

# Traitor's Trump

by Henry P. Stevens

*Will Fritz sat in on a dangerous game, in which men gambled with treason.  
And Fritz was hoping desperately to be dealt a "Traitor's Trump."*

TEN years behind bars," snarled the tall man from the side of his mouth. "Ten years for savin' my own life!" His drooped shoulders jerked indignantly as he paced the ragged carpet of the small living-room.

Will Fritz leaned forward in his chair near the dirty window and, elbows on knees, stared wide-eyed at his cousin's gray face.

"John, not quite so loud," he said. "Betty—my wife, you know—is trying to sleep." He nodded to the bedroom door. "Poor kid needs all the rest she can get."

"Sorry. I was excited."

"But John, about this prison business—I thought you were in the army all the time."

John Fritz whirled around, his thin lips writhing in a leer.

"Army?" His slitted gray eyes smoldered with hatred as he stood there, clenching and unclenching bony fists.

"Yeah, sure I was—till a crazy-drunk officer sliced me with his saber!" He fingered a deep scar running from temple to chin. "I had to beat him up to save my own skin."

Will looked down at the carpet. "And you got ten years," he muttered. "But—but how about self-defense?"

John Fritz cackled. "Self-defense, damn' right! But with no witnesses. A private's word against an officer's." The growl sunk deep in his throat. "Then, ten years behind bars; and booted out with a dishonorable discharge. Haven't held a job

since. People find out—" He laughed harshly. "I've been through hell since we were together on Uncle Emile's farm, Will."

Will looked up. "It's a damn' shame!" he choked indignantly.

"Worse'n that," rasped John. "Worse than the man without a country. But some day, I'm gonna get even."

"You say that people find out." Will lowered his head again. "That makes me wonder—"

"What?"

"Wonder about myself. Y'know I work in the Navy Yard, across the river."

"Yah," grunted the thin-lipped man. "For dear ol' Uncle Sammy, eh? What doin'?"

"I'm a junior clerk," mumbled Will apologetically, "in all those blue-print files."

"Hell, then, you're all set."

"All set!" exclaimed Will. "All set! Slaving for a few bucks a week? And my wife, lying sick in the next room, wasting away with T.B.? The only way I'd figure to be all set is to have a couple thousand dollars to take Betty out to Arizona so she can live again. The doctor says it's her only chance."

JOHN FRITZ'S agate eyes measured his cousin calculatingly. "You are in a hole," he agreed. "But—there's ways of gettin' out."

Will's lower lip drooped. He stared down at the frayed upholstery on his chair.

"There is no way," he sighed, shaking his head. "Just going on and on—"

John leaned forward stabbing the air with a forefinger. "I know one way," he snapped. "A way that'll get me part of what's due me, too."

The clerk looked up quickly. "How?"

John Fritz waved a protesting palm. "Wait a minute, now," he warned. "Keep your shirt on. S'pose I tip you off—and you don't want to play the game?"

Will blinked up. "I'll keep mum," he assured.

"Yeah," growled John ominously. "You'll keep mum. You'll keep mum, or else!"

"Go on," prodded Will nervously.

"Okay." John Fritz swung a chair close to his cousin's, dropped into it. He leaned forward earnestly, tapping Will's knee with a bony forefinger. "Now, you handle blue prints. All right. I know a certain man who'll pay plenty for blue prints."

The clerk stared at him with startled eyes. "What d'you mean?" he demanded, raking a nervous hand through his brown hair.

John slumped back in his chair and glared. "Don't be dumb," he sneered.

"You mean I— Oh, I—I couldn't do that!" Will was mumbling wildly. "Why—that'd be—treason! They'd shoot me!"

John's blue scar twitched rapidly. "Rats!" he snapped. "Nothin' to it, kid."

"I couldn't do it," Will desperately massaged a fist between his knees.

"Couldn't, eh? You mean you ain't got the guts!" The gray-faced man leaned forward once more. "Listen kid: One deal—just one deal, and you'll be out of a bad hole and walking down easy street. Easy street—for life."

He leaned back with a triumphant smile.

Will bit his lower lip nervously without reply.

"It'll be a cinch," goaded John. "And just think, inside of a month Betty would be up and enjoying herself in the sun. She's young, Will; she's got a right to live. And you've got a right to give her the chance. It's your duty."

Will heaved a lengthy sigh. For a while he sat brooding, as if in a trance. Suddenly he looked up.

"Where is this guy?" he demanded. "Take me to him!"

John's body relaxed. "Now you're talkin', buddy," he cheered, patting Will's knee. "But," he shook his head, "I can't take you. You'll have to arrange the deal on your own, so's he won't shy off. Best thing is for you to call him up; tell him about your job and all. I'll tell you his name: Bamberg. Call Berkley, seven-two-two-one. He'll probably make arrangements to meet you somewhere."

"But—this fellow—what do you know about him?" protested the clerk. "How'd you come to know him?"

