

"A MATHEMATICAL CERTAINTY"  
(A SHORT STORY -  
WRITTEN NOV. 25, 1949)

<u>SENT</u>	<u>MAG</u>	<u>RETURN</u>
Nov. 28, 1949.	Harpers	Dec. 12 min.
Dec. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Collins'	Dec. 27 "
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Jan. 24	True	Feb. 6 "

Fri. Nov. 25, 1949. 1st. draft

Here Maddock and I had been <sup>deep</sup> hunting together <sup>along years</sup> for nearly fifteen years -- and <sup>now</sup> all of a sudden he wanted to kill me...

### A Mathematical Certainty

2 draft

~~I first began to suspect that Maddock intended to kill me on our first night in our camp.~~

It was on our way to ~~that I first~~ first

~~It was on our first day in our camp I began to~~ clearly realized <sup>I think</sup> that Maddock wanted to kill me. There was nothing

really tangible. <sup>at first</sup> nothing one could put his finger on; <sup>nothing</sup> one could prove in court. No, it was

~~It was~~ more of a feeling than anything else. <sup>fact, this</sup> strange feeling started before Maddock and I ever got <sup>into the woods</sup> to camp. ~~It~~ me see,

~~where was it?~~ We had started from Detroit early the day before, practically daylight and we had made

~~on the ferry, headed north~~ We were <sup>late</sup> crossing coming across the Straits of Mackinac with all the other deer hunters. Fred had bought

<sup>Detroit</sup> a newspaper from a kid on the Mackinaw side, and on the way across he ~~was~~ reading a deer hunting article by some

columnist. <sup>sure enough</sup> Then he read <sup>out loud</sup> where the columnist said that <sup>Northwoods</sup> an army of <sup>hunters</sup> would soon be in the <sup>woods</sup>

and that it was a "mathematical certainty" that some of them would be carried out <sup>first</sup> of the woods, ~~that~~ killed by other

hunters. <sup>to me with a sort of a smile.</sup>

I remember that he turned <sup>winking</sup> "Sure hope it doesn't happen to <sup>either</sup> us, Clyde," he said to me, and then he kind of chuckled. "Sort of gives

a fellow the willies -- makes him feel <sup>almost</sup> like turning back.

<sup>Just think</sup> "Yes, Fred," I said. <sup>Then I remember he turned and looked at me with a funny little</sup>

<sup>sort of smile.</sup> "Just think, <sup>Clyde</sup>, there's probably at least one guy on this <sup>very</sup> boat, <sup>and healthy</sup> happy and looking forward to a week of <sup>and relaxation</sup> hunting that'll be stone dead in a few days --

and he doesn't even know it. Brrr... Let's talk about something else."

"It's okay with me, Fred," I said, and that's when I got the first <sup>small</sup> flicker that Maddock <sup>intended</sup> was going to

pay me off. I'll tell you, it made me shiver with <sup>horror</sup>.

But we crossed <sup>on</sup> the ferry, picked up a few quick drinks and a <sup>hot</sup> sandwich in St. Ignace, and by

nightfall <sup>we</sup> had arrived in Chippewa, way up in the Upper Peninsula. <sup>By then</sup> Fred was so cheerful and full of

pre-deer-season guff  
It was the usual newspaper crap about the "Army of hunters."

good humor that I <sup>had quite</sup> forgot the <sup>fun</sup> feeling I had <sup>had</sup> earlier <sup>that day</sup>.  
~~I remember we registered~~ I remember we <sup>stored</sup> rolled our car  
and two-wheel trailer <sup>of stuff</sup> in a garage in Chippewa and got  
were lucky <sup>enough to get</sup> a room in the <sup>local</sup> hotel: the Palmer House it was called.  
I often wonder why these <sup>one-horse towns</sup> little dumps choose such  
high-sounding names for their miserable little bars and  
hotels...

"Let's raise a little <sup>middle-aged</sup> hell tonight, Clyde," Fred  
said after supper, as we sat around in the lobby listening  
to the other lower Michigan hunters <sup>bragging and</sup> shooting the breeze.  
"They tell me there's a hunter's ball <sup>tonight</sup> at the local  
Stork Club." Believe it or not -- that's what they call it."

"Okay by me, Fred," I said.

