The Use of a .38

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Abstract

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by Karl Schilling

English, Grad

THE BELLS above the door rang and Bendix Fergeson looked up from his sweeping to see five grade schoolers troop in. As usual they were led by Eric Samuelson, the son of the town’s only remaining plumber. And there was Connie (Conrad) Pritchard who always had his hands in his pockets, Alex Sidney, the lawyer’s boy; Jimmy Hadenfelt was already eyeing the candy rack, and Buddy Ruhrs stood morosely by the door.

“Good afternoon, boys.”

Eric spoke. “Hi, Mr. Fergeson, how’s business?”

“Fine, Eric, fine. But I had another accident today cutting boxes.”

“That’s too bad, Mr. Fergeson. What were you opening up?”

Bendix noticed a stranger come to the door, look in, and walk away. “It was a shipment of Chipos. Cut right through one of the Chipos boxes.”

“That’s a shame,” said Eric. The boys, except Buddy, nodded. Buddy stayed by the door looking down at the floor.

“I’ve got the box under the counter here if you boys

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want it. Shame to waste it.” Bendix took the box of potato chips out from behind the counter and held it out to Eric.

Eric took it and looked at the slit box. “You sure dug into that one, Mr. Fergeson.”

“Getting careless in my old age, I guess.”

“Well, thanks a lot . . .” Eric held up the box to say for the potato chips, and the rest of the boys nodded; then they all filed out of the store.

Bendix smiled, and shaking his head, he rang up a sale on the cash register and put in thirty-nine cents to keep his records straight.

The stranger who had come to the door before and turned away came in after the boys left.

Bendix smiled, “Remember what you came for?” He expected a smile in return, but the young man, with a whiskered and acne-pitted face, remained tight-lipped as he strode to the counter.

“Empty that cash register quick.”

Bendix didn’t react, couldn’t decide how. The stranger took a kitchen knife from under his jacket. “I mean it.” The young man looked angry now and still Bendix could only stare.

“Will you hurry!” The man grabbed Bendix by the collar and pulled him forward, then pushed hard and Bendix fell backwards against the cigarette rack. “I want it now!” He hid his knife from the street by holding it under the counter. He glanced nervously out to the street. He bit his lip. Bendix rang open the cash register, trembling now and fumbling. He could feel a chest-paining fear spreading as from a needle and he couldn’t make his fingers stop shaking. He heard the man swear and suddenly the man grabbed him by the back of the collar and Bendix felt himself being pulled back. The man pulled Bendix back away from the cash register and pushed him out of the way. Bendix fell, his glasses came off and he reached for them on the floor. The man turned from the cash register hurriedly and caught his foot against Bendix’s leg and fell on his own knee; the money went from his hands and scattered on the floor. He jumped to his feet. “God damn you!”

Bendix scarcely saw the young man move before he
felt the kick in his ribs. Bendix fell back gasping for breath but unable to work his chest from the pain. The man was hurriedly gathering the money he’d dropped. Bendix’s eyes were watered and blurred, the son of a bitch, the son of a bitch . . . he rocked back and forth from the pain. Then he saw his pistol on its shelf under the counter. He grabbed it and thrusting his pistol forward as if throwing a punch, he fired. The man was reaching for a ten dollar bill under a cart when the bullet splintered the mop board. The man pivoted around on his knee wide-eyed as Bendix fired again and the man doubled up so quickly his forehead knocked the floor. A large tear in the back of the man’s jacket near the small of his back turned quickly red. He stayed doubled up, shuddering, rocking, huddled protectively over a growing pool of blood.

Bendix sat on his sofa, his wife beside him, and waited for the sheriff to come. She had her hand on his. Bendix’s eyes were fixed on the arm of the overstuffed chair across the room. Years of scratching absently with his fingernails had left a deep indentation in the wood; his fingers began to work his pant leg.

“Do you think you could eat some soup?”
“No, thank you, Leah.”
“I could make some tea.”
“No. Or maybe that would help.” Leah needed to do something. She went into the kitchen and began to fill the pot. He twisted and felt a sharp pain; he sucked breath.

“Are you all right?”
“I’m okay, really. I just twisted, and my ribs hurt.”
Leah came into the living room. “Let me see.”
“The doctor said he’d be coming here tonight.”
“Let me see.” She was already unbuttoning his shirt.

