

Double Daggers

JAMES R CLIFFORD



The trader incessantly tapped the enter key watching as the flashing numbers flew across the computer screen like a swarm of Monarch butterflies embarking upon their annual migration journey.

Stocks, bonds, gold, currencies, corn, sugar, coffee, soybeans. The trader had bought and sold it all. He loved the dog-eat-dog world of the commodities markets because it was an even sum game. For every dollar that he gambled and won, someone else had lost the same exact amount. That was how the game was played and that was the ultimate attraction to him, beating other people. Of course, the money wasn't too bad either and over the years Jack Wentworth, aka Jack the Destroyer, had caused a lot of misery and wrecked more than a few lives while amassing a fortune that had made him one of the wealthiest traders on all of Wall Street.

His enormous success was also his Achilles Heel. He had made so much money that his bosses, in name only, had become a constant pain in his rear end. They were always complaining about the risks he took even though everyone knew the real reason they despised Jack so much was he made way more money than they ever hoped to.

So it was only a matter of time until the inevitable happened, either the bank was going to fire him for some made-up transgression or he was going to quit. Jack always did things on his own terms so before the bank had a chance to win he resigned and built his own trading office in of all places Charleston, South Carolina.

He distinctly remembered that his wife had laughed at him when he told her of his plans to go independent and relocate to Charleston. She swore that he wouldn't last a month before he missed the action of Wall Street and wanted to move back. Jack, on the

other hand, never had a doubt. After twenty-five years of working on Wall Street he had seen and done it all and like a winning trade the time had come to cash in and move on.

After driving a small army of real estate agents crazy Jack purchased one of the most expensive mansions in historic Charleston. The enormous three story colonial building was smack dab in the most exclusive, blue-blooded part of the peninsula and he converted it to his new trading headquarters.

Jack spared no expensive remodeling and furnishing his new trading headquarters. Even his wife, who thought nothing of spending millions of dollars on designer dresses and jewelry at Saks Fifth Avenue or Neiman Marcus thought he was being a tad ostentatious. He ignored her complaints about how much of his money he was spending and sarcastically told her that he had to have a nice office if any of his friends from New York ever came to visit.

It was a statement they both knew was ridiculous. There would be no visits from any friends in New York because the simple truth was Jack didn't know of a single person who he could remotely call a friend. In truth, he had probably made more enemies than he could even count. That fact was evident by the turnout for his going away party the investment bank had thrown him at the Ritz Carlton. A grand total of a dozen people showed up to pay their respects and say their good-byes, and most of those were low-level bank employees who Jack was sure came only because of the free drinks and food.

But the snub hadn't bothered him much, that's the way Wall Street worked he had explained to his embarrassed wife. He was one of those rare individuals that could literally print money and his co-workers could all go to hell because the simple fact was they were jealous at how much power and wealth he had accumulated.

Jack sat at his mahogany desk smoking a Cohiba Cigar watching a cargo ship slowly making its way into Charleston's Harbor. Someone told him that both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars were fought in the historic harbor but it was a fleeting thought because he had more important matters to think about, and that was the silver market had finally turned in his favor.

It was time to get out. He grabbed his black trading phone and pushed a single button that speed dialed directly to his trader on the floor of the exchange. The line only rang once.

"Jim," answered his trader over the deafening roar of the pit traders in the background.

"Sell my silver," Jack calmly instructed.

He waited no more than a few seconds until the trader came back on and gave him confirmations of his sell prices. He did a quick mental calculation then pumped the air with his fist. The trade had netted him a profit of almost two million dollars. That's why he played the game all these years, he liked to take other people's money, but more importantly, he loved to win. In his view commodity trading was the most difficult and challenging of all sports. It was a combination of chess and boxing and he was Muhammad Ali and Bobby Fisher all rolled into one. He was The Greatest.

Jack's non-trading phone rang interrupting his victory celebration. "Yeah," he answered briskly.

"Mr. Wentworth," replied a man's voice in a thick Eastern European accent.

"Yeah, who's this?"

“This is Werner Markhov calling from Bulgaria. We met at the New York Numismatic Auction last year.”

Jack sighed. He remembered meeting the old bugger at some stupid coin auction at Sotheby’s right before they had moved. His wife had sat on the board and she had insisted that he accompany her to the god-forsaken event. During the auction he had drunk too much champagne and for entertainment had engaged in a bidding war on the prize item of the night.

He remembered the stupid coin was billed as the most famous coin in all of antiquity. It was called the Ides of March something-or-another and that was all those stuffy fools could talk about. He remembered some egghead going on and on about how the coin had been minted by Brutus to commemorate his role in the assassination of Julius Caesar and that the coin symbolized the most important single event in early western civilization.

Jack grinned when he recalled the auction because there was no telling how many people he had pissed off. He couldn’t help it though because it was in his nature to win at all cost. So even though he could have cared less about the coin or its supposed grand historical importance, he had bought the coin for one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars just to annoy and humiliate all the history jerks and nerdball coin collectors in attendance.

Jack distinctly remembered after the auction Markhov telling him some crazy story about a curse involving the coin he had bought but Jack’s memory was a bit hazy about the whole episode because of the alcohol.

“Mr. Wentworth, are you there?”

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“Yeah,” he sighed while opening his desk drawer and pulling out the coin. He did have to admit it was pretty cool looking. On one side the Roman liberty cap liberty cap was set between two daggers with the inscription of Eid Mar underneath. On the reverse side was a portrait of the chief conspirator in the plot, Brutus, who from what he was told had used the notion of saving the republic as a ploy to eliminate Caesar and take control of Rome for himself.

“Hey what does that Eid Mar stand for anyway?” Jack asked wondering why he was humoring the lunatic.

“It’s the date of Caesar’s assassination, the Ides of March. Of course the Romans went by a different calendar than we do but the Ides of March is equivalent to our March Fifteenth.”

Jack rubbed a