John Fritz grinned. "Oh, a guy gets to know about things like that—in stir." His grin changed to a scowl. "Why? Gettin' cold feet? You going to sit around and watch Betty die by inches?"

Will jumped to his feet. "No!" he cried. "I'll do it! I'll call him tonight!"

**T**HAT night Will Fritz's hands tightly gripped the wheel of his old brown sedan as he guided it through the ruts of a country road outside Parmouth. Then his headlights gleamed on a black car waiting in the roadside darkness. He pulled in behind it.

A thick-set man of medium height rounded the side of the black car and approached, carefully avoiding the beams of Will's headlights.

"Douse those lights," he growled.

Will recognized the guttural tones as those of the man he'd talked to on the

phone earlier that night. He shut off motor and lights, opened the door of his car, and stepped out.

The thick-set man's right hand was in the side pocket of his coat as he advanced. "Will Fritz?" he demanded, craning forward. "Let's see your Yard pass."

"What for?" demanded Fritz uneasily.

The bulge in the other's pocket moved. "Are you the guy who called me?" he snarled. "Come on!"

Will fumbled in his breast pocket to haul out a card and hand it over.

The other stepped back. A ray of moonlight picked out the white pasteboard, which he scrutinized carefully.

"All right," he muttered at last and handed back the card. "Now, you know what we—I'm after, eh?"

"Plans—blue prints," gulped Will.

"Right. Ready to go through with a deal?"

Will nodded.

"Good! No need to say what it'll cost you to talk out of turn, eh? Now, there's one set of plans in particular: the new radio-controlled aerial torpedo that they've been working on lately. Get me the master blue print of that torpedo. It'll be worth \$25,000 to you. Think you can do it?"

Will swallowed. "Twenty-five thousand," he murmured. "I—I can do it."

"How?" asked the man.

"Well, of course I couldn't get the print itself out. But that particular job has been microphotographed. I'm sure I could get a film—they're very small—and all you'd have to do would be to project it on a screen."

"Good. How soon can you deliver?"

"Tomorrow night," mumbled Will.

"Okay. Now, here's what we'll do—"

He arranged headlight signals for their meeting. They parted.

THE following night, William Fritz, junior file clerk number 6249, nervously scuffed back and forth over the frayed carpet of his cramped flat. His clenched fists were jammed deep in his pockets. Light from the bulb overhead shone on his white, pale face. The aerial torpedo plan was heavy against his chest. He licked dry lips, shot a feverish glance at a battered alarm clock on the dresser. Ten-thirty. A half hour more of this, he thought. He stopped prowling suddenly, to stare at his reflection in the mirror. His face worked nervously.

A cry burst from him. "I can't do it!" He turned, ran to the door, jerked it open, pelted down the dim hallway to a wall phone. His hand shook as he jerked the receiver from its hook.

"Navy Yard," he rasped hoarsely. "Duty Officer's office? ... Send some men over here, Monroe Apartments, right away! Spies! I—I was going to—"

He broke off, gasping in pain, as something hard jammed between his ribs.

"Hang up!" a steely voice clipped. Will's jaw dropped. Turning his head fearfully, his frightened eyes met John Fritz's hard ones gleaming from under a slouch hat. The receiver gave off crackling sounds as Will obeyed.

"Now, into your room." John prodded Will down the hall, belted him through the doorway, closed the door behind him and leaned back against it.

In the center of the room, Will faced about, thin shoulders hunched over, wild eyes staring at the menacing Army automatic John held drawn at his stomach. The latter's eyes burned in the gray mask of his face. The long scar on his cheek twitched in the harsh light.

"You yellow hound!" he snarled, his thin lips scarcely moving.

Will clenched his fists to his sides. "I can't do it," he gasped.

“Ain’t that too bad!” sneered John. “But you’re in it now—and so am I. And we’re going to see it through. I figured this’d be the only way you’d do it—with a gat at your back.”

Will breathed in hoarse gasps as John stepped forward.

“You got the plans? Let’s see—” His slitted eyes watched Will fumble inside his coat. The tight packet of papers trembled as Will passed them over.

John grabbed them in his left hand and thumbed them over expertly. “All right.” Shoving the papers back, he added, “You keep ’em. If we get nabbed, I don’t know a thing, see?” He backed to the door knob. “Come on.” He motioned over his shoulder with the gun as he flung the door open.

The gun muzzle pressed hard between Will’s ribs as he moved into the hall. It stayed there down the stairs and into the street.

Will’s lips were quivering as he darted nervous glances around. A near-by street lamp showed no uniforms, only one ragged hobo slouching past. The gun forced him into his parked sedan. Settling behind the wheel he heard:

“Get goin’.” The gun jammed into him between the seats.

**D**RIVING through town, Will clenched the wheel. His body was covered with cold sweat. At an intersection, he saw a cop leaning negligently against a lamp post. He made a clumsy attempt to stall the car.

“Nix!” snarled John, belting him a ringing clout on the ear.