“Don’t Leah. I’ll do it.” He put her hands off and unbuttoned his shirt while she looked over him, worried. Her eyes widened at the bruise he revealed. “Why you’re all black and blue. I’m going to call Dr. Campbell.”

“Leah, please. Dr. Hanson will be over soon. I’m sure.”
Someone rattled the screen door. “That might be the doctor now, Leah.”

“It better be.” She scowled and went to the door.
A voice came from outside. "Mrs. Fergeson? I'm Carl Hendricks, Camden county sheriff."
"Come in, Sheriff."
The sheriff was a tall man and thin. Bendix noticed he looked tired; he seemed to favor his right foot as if it were sore. He carried a clipboard in one hand and his close-brimmed stetson in the other. "You're Mr. Fergeson?"
Bendix began to button his shirt. "That's right."
"Mind if I sit down?"
"I'm sorry, Sheriff. Of course." Bendix motioned to the overstuffed chair.
The tea kettle began to whistle and Leah rushed into the kitchen. As the Sheriff eased into the chairs she called back, "Would you like some tea?"
"Yes, please." He put his hat on the floor and shifted in the chair until he was comfortable. His hand found the indentation in the chair arm and his fingers rubbed in it absently. "Do you feel up to talking about what happened?"
Bendix nodded.
"All right." The sheriff leaned forward in his chair. He took a deep breath. "First, Mr. Fergeson, let me explain to you that anything you may say to me may be used against you in a court of law."
Bendix was dumbfounded. The sheriff didn't understand.
"Further, you are entitled to call a lawyer and have him present during your questioning. If you would like to call one now, I'd be happy to wait."
Leah came in. "What would Bendix need a lawyer for?"
"I don't know, Ma'am. Maybe he doesn't. But a man has been shot . . . ."
Leah challenged, "A thief!"
"Please, Mrs. Fergeson. Your husband may have been justified in shooting the man, but it's not my job to decide that."
Bendix recovered a little. "It's all right, Leah. Go ahead, Sheriff. I don't think I need a lawyer."
He sighed. "Okay, Mr. Fergeson, tell me what happened."
Leah cast a worried look to Bendix and he nodded. Re-
luctantly she returned to the kitchen and her tea. But before Bendix could say anything there was the sound of the screen door spring and then a knock. "I can get it." Bendix eased out of the sofa and went to the door. It was Doctor Hanson. "How is he, doctor?"

"The coroner's with him now. Are you all right?"

"I think he may have hurt my ribs."

The doctor came in, nodded to the sheriff and to Leah who was coming in with tea. "Well, sit down, Bendix, and we'll have a look."

"Would you like some tea, Doctor?"

"No, thanks, Leah. I have to be getting home right after I examine Bendix. His voice became business-like, "Open your shirt, Bendix."

The sheriff sat quietly sipping his tea while the doctor gave a quick but efficient examination. In only a few minutes he had wrapped Bendix's chest in an elastic bandage and was putting three pills into an envelope. He turned to Leah. "These pills are sedatives. They'll put Bendix asleep. Just give him one before bed. If he gets a fever call me, it might mean internal bleeding. His ribs aren't broken but some cartilage may be damaged in one of the ribs. Keep him comfortable and keep the bandages on except when he showers. Bendix, you might use this as an excuse to stay home from work for a change."

"I can't do that."

"Then don't lift anything heavy for awhile. Maybe Leah can help for a couple of days."

Leah brightened. "Yes, I could."

"I do have to run. Goodnight, Leah, Bendix, Sheriff."

When the doctor had left, Bendix turned to the sheriff again. "I'm sorry for the interruption."

The sheriff sighed again. "That's quite all right. Now, about when did the man enter your store?"

The questioning took almost two hours and when the sheriff left, Bendix was drained. He settled back in the sofa. Leah came and sat by him.

"Is that the end of it, Bendix?"

"He said I'll have to come to his office in Camden and write out a statement."
"But that will end it, won't it?"
"What do you mean?"
"They aren't going to charge you with anything?"
"I don't think so. I think the sheriff was just going through a formality; don't worry about it."

They sat quietly for a moment. Then Leah patted Bendix's hand once and got up. "We got a letter from Edith today, would you like to see it?" Bendix nodded. She left and came back with the letter and a glass of water. "You should take your pill now."

Bendix swallowed the pill dry and then drank a little water. Leah gathered the cups and saucers and went into the kitchen while Bendix read easily the long familiar back-hand of his daughter. Leah called from the kitchen, "She said Stevie might go to a fast-class in mathematics."