These hunters' balls are quite an institution  
<sup>northern</sup> in Michigan during the deer season. About all they are,  
really, is a big <sup>informal</sup> drunk where scores of perspiring, red-clad,  
~~flamboyant~~ rubber-booted <sup>deer</sup> hunters <sup>clutch and</sup> grab <sup>at</sup> the local  
virgins and wrangle them around an over-heated  
dancehall, while the local <sup>Mortimer Snerds</sup> stand around  
invidiously looking <sup>on</sup>.

<sup>at the dance</sup> I remember that there was a little dark <sup>one</sup>  
that both Fred and I went for that night. Her name  
was Hazel <sup>a divorcee</sup>. First Fred would dance with her and buy  
her a drink and <sup>of a babe</sup> then I would. We were <sup>giving her quite a play and</sup> both trying to take  
Hazel was the kind a man wanted to get out alone with alone.  
her home. I don't like to brag, but I finally sold her  
my bill of goods. Hazel went home with me instead of Fred.

I took Hazel home in a cab. But first we went  
and had some <sup>genuine</sup> top-grain cowhide steaks <sup>and french fries</sup> at a local  
restaurant. <sup>And soggy french fries.</sup> Naturally it was called ~~the~~ Lundy's. Then I stayed  
at Hazel's place longer than any married deerhunter ever  
should, and when I got back to the Palmer House  
even some of the <sup>sleeps</sup> chamber maids were beginning to stir. I  
remember how the <sup>wooden</sup> stairs creaked as I teetered up to our  
room. <sup>Tip-toeing down the carpeted hallway my rubber boots I saw</sup> There was a slit of light under Fred's door. I  
<sup>wrenched</sup> quickly opened the door and there was Fred sitting on the bed  
holding his ~~deer~~ rifle pointed at me! When he saw

me he quickly lowered the gun and began <sup>rubbing</sup> ~~polishing~~ it with a rag. I stood there in the door carefully watching him.

"Couldn't sleep," Fred mumbled. "Decided to ~~polish~~ oil <sup>up</sup> the old .30-30 a little."

"So I see," I said <sup>casually</sup> closing the door.

"How was the local Darnell?" Fred said.

"Adequate?" He stood <sup>yawning</sup> up and <sup>next to the bed</sup> leaned the rifle against the back corner of the old walnut bureau. I longed to grab it and see if it was loaded, but decided to wait until later.

*Wrote when after Fred was asleep.*

Fred turned to me, grinning. "Oh, so she was that good, was she, Mr. Eagle Scout?" He said. "So you won't talk, hey?"

"Fred," I said, "I ~~didn't~~ <sup>don't</sup> like the way you were holding that <sup>rifle</sup> gun at me when I first came in the door."

Fred looked at me, <sup>at first</sup> ~~then~~ incredulously and <sup>then</sup> a little angrily. Then he grinned <sup>at me</sup> and sat on the bed. He spoke

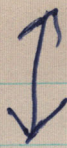
*quietly.*

"Clyde, you better hit the hay. You've had a large evening and you're tired... I told you I <sup>couldn't sleep and I</sup> was going over my rifle <sup>to pass the time</sup>. I didn't <sup>even</sup> hear you coming down the hall. And it isn't loaded anyway, naturally. But this is all too silly..." Listen, fella -- don't be that way. You got the dame and took her home -- and now I'm trying to shoot you for it. No, Clyde -- not over <sup>an eagle</sup> a little divorce neither <sup>of us</sup> even saw before tonight. <sup>we're knocked</sup> C'mon, Clyde, let's roll in. We've both had a long day." He held out his hand to me.

"Okay, Fred," I said, shaking <sup>his</sup> hands.

It was broad daylight when I <sup>awoke</sup> woke up. Fred was lying on his back with his mouth open, snoring. I carefully slid out of my side of the bed and <sup>quickly</sup> went over and looked at his rifle. It was empty. He must have waited until I went to sleep and <sup>then</sup> <sup>and</sup> unloaded it. I had meant to stay <sup>away</sup> awake and catch him at it...

"Fred," I said, <sup>gently</sup> pushing him in the ribs. "Fred, get up. It's daylight in the swamp. Let's get up and head for deer camp."   
 ↓ Space.