The car leaped forward as Will pressed hard on the accelerator. They sped on through the outskirts of town, the lighted windows on either side growing more and more infrequent. At last they hit the Post Road and rolled into open country. The

headlights shone on thick pine woods on either side. Deliberately he gunned the car to a breakneck speed.

Suddenly a siren started wailing behind them. Will tensed, his foot started for the brakes.

John’s gun prodded. “Don’t stop.”

Will jammed the accelerator to the floor again. The engine labored loudly with a carbon knock. The wail of the siren rose in pitch. Will was crouched over the wheel waiting for the sound of shots when the black sedan eased alongside. He saw moonlight gleaming on the blue steel of a gun and the visor of the cop’s cap as he leaned out, bellowing:

“Pull off the road!”

Will slowed down.

“No funny business,” John was muttering in his ear. “I’m doing all the talking.”

The big cop strode up to Will’s open window, leaned an arm on the sill, poked his head inside.

“What the hell’s a matter?” he bawled. “You deaf or somethin’?”

John was leaning over the back of Will’s seat. “We heard the siren, officer,” he chattered excitedly, “but, y’ see, we’re in a terrible hurry.”

“Zat so?” The cop grinned savagely. “Well, ain’t that too bad?”

“But,” gasped John, “he—he’s taking me to my mother. She—she’s dying! Can’t you let us go this time?”

The cop gulped down a remark. His grin faded.

“Hell,” he murmured lamely. “Hell, that’s tough.” He looked down at his sleeve. “Well, you guys go ahead then. But take it a little slower.” He drew his head out of the window, moved back, and stood staring at Will for a moment.

The gun prodded relentlessly. Will shoved in the clutch, yanked the car back into the highway. The drove on in silence

for three miles, then Will turned off onto a dirt road. The car bumped over ruts.

"Is this where you meet him?" demanded John. Then, as Will nodded: "You've got signals, huh?"

"I make two flashes," mumbled Will sullenly. "He comes back with four."

"Okay," snapped John testily, "be sure you make 'em."

Will's heart was in his mouth as the lights of an oncoming car showed around a turn ahead. He pulled over.

As the car neared, he flashed his headlights twice. The big black sedan's headlights flashed four times before it purred swiftly by.

"Hah!" grunted John. "What now?"

"I go a mile farther, turn and come back." The car bumped on. The headlights showed a clearing at the roadside.

"Turn here," ordered John Fritz. Will slowed, cramped the bus around, headed back. At last, his headlights revealed the black sedan drawn up close to the roadside bushes.

"That looks like it," advised John. "Pull up." He added grimly: "No monkey business. The gat'll be on you every second. Just go ahead as you planned it."

Will swerved his car behind the other and switched off the lights. He slumped back in his seat.

"Out with you," clipped John.

As Will slowly opened the door and climbed out backwards, John crouched down, easing out the other side.

**T**HE same thick-set man loomed up suddenly in front of Will.

"Got them?" he demanded.

Will reached into the breast pocket of his coat and passed over an envelope.

"Hold it, you!"

Will froze and turned at the barked order.

"Reach high, Bamberg!" John Fitz's

torso showed over the hood of Will's car. Moonlight gleamed on guns in both hands. "Caught you with the goods in your hands!"

Bamberg grunted angrily and raised his arms slowly.

Guns roared twin spouts of flame from the roadside bushes. Lead thudded into Will's car and ricocheted, whining. A slug drove Will back against the door.

He slumped down to the running board. John's 45's boomed a cannonade as he crouched low behind the hood.

The fusillade from the bushes quit suddenly. John ceased firing and straightened up. The only sound was Bamberg's noisy breathing grunts as he lay on the ground with one hand pressed to his side.

John Fritz whipped round the front fender, darting a quick glance at Bamberg as he leaped at Will. The latter was bent over with right hand pressed against his thigh.

"They got me," he said quietly.

John slipped his gun into his coat pocket and extended his hand.

"Hell!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I'm sorry you got plugged, but this was the only way to get these dirty spies red-handed. I faked that yarn about my going to prison. I'm in government secret service."

Will looked up at his cousin incredulously, gasped: "You—a secret service man?"

"Yes. I would've told you before, but I was afraid you wouldn't be able to act your part well enough if you knew it was all a put-up job."

Will still stared. "Thank heaven!" he muttered. Then he looked startled. "What—what's going to happen to me?"

John's face was grim. "I'll cover for you, because you did have a change of heart. You wouldn't have gone through

with it except at the point of my gun. Still, I can't help feeling disappointed, kid. There are a lot of men who would have eaten lead rather than sell out their country."

"But John," said Will eagerly, "I didn't sell out—honestly I didn't. Remember that cop? Just as we pulled away from him, I slipped one of the microphotographs up his sleeve. You see, those plans were made in divided blue prints. One wouldn't be

any good at all without the other."

In the shine of the headlights Will could see John's face soften in a smile.

"Good boy, Will! That sounds more like you." He patted his cousin on the shoulder sincerely. "Listen, I'll have a good deal of drag with the service after this. Maybe you'd like me to get you a post out West for a while—say, in Arizona?"