"Yes. I'm reading that."

"And she says they're thinking of coming up the 20th."
"Uh-huh." Bendix remembered his young grandson in a cowboy suit. "Draw, Grandpa!" and the boy said bang and Bendix felt his own hand jerk and the man doubled and his head hit the floor. The young man breathed in shakily and rocked unsteadily. Bendix folded the letter. "I hope they can make it. I think I'll turn in."

With the help of the sedative, Bendix slept deeply. He woke groggy and he was puzzled for a second about his bandages. Then he remembered and the last night's exhaustion returned. He could hear Leah in the kitchen, pans clattering. He had once accused her of putting pans in the sink in the morning and stirring them. He'd said that years ago, a happy remark that still made him smile when hearing the kitchen sounds. A smile tweaked the corners of his mouth, even that morning. The clock on the night stand said 7:00 o'clock, half an hour past Bendix's rising time. He eased out of bed, careful of his ribs, and hurriedly shaved, dressed, and went downstairs. "You shouldn't have let me sleep, Leah."

"You needed it. Sit down and I'll have your breakfast in a moment."

"I get quite a few customers that first half hour in the morning."

"A few people who forgot their eggs. Here's your break-
Fall, 1970

Bendix was surprised at his appetite and felt a little guilty, a little calloused. He ate hurriedly.

"Be sure you don’t rush out without your coat. I’m afraid Indian summer is about over."

Bendix nodded.

"I thought I’d come down right after I washed the breakfast dishes."

"Yes, that should be about right."

Leah stopped working, and Bendix put down his fork.

There was blood on the floor, it would no longer be bright, liquid, red. A dark scab on the wooden floor. He broke the silence by getting up from the table.

"I wouldn’t mind doing it for you."

"It’s all right. I know how to take care of that sort of thing."

Beef fed into the grinder, blood laves over the top onto the counter, the young man bent over a growing pool, his handful of paper money pressed against the wound, and the pool grows. A reddened dollar drops and lays in the pool between the man’s knees. He grabbed his coat, kissed Leah quickly and hurried out the back door and down the narrow flagstone walk that twisted around the house to the driveway. Bendix walked the four blocks to his store leaving the car for Leah. He was out of breath by the time he got to his store. He unlocked the door and swung it open. The bells jangled. The blood was as he had supposed, hard, and dark. There was no trail of blood, just smears left by the feet of those who had put the man on a stretcher. Most of it could be scraped up, and what hadn’t soaked in came up with soapy water. By the time Leah arrived there was only the wet, dark spot, and Bendix was putting away the mop.

Together they opened the store but business was noticeably slower through the morning. At 10:10 o’clock Leah went across the street to visit with Clara who ran the cafe. She brought back a couple of beef roast dinners which they ate between customers. At one thirty they had the store to themselves.

"Business is really slow today, Leah."

"People probably think you’re closed today and resting like you should be."
"You know I can’t close. It only takes a couple of trips to a store to start a habit and I don’t want my customers to go to Wally’s Mart."

"I suppose." She leaned back against the counter and began to fiddle idly with the strings of her white apron. "Bendix?"

"Hmm."

"I’ve been thinking. Maybe you should go see Mr. Sidney."

"About yesterday?"

"Yes. He could tell you if there was anything wrong with what you did."

"I suppose so."

"Why don’t you go see him? I’ve been worried ever since the sheriff talked to you like that."

"I suppose it would be a good idea to know for sure if I was in the right."

"Why don’t you go now? I can take care of things while you’re gone."

"It would be a relief."

"I really think you should."

Bendix untied his apron and stuffed it under the counter. "I think I will." He put his hand on hers and squeezed lightly and quickly. "I’ll be back soon." She nodded and he got his overcoat and left for the lawyer’s office.

He was greeted when he got there by Mrs. Sidney who did her husband’s secretarial work and acted as receptionist. "Hello, Mr. Fergeson. Can we help you?"

"Could I see Mr. Sidney for a few minutes?"

"I’ll see." She flipped the intercom switch. "Honey? Are you able to see Mr. Fergeson?"

Alex Sidney’s voice came flatly through. "Sure, send him in."

Mrs. Sidney smiled and motioned to the door.

Bendix found Mr. Sidney hunched over some papers on his desk. "I hope I’m not interrupting anything."

"Oh, no. I’m just going over my treasurer’s report to the Lion’s Club. Have a seat, Bendix."