On account of the swamps and windfalls we

The feeling came over me again <sup>(as we much stronger)</sup> packed out stuff into deer camp. Our camp was part of an old abandoned lumber camp standing in the second-growth hardwood and maple. ~~We~~ had to pack our gear in nearly two miles <sup>over</sup> an old tote road, <sup>It was nearly noon before we</sup> from where we left the car. ~~we~~ loaded our packs and took our rifles and started off for camp.

Fred was in the lead. We hadn't gone a half-mile <sup>before</sup> when he sat down on a windfall and said he'd have to rest. He grinned up at me. I was beginning to hate that grin.

"Guess you're ole' chum Fred isn't the man he used to be," he puffed. "What's more he never was." Guess the ole' legs are goin' back on me, Clyde. ~~You better lead the way.~~ <sup>Take it easy, Fred,</sup> I said, <sup>watching him carefully.</sup>

~~I~~ I could see he was trying craftily to get me in the lead, but there wasn't much I could do about it without making <sup>another</sup> ~~as~~ scene. <sup>I'd have to humor him.</sup> So after we rested a few minutes I started out in the lead. Fred kept close to me for awhile and <sup>then</sup> pretty soon he started falling behind.

Once I thought I heard a <sup>metallic</sup> click <sup>behind me,</sup> like someone loading a rifle, but when I turned around Fred was ~~seated~~ <sup>sitting</sup> again sitting down again, ~~holding~~ <sup>resting</sup> his head in his sitting on a log <sup>far down the trail,</sup> again, resting his arms on his knees and his head on his <sup>arms.</sup> His rifle <sup>was</sup> leaned on the log beside him.

<sup>I called to him and he looked up and</sup> he waved at me, kind of weakly, ~~and~~ I thought of what a crafty sly bastard my old hunting chum had become.

As I walked along, <sup>the trail</sup> I tried to <sup>calmly</sup> think <sup>it</sup> out. Why ~~should~~ Fred ~~should~~ want to kill me? Perhaps it was over little Hazel of the night before? But no, that couldn't be, because I had had the feeling earlier in the day, on the ferry <sup>crossing</sup> at the Straits, long before either of us had laid eyes on little Hazel. Perhaps Fred was still brooding <sup>over</sup> that New Year's eve he <sup>had</sup> caught me and his wife Maida in a clinch. But that was years ago hell, that was <sup>mean</sup> five years before and the lord knew

right out before God and everyone;  
Fred had nipped my wife often enough, at bridge  
parties and anniversaries and the like. No, it  
couldn't be that. Then, as I was walking along  
in the <sup>dark silent</sup> hardwood, carrying my rifle and pack, ~~it~~  
<sup>suddenly</sup> the answer came to me in a flash: Fred was losing his  
mind!

The realization made me so weak and  
jittery that I ~~sat~~ had to sit down. I discovered that  
I was perspiring and my hands were trembling. I  
glanced down <sup>yet</sup> the trail on which Fred was  
approaching. <sup>he was my right.</sup> I'd have to ~~act~~ act fast. Quickly I  
<sup>laced off my pack,</sup> whipped out <sup>from three</sup> shells and loaded my ~~gun~~ rifle.  
I stood up and took <sup>either</sup> careful aim down the trail. It  
was ~~either~~ <sup>a case of him or me.</sup> "Steady," I whispered to myself. "When  
he rounds that bend you've got to let him have it--  
right between the eyes!"

Well, I guess that's the whole story. <sup>Open house.</sup> I  
guess that's all I've got to say before you pass  
sentence on me, Judge.

NOV. 26.  
2nd. draft;  
1st. type draft.

Written by

A MATHEMATICAL CERTAINTY

Final  
3 heavy

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2/1/64  
8/2/68

It was, on our way to deer camp that I first clearly realized that Maddock

<sup>came as</sup> It was a terrible shock, for Maddock and I were good

wanted to kill me. ~~Here Maddock and I had been deer hunting together every year~~

~~November~~ had hunted deer together every November

for nearly fifteen years--and now all of sudden he wanted to kill me... There

was nothing ~~really~~ tangible; nothing one could <sup>really</sup> exactly put his finger on;

That's what made it <sup>at once</sup> so baffling <sup>and</sup> so terribly frightening, certainly nothing one could ever prove in court. ~~It~~ It was more of a feeling

than anything else. In fact this strange <sup>sense of dread first</sup> feeling came over me even before

Maddock and I ever got <sup>into</sup> the woods.

