted he stick to the classics, and to respectable composers. He used to get very angry with us and shake his fist, and could hardly speak for stuttering; which was unusual, as he was always so quiet. But he seemed to get over it, finally. We all thought he was going to do well when we sent him off to Chicago to a good, respectable school. But now—his attitude, his clothes, those friends of his! Disgusting! I finally told Charles to tell him to leave and never come back, after Billy had come home that time and literally tore the house to pieces for no reason at all! My beautiful purple drapes, my antique crystal glassware, my new leather lounge chair—all ruined! Well, he's gone now. The last we heard he was in Ohio, working in a factory, and living with a bunch of homosexuals and Negroes and God knows what else! I just can't keep from wondering about him, and what went wrong. He's just not the same Billy we used to know."