Bendix sat down on the edge of a cushioned chair in front of the lawyer’s desk.
“What can I do for you, Bendix?”
“I’d like to have your legal opinion of what happened yesterday.”

The lawyer frowned and leaned back in his swivel chair.
“You mean the robbery?”
Bendix nodded.
“Well, just what sort of advice do you have in mind?”
“I want to know if it was all right for me to shoot that man.”
“Well, Bendix, you know I’m not a criminal lawyer, but what makes you ask? Do you think you might be in some kind of trouble over this?”
“We were a little worried.”
“WE?”
“Leah and I. You see, the sheriff wanted to know if I wanted a lawyer present when he talked to me, and said anything I said could be used against me.”
“Oh, I think that was just a formality.”
“I did too. But it makes you think.”
“I suppose so.” He took a cigarette out of a box on his desk and silently offered Bendix one. Bendix shook his head.
“Have you heard anything from the District Attorney’s office?”
“No.”
“Well, let’s just see if I’ve got this straight. I heard that a man came into your store armed with a gun. . . .”
“A knife.”
“Okay, a knife, and then made you empty the cash register.”
“Well, he took the money out.”
“Okay. But he was armed, and he did try to rob your store.”
“Yes.”
“Did he threaten you with the knife? Point it at you or anything?”
“He pointed it at me.”

The lawyer flicked the ash from his cigarette into an ash tray. It was walnut and looked like something Alex Jr. made in school. “Well, Bendix, it looks to me as if you don’t have a thing to worry about.”
Bendix settled back in his chair.

“What I’d do if I were you is, I’d wait for the District Attorney’s office to make the first move, not that I think they will; but if they do, then call a criminal lawyer. There’s a pretty good one in Camden named Hovick, pretty smart for a Polack. . . .”

“But you don’t think I’ll need one. . . .”

“No. I think it’s pretty clear you were protecting your property and maybe your life. I can’t imagine any District Attorney charging you with anything, they like to get re-elected you know, and people wouldn’t like to see a man brought to court for shooting a thief.”

“But could he?”

The lawyer frowned. “Well, I suppose he could. But I’m sure he wouldn’t, and I don’t think he could make any charges stick. You do have a permit for your pistol, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Then really, Bendix, I don’t see that you have anything at all to worry about.”

Bendix sighed.

The lawyer smiled. “Relieved?”

“Very much.” Bendix stood up. “Thank you very much.”

The lawyer stood up and walked around his desk, then guided Bendix out with his hand on Bendix’s shoulder. “Like I say, I don’t see any problem for you, but if something does come up, this guy Hovick is the man to call.”

“Thanks again. What do I owe you?”

“A couple of dollars will be fine, Bendix.” He opened the door to the reception room. “Take care now.”

Bendix left two dollars with the lawyer’s wife and hurried to the store to tell Leah what Mr. Sidney had said. She would be relieved.

Leah helped at the store for nearly a week and Bendix found it a little lonely at the store when she’d gone. They had both enjoyed her being at the store but Leah found herself behind in her housework and sewing circle was due to meet at her house that Wednesday. Wednesday night Bendix almost suggested that she come back but for some reason
didn’t and after the next day, he was accustomed enough to her being gone that he didn’t think seriously of asking again.

By the end of two weeks the effects of the incident in Bendix’s store had become few and unapparent. People no longer made furtive glances at the stain on the floor, and children no longer asked about what had happened. The five boys that had come on occasion to see if they could profit from Bendix’s mistakes no longer stopped by. They had come the next two days after the incident and asked questions about what had happened and Bendix had answered briefly, reluctantly. He didn’t give them anything because Leah was around. After the second day they quit coming.

Bendix had expected to have trouble sleeping after he’d used his third pill but found he slept well the fourth night and the fifth. It wasn’t until Leah quit working at the store that he began to sleep fitfully. During the day he would catch himself brooding, sometimes staring at the stain. His worst night came after he had suggested to Leah that the store could use modernizing, maybe a tile floor.

That night Bendix eased out of bed, careful not to wake Leah. He made his way quietly through the dark bedroom to an old easy chair and sank into it. He looked out the window. There was a bit of a moon and he could see the outline of an old oak. Leah’s breathing gave the room a calm.