We were coming across the Straits of Mackinac on the crowded state ferry,

headed north with all the other lower Michigan deer hunters. Fred--that's

Maddock's first name--had bought a Detroit newspaper from a kid on the Mackinaw City

side, and on the way across I remember we sat in the car, ~~and he~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> reading a deer hunting article by

some <sup>glib</sup> columnist or other. It was the usual <sup>annual</sup> pre-deer-season newspaper <sup>blather</sup> guff about

the "army of nimrods" <sup>that would soon be "stalking" the white-tail deer</sup> There <sup>sure</sup> enough <sup>he</sup> read out loud <sup>where the columnist</sup>

<sup>about the</sup> ~~said that an~~ army of nimrods <sup>that</sup> would soon be <sup>invading</sup> in the Northwoods--they always call it

<sup>favorite phrases--and that</sup> that, too--it was a "mathematical certainty" that some of <sup>these hunters</sup> them would be carried

<sup>of the woods,</sup> out feet first, killed by other hunters.

"Sure hope it doesn't happen to either of us, Clyde," <sup>Maddock</sup> ~~he~~ said to me, winking,

and then he kind of chuckled. "Sort of gives a fellow the willies--makes him

<sup>feel</sup> ~~feel~~ almost like turning back." ~~Maddock was a great one for grinning~~

~~and chuckling.~~

friends; see

the same ~~idea~~ <sup>idea</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> the words <sup>with</sup> a little every on safety

"Yes, Fred," I said.

Then I remember he turned and looked at me <sup>soberly! (peculiar)</sup> with a ~~funny~~ little smile. "Just

think, Clyde, there's probably at least one guy on this very boat, <sup>all</sup> happy and

<sup>unsuspecting &</sup> healthy and looking forward to a week of deer hunting and relaxation, that'll be

stone dead in a few days--and he doesn't even know it. ~~Brrr~~.. Let's talk about

something ~~else~~ <sup>a little less grim.</sup>" He balled up the newspaper and threw it on the car floor.

"It's okay with me, Fred," I said, <sup>It may sound foolish but</sup> and that's when I got the first small <sup>inkling--</sup>

<sup>--premonition, I guess you'd call it--</sup>

~~flicker~~ that Maddock intended to pay me off. I'll tell you, ~~it~~ made me shiver inwardly

with horror.

But ~~we~~ <sup>We</sup> crossed on the ferry, picked up a few quick drinks and a hot sandwich <sup>ok?</sup>

<sup>(reached the mining town of</sup> in St. Ignace, and by nightfall we had ~~arrived in~~ Chippewa, way up in the Upper

<sup>we were going to do our hunting north of there.</sup> Peninsula. By then Fred was so cheerful and full of <sup>his usual</sup> good humor that I ~~had~~ <sup>was</sup> quite <sup>nearly</sup>

<sup>about</sup> forgot <sup>the</sup> the odd feeling I had had earlier that day. I remember we stored our

car and two-wheel trailer of duffle in a garage in Chippewa <sup>except for our rifles. We</sup> decided it was too

<sup>that night and we</sup> late to head for deer camp ~~we~~ were lucky enough to get a room in the local hotel:

the Palmer House it was called. I often wonder why these one-horse towns choose

such <sup>glittering</sup> ~~high-sounding~~ names for their miserable little bars and hotels...



"Let's raise a little middle-aged hell tonight, Clyde," Fred said after  
*bare crowded little* a blaring radio and all  
supper, as we sat around in the lobby listening to the other lower Michigan

hunters bragging and shooting the breeze. "They tell me there's a hunters'

ball tonight at the local Stork Club. Believe it or not, *Clyde,* that's what they call it. *"*

*He winked at me.*

*"Who knows, maybe there's something in that name."* *"Let's go see."* *"*  
"Okay by me, Fred," I said. *"Maybe there's something in that name."*

*at during the season, (mighty deer*  
These hunters' balls are quite an institution in northern Michigan, *during*  
*at least one held* *There's* somewhere every night, and some hunters never get any *close*  
the deer season. About all they are, really, is a big informal drunk where scores

*check-full of high spirits and low purpose,*  
of perspiring red-clad, rubber-booted deer hunters clutch and grab at the local

virgins and wrastle them around an over-heated dancehall, while the local Mortimer

Snerds stand around enviously looking on.

I remember that there was a little dark one at the dance that *night that* both ~~Fred~~ *Maddock* and

I went for ~~that~~ *lonely little* night. Her name was Hazel, a divorcee. First Fred would dance

with her and buy her a drink and then I would. *And, little Hazel just got loonier and lonier...* *Maddock's*

We were both giving her quite a *or somewhere...* play and trying to take her home. *naturally* Hazel was the kind of *motherly type* *crablike* a man wanted to

get out ~~alone~~ *that noted nurse of* with, alone. *Kind of like a restless delinquent daughter...* *sort of* I don't like to brag, but I finally sold her my bill

of goods. Hazel went home *Kiddie,* with me instead of ~~Fred~~ *Maddock.*

"Good luck, *Kiddie,*" *Maddock* joked as we left him.

I took Hazel home in a cab. But first we went and had some genuine top-grain *Little Hazel was simply starved...*

cowhide steaks at a local restaurant. And some soggy French fries. *Naturally* ~~it~~

*scene of the "Latter Hunters' Ball" pulling after other men. My, my...*

(the dump) Then I took her home and we settled down on her davenport <sup>and had</sup> ~~for~~ a good long talk <sup>decent</sup>  
was called Lindy's. ~~Then~~ I stayed at Hazel's place longer than any married

deerhunter ever should, and when I got back to the Palmer House ~~even~~ some of the  
sleepy chamber maids were <sup>even</sup> beginning to stir. I remember how those <sup>damn</sup> wooden stairs

creaked as I teetered up to our room. Tip-toeing down the carpeted hall in my

rubber boots I saw a slit of light under <sup>Maddock's</sup> Fred's door. <sup>Pausing for a moment,</sup> I quickly wrenched open

the door and there was <sup>Maddock</sup> Fred sitting on the bed holding his deer rifle. <sup>It was</sup> pointed straight

at me! When he saw me he quickly lowered the gun and <sup>sheepishly</sup> began rubbing it with a

rag. I stood there in the door <sup>way</sup> carefully watching him.

<sup>Maddock</sup> "Couldn't sleep," Fred mumbled. "Decided to oil up the old .30-.30 a little."

"So I see," I answered coldly, <sup>closing the door.</sup>

"How was the local <sup>Linda</sup> Darnell?" <sup>he</sup> Fred said. <sup>it was she</sup> "Adequate?" He stood up, yawning,

and leaned the rifle against the back corner of the old walnut bureau, next to <sup>his side of</sup> the

bed. I longed to <sup>walk over and</sup> grab it and see if it was loaded, but decided to wait until later

when <sup>he</sup> Fred was asleep. <sup>He</sup> Fred turned to me, grinning. "Oh, so she was that good

was she, Mr. Eagle Scout?" he said. "So you won't talk, hey?"

"Fred," I <sup>quietly</sup> said, "I don't like the way you were holding that rifle at me  
when I just came in the door."

<sup>Maddock</sup> Fred looked at me, at first incredulously and then a little angrily. <sup>His face got very red.</sup> Then

he grinned at me and <sup>again</sup> sat on the bed. <sup>He began to speak,</sup> He ~~spoke quietly,~~ in a low voice, almost  
wearily.

<sup>id</sup> "Clyde, you better hit the hay. <sup>What's come over you lately?</sup> You've had a large evening and you're

tired... I told you I couldn't sleep and I was going over my rifle <sup>just</sup> to pass the <sup>till you got back.</sup>

time. I didn't even hear you coming down the hall. And it isn't loaded anyway, <sup>Look at ~~that~~ <sup>the damn thing</sup> if you want to.</sup> naturally. <sup>What's come over you lately?</sup> But this is all too silly... Listen, fella--don't be that way. <sup>God, man,</sup>

you got the dame and took her home--and now I'm trying to shoot you for it! No,

Clyde--not over <sup>a hungry</sup> an ~~eager~~ little divorcee neither of us ever saw before tonight...

C'mon, Clyde, let's roll in. We've both had a long day. We're bushed." He <sup>stood up</sup>

<sup>and</sup> held out his hand to me. <sup>"Clyde, let's</sup> ~~Let's~~ <sup>forget</sup> the whole <sup>song</sup> business. <sup>We're both a</sup> ~~trifle~~ <sup>trifle</sup> over-mature for this sort of thing." He was <sup>smiling</sup> again.

"Okay, Fred," I said, shaking his hand.

It was broad daylight when I awoke. <sup>Muddock</sup> Fred was lying on his back <sup>with</sup> his mouth <sup>(that</sup> open, snoring. <sup>His hair was wispy and standing up like a Kenzie doll's)</sup> I noticed he

carefully slid out of my side of the bed and <sup>quickly</sup> went over <sup>and</sup> looked at his rifle. It was empty. <sup>Um... I figured</sup> He must have waited until I <sup>fell asleep</sup> ~~want to sleep~~

and then unloaded it. And I had meant to stay awake and catch him at it...

"Fred," I said, gently pushing him in the ribs. "Fred, get up. It's daylight in the swamp. Let's get up and head for deer camp."

↑ SPACE ↓

The <sup>same horrible</sup> feeling came over me again, <sup>only</sup> much stronger, as we packed our stuff into

deer camp. Our camp was part of an old abandoned lumber camp standing in the

God, man, pull yourself together. getting much sadder than I.

second-growth <sup>birch</sup> hardwood and maple <sup>hardwood</sup>. On account of the swamps and windfalls we had to pack our gear <sup>about</sup> nearly two miles over an old tote road. It was nearly noon before

we <sup>had</sup> loaded our packs and took <sup>up</sup> our rifles and started off for camp. <sup>(Out -> Here)</sup> Fred was in <sup>I saw to it that Maddock took</sup>

It was a clear, cold day with thin sunlight. <sup>November</sup> the lead. We hadn't gone a half-mile before he <sup>suddenly</sup> sat down on a windfall and said <sup>broody</sup> "He held his rifle across his knees and he'd have to rest. He grinned up at me. I was beginning to hate that grin of his."

"Guess you're ole chum Fred isn't the man he used to be," he puffed.

<sup>He shook his head.</sup> "What's more he never was." "Guess the ole legs are goin' back on me, Clyde. <sup>Or maybe it's the ticker acting up again.</sup> You remember that <sup>little</sup> spell I had <sup>two or three</sup> years ago?" "Take it easy, Fred," I said, watching him carefully.

I could <sup>that</sup> see he was <sup>playing on my sympathy,</sup> trying craftily to get me in the lead, <sup>and</sup> but there wasn't much I could do about it without making another scene. I'd have to humor him.

So after we rested a few minutes I started out in the lead, <sup>my spine tingling, thinking of him walking right behind me with his deer rifle.</sup> Fred kept close to me for awhile and then pretty soon he started falling behind. <sup>He was changing so that was his strategy...</sup> Once I thought I

heard a <sup>sharp</sup> metallic cick behind me, like someone loading a rifle, but when I turned around <sup>Maddock</sup> Fred was sitting on a log again, far down the trail, resting his

arms on his knees and his head on his arms. His rifle was leaning on the log <sup>halloed</sup> beside him. I called to him and he looked up and waved at me, kind of weakly. I thought <sup>stood there thinking sadly of what a cunning, sly old</sup> of what a crafty sly bastard my old hunting chum had become.

<sup>turned and towards camp</sup> As I walked along the trail I tried to calmly think it out. <sup>This thing was not only</sup> Why should Fred want to kill me? <sup>why, why, why.</sup> Perhaps it was over little Hazel of the night before. But no,

why did Fred Maddock

will think that Fred come between them  
winning over Maddock

It cracked my brain to solve it. <sup>but the friendship as well.</sup> <sup>the friendship as well.</sup> <sup>the friendship as well.</sup>

¶ (Single line, Donna) ¶ Why <sup>then</sup> did Fred want to kill me? Why?

that couldn't be, because I had had the feeling earlier in the day, on the ferry crossing the Straits, long before either of us had laid eyes on little Hazel.

¶ ~~Fred Maddock~~ he  
Perhaps Fred was still brooding over that New Year's eve he had caught me and his wife Maida in a <sup>friendly</sup> clinch. But hell, that was nearly five years before and the Lord <sup>and everybody clinches on New Year's</sup> ~~knows~~ <sup>anyway</sup>

~~knows~~ Fred had necked my wife often enough, right out before God and everyone, at bridge parties and anniversaries and the like. No, it couldn't be that. ¶ Why, why, why?...

Then, as I was walking along in the silent hardwood, carrying my rifle and pack, the answer

suddenly came to me in a <sup>blinding</sup> flash: Fred was losing his mind! Fred Maddock was <sup>going insane!</sup>  
(omit underline here) (underline)

The realization made me so weak and jittery that I had to sit down. I dis-

covered that I was perspiring and my hands were trembling. I glanced <sup>back</sup> down the trail on which Fred was approaching. <sup>Thank God he</sup> He was not yet in sight. <sup>I know I'd</sup> I'd have to act fast.

Quickly I <sup>scrambled to my feet,</sup> eased off my pack, whipped out three shells and loaded my rifle. I stood up and took careful aim down the trail. It was a case of either him or me. <sup>It had</sup> ~~It had~~ started to snow a little and the thin flakes glistened in the <sup>sun</sup> light.

¶ "Steady, <sup>Bye!</sup> I whispered to myself. "When he rounds that bend you've got to let him have it--right between the eyes!"

<sup>well,</sup> ¶ I guess that's the whole story. Yes, I guess that's <sup>just about</sup> all I've got to say before you pass sentence on me, Judge.

Written by  
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Ishpeming, Michigan

A MATHEMATICAL CERTAINTY

by  
Robert Traver

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"Okay by me, Fred," I said.

These hunters' balls are quite an institution in northern Michigan. There's at least one held somewhere every night during the season, and some mighty deer hunters never get any nearer to the woods than the scene of the latest hunters' ball. About all they are, really, is a big informal drunk where scores of perspiring, red-clad, rubber-booted deer hunters, chuck-full of high spirits and low purpose, clutch and grab at the local virgins and wrassle them around an over-heated dancehall, while the local Mortimer Snerds stand around enviously looking on.

I remember that there was a little dark one at the dance that night that both Maddock and I went for. Her name was Hazel, a lonely little divorcee. It seems her former husband was a hulking jealous brute that suspected her of running after other men. My, my... First Maddock would dance with her and buy her a drink and then I would. And little Hazel just got lonlier and lonlier... We were both naturally giving her quite a play and trying to take her home--or somewhere. Hazel was the sort of motherly type a man wants rapidly to get out with, alone. Kind of like that noted nude of Whistler's delinquent daughter... I don't like to brag, but I finally sold her my bill of goods. Hazel went home with me instead of Maddock.

"Good luck, Kiddies," Maddock joked as we left him.

I took Hazel home in a cab. But first we went and had some genuine top-grain cowhide steaks at a local restaurant. And some soggy French fries. Little Hazel was simply starved... Naturally the dump was called Lindy's. Then I took her home and we settled down on her davenport and had a good long talk...

I stayed at Hazel's place longer than any decent married deerhunter ever should, and when I got back to the Palmer House some of the sleepy chamber maids were even beginning to stir. I remember how those damn wooden stairs creaked as I teetered up to our room. Tip-toeing down the carpeted hall in my rubber boots I saw a slit of light under Maddock's door. Pausing for a moment, I quickly wrenched open the door and there was Maddock sitting on the bed holding his deer rifle. It was pointed straight at me! When he saw me he quickly lowered the gun and sheepishly began rubbing it with a rag. I stood there in the doorway carefully watching him.

"Couldn't sleep," Maddock mumbled. "Decided to oil up the old .30-.30 a little."

"So I see," I answered coldly, closing the door.

"How was the local Linda Darnell?" he said. "Was she adequate?" He stood up, yawning, and leaned the rifle against the back corner of the old walnut bureau, next to his side of the bed. I longed to walk over and grab it and see ~~if~~ if it was loaded, but decided to wait until later when he was asleep. He

turned to me, grinning. "Oh, so she was that good, was she, Mr. Eagle Scout?" he said. "So you won't talk, hey?"

"Fred," I quietly said, "I don't like the way you were holding that rifle at me when I just came in the door."

Maddock looked at me, at first incredulously and then a little angrily. His face got very red. Then he grinned at me and again sat on the bed. He began to speak, in a low voice, almost wearily.

"Clyde, you'd better hit the hay. You've had a large evening and you're tired... I told you I couldn't sleep and I was going over my rifle just to pass the time till you got back. I didn't even hear you coming down the hall. And it isn't loaded anyway, naturally. Look at the damn thing if you want to. But this is all too silly... Listen, fella--don't be that way. What's come over you lately? God, man, pull yourself together. You got the dame and took her home--and now I'm trying to shoot you for it! No, Clyde--not over a hungry little divorcee neither of us ever saw before tonight... C'mon, Clyde, let's roll in. We've both had a long day. We're bushed." He stood up and held out his hand to me. "Clyde, let's forget the whole sorry business. We're both a trifle over-mature for this sort of thing." He was smiling again.

"Okay, Fred," I said, shaking his hand.

It was broad daylight when I awoke. Maddock was lying on his back with his mouth open, snoring. His hair was wispy and standing up like a Kewpie doll's and I noticed that he was getting much balder than I. I carefully slid out of my side of the bed and went over and looked at his rifle. It was empty. Hm... He must have waited until I fell asleep and then unloaded it. And I had meant to stay awake and catch him at it...

"Fred," I said, gently pushing him in the ribs. "Fred, get up. It's daylight in the swamp. Let's get up and head for deer camp."

The same horrible feeling came over me again, only much stronger, as we packed our stuff into deer camp. Our camp was part of an old abandoned lumber camp standing in the second-growth birch and maple hardwood. On account of the swamps and windfalls we had to pack in all our gear about two miles over an old tote road. It was nearly noon before we ~~had~~ loaded our packs and took up our rifles and started off for camp. It was a clear, cold November day with a thin sunlight. I saw to it that Maddock took the lead. We hadn't gone a half-

✓ mile before he suddenly sat down on a windfall and said he'd have to rest. He held his rifle loosely across his knees and grinned up at me. I was beginning to hate that grin of his.

"Guess you're ole chum Fred isn't the man he used to be," he puffed. "What's more he never was." He shook his head. "Guess the ole legs are goin' back on me, Clyde. Or maybe it's the ticker acting up again. You remember that little spell I had two--no three--years ago?"

"Take it easy, Fred," I said, watching him carefully.

I could see that he was craftily trying to get me in the lead, playing on my sympathy, and there wasn't much I could do about it without making another scene. I'd have to humor him... So after we rested a few minutes I started out in the lead, my spine tingling, thinking of him walking right behind me there with his deer rifle. He kept close to me for awhile and then pretty soon he started falling behind. He was changing his strategy... Once I thought I heard a sharp metallic click behind me, like someone loading a rifle, but when I turned around Maddock was sitting on a log again, far down the trail, resting his arms on his knees and his head on his arms. His rifle was leaning on the log beside him. I halloed to him and he looked up and waved at me, kind of weakly. I stood there thinking sadly of what a cunning, sly old bastard my old hunting chum had become.

As I turned and walked along the trail towards camp I tried to calmly think it out. This evil thing that had come between us was not only ruining our hunting trip, but a valued old friendship as well. I wracked my brain to solve it. Why did Fred Maddock want to kill me? Perhaps it was over little Hazel of the night before. But no, that couldn't be, because I had had the feeling earlier in the day, on the ferry crossing the Straits, long before either of us had laid eyes on little Hazel.

Why then did Fred want to kill me? Why?

Perhaps he was still brooding over that New Year's eve he had caught me and his wife Maida in a friendly clinch. But hell, that was nearly five years before and everybody clinches on New Year's anyway--and the Lord knows Fred had necked my wife often enough, right out before God and everyone, at bridge parties and anniversaries and the like. No, it couldn't be that.



Why, why, why?...

Then, as I was walking along in the silent hardwood, carrying my rifle and pack, the answer suddenly came to me in a blinding flash: Fred was losing his mind! Fred Maddock was going insane!

The realization made me so weak and jittery that I had to sit down. I discovered that I was perspiring and my hands were trembling. I glanced back down the trail on which Fred was approaching. Thank God he was not yet in sight. I knew I'd have to act fast. Quickly I scrambled to my feet, eased off my pack, whipped out three shells and loaded my rifle. I stood up and took careful aim down the trail. It was a case of either him or me. It had started to snow a little and the thin flakes glistened in the sunlight.

"Steady, Clyde," I whispered to myself. "When he rounds that bend you've got to let him have it--right between the eyes!"

Well, I guess that's the whole story. Yes, I guess that's just about all I've got to say before you pass sentence on me, Judge.