A young woman entered the store whom Bendix didn’t recognize. He was always happy to see a stranger in the store; there was always the chance of a new steady customer and Bendix was only too painfully aware of how much his business had slowed over the years. He didn’t complain. The slowing had come along with his lessening need for money as Jack, then William, and finally Edith had married and moved away. After William left, Bendix took out the meat counter; when Edith married, he decided to switch over to staples almost exclusively because they wouldn’t spoil and could stand to move slowly. Both changes hurt but not as much as having to throw out spoiled meat and vegetables. He had quit expecting business to improve greatly years ago. Now, he was just hoping for six more years of decent income until he could apply for social security. Every new customer helped.

The woman issued a sense of tightness. Her hair was
pulled back in a skin-stretching bun and her lips made a
tight, straight line. She was smoking and drew in short puffs
that she didn’t inhale but blew out immediately in a fine
stream. As she pushed her cart through the store her fingers
tapped a rhythm on the cart handle. Her blouse was grayed
white and had a small hole in the back.

She was the only person in the store at the time and she
looked like she would be shopping awhile, so Bendix used
the opportunity to straighten out the pile of bottles people
had brought in for credit on purchases. When she approached
the counter, Bendix stopped what he was doing and began to
ring up groceries. He smiled at her. “Hello.”

She said nothing but nodded and stared at the stain on
the floor. Bendix noticed the muscles on her cheeks flexed
nervously; she was grinding her teeth.

“Will that be all, ma’am?”

She answered tersely still staring at the stain, “This
time.”

“Well, sounds like you’ll be back then; I hope so. That
will be nine fifty-seven.”

“I’m not paying.”

Oh, Lord. “Ma’am, I’m afraid I can’t sell on credit.”

“You owe me.” She shifted her eyes to Bendix. “You
killed my husband.” She gathered the sack in her arms and
rushed from the store.

Bendix made no attempt to stop her but only watched
her leave, feeling helpless. He turned away from the sight of
her going down the street but glanced down at the stain and
had to pull his eyes away from that too; he turned to the cash
register and saw nine fifty-seven, turned too, away from that
and stared at the top of the counter. He stroked the counter
top with the palm of his hand, then slammed his palm onto
the counter.

“Bendix?”

“Yes.”

“What’s wrong?”

Bendix looked up from his book. Leah was working on
some needle point. He looked back at his book. “Nothing.”

She worked quietly for a few moments. “You shouldn’t
let it bother you. No one thinks you did anything wrong.”
"It isn't that."
"What then?"
Bendix gave up. "The man's wife came in today."
Leah looked up wide eyed. "Into the store?"
"She took some groceries without paying."
"She can't do that."
Bendix shrugged.
"Why did you let her? She has no right to expect anything from you."
"She just took them. Leah, I just didn't know what to do."
Leah went back to her needle point for a few minutes.
"What if she comes back?"
"I thought I'd just not bag anything for her."
"That's sensible." She put aside her work and came to sit beside her husband. He put his book on the coffee table and put his arm around her. They sat quietly for a time.
Indian Summer came to an end abruptly in a damp chill. Snow was forecast and Bendix brought his overshoes to the store in the morning to wear back home that night. In the afternoon, the woman came in wearing a tan cloth coat and Bendix didn't notice her at first. It was the four o'clock rush, the longer of the two rushes and the busier. He didn't see her until she came to the counter. She put her groceries on the counter and looked up at Bendix, silently challenging him.
"Are you going to pay for these?" As Bendix asked the question, the people around the counter looked away, picking their own objects in the store to stare at.
"No."
"I let you take the groceries last time but I can't let you keep on . . ."
"You owe me."
"I do not owe you anything."
The woman took a step back and with her face thrust forward screamed, "You killed my husband!"
"He was a thief!"
"People aren't killed for that!"
"I have a right to protect my property." Bendix was trying not to yell now.
"You're insured!"
"You don't understand . . ."
"You don't have to protect anything. You're insured."
"I have a right . . ."
"You have shit!"
"I had to defend myself."
"He had the money, he wasn't after you. I know. I heard. You just killed him."
"I had a right . . ."
"Why did you kill my husband!?"
"He pushed me! He kicked me! He came in here and he . . ."
"Murderer!"

Bendix recoiled, backed up against the cigarettes again and the display teetered and he had to correct it and he felt clumsy again, clumsy and scared again, and he turned and yelled, "Get out! Get out of my store! Get out!"

The woman ran out into the street and was gone.
A man put his hand on Bendix's shoulder. "Take it easy, Ben. We all understand."

Bendix looked around at his customers. No one avoided his look so Bendix calmed. "I'm not what she said."
"We know, Ben. We know."

He called Leah and she came down and tended the store. He went home slowly, walking. When he reached home, he sat down heavily on the sofa without taking his coat off, and thought. *The woman screamed murderer . . . The lawyer flicks the ash from his cigarette, "it looks to me as if you don’t have a thing to worry about.” Murderer!*

Bendix got up and took off his coat, then hung it in the closet. *I had a right . . . You got shit . . . it looks to me as if you don’t have a thing to worry about . . . He was a thief . . . People aren’t killed for that . . . He went into the kitchen and took a glass from the cupboard. He got the milk out of the refrigerator and poured himself half a glass, then sat down at the kitchen table and took a sip. Murderer.*

A paper sack was lying folded on the table and he spread it out in front of him. With a ball point from his shirt pocket he wrote: 

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Self defense he was leaving
protect my property insured
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He was a thief not a killing offense
it was legal legal isn’t always right
he kicked me

He stared at the paper for a long time. Finally he groaned and held his forehead with his hands.

When Leah came back she sat beside him quietly. “Are you all right?”

“I’m feeling better.”

“Good enough to have some supper?”

“I don’t think so.”

“You could tell me about it.”

“Leah . . . she was right.”

“About what?”

“Leah, I didn’t kill that man because he was stealing. Not to protect anything, not to protect myself. I killed him because I was angry, because he had hurt me, scared me.”

Leah began to shake her head and she was on the verge of crying. “You shouldn’t think that way, you . . .”

“Leah, she was right.” Bendix started to say something else but stopped and shook his head; when Leah put her arms around him, he let her, and he cried.

Later that evening, Bendix phoned the sheriff, who reluctantly gave him the address of the woman, and then drove to the store. Soft, wet snow had begun to fall and Bendix had to drive slowly. When he reached the store he quietly went inside and gathered together what he thought would be a week’s supply of groceries, counted them up and put the tab in a drawer under the cash register. He loaded the food in the back of his car and drove to the woman’s address. She answered the door with a tired yes. Then she recognized him and her eyes widened. She saw the sacks in his arms. “Go away.”

“Wait, I . . .”

“Go away!” The door slammed. Bendix went back to the car.

The roads were becoming steadily more treacherous with the continued soft snow, and Bendix, distracted, was slow in getting back to the store. He replaced all the goods he’d taken from the shelves. Leah was waiting for him when he reached home. “How did it go?”
“She wouldn’t take them.”

Leah put her arms around him again. “I’m sorry. What are you going to do now?”

“I don’t know. I thought about turning myself in but it wouldn’t do any good. No one would convict me, and I couldn’t leave you alone anyway. She won’t let me help her. I’m sure she never will. I think I’m just going to have to live with it.”

“We’ll see later. Why don’t we turn in? Maybe you could sleep a little. You look so tired.”

They quietly changed for bed, Bendix in the bedroom and Leah in the bathroom, the old habit of modesty followed still, and without thought, and after they had kissed goodnight, Bendix made a pretense of rest until Leah’s breathing told him she was asleep. The he eased out of bed and settled down again in his chair to look out the window. The moon was up and reflected by the new snow and Bendix could see clearly yards into the night.

Mr. Schilling, in the “Use of a .38,” embodies several themes. One, crystalized in the words: “because he hurt me, scared me,” illuminates one of man’s key psychological motivations. This motivation—to destroy what degrades or humiliates you—is fathered by the desire of every man to have worth, to think himself of value, and to have others think he is of value. Mr. Schilling’s short story captures one of the evanescent, and seldom admitted reasons why man strikes out at his fellow man. His main character, Bendix, has the law, “right,” defending him; his freedom, his rights have been violated by the robber, so Bendix acts—the man is killed. But Bendix didn’t act out of protection for his rights, for his impaired freedom, he acted because he had been scared and humiliated. So Bendix is put in the precarious position, faced by too few in this world, of having society say his act is justified, of having all the laws and all the opinions saying he acted justly, but knowing himself, that he was wrong, that he acted from fear and humiliation. Bendix must live on, live with the knowledge that he was not justified in his action and that he will never be punished for it, that people will judge him right when he knows he has been wrong. Bendix’s type of man lives on today in the man who accepts totally the responsibility of his actions, who seeks no excuse for his weakness, who lives each day accepting again and again his frailty and his responsibility.—R.E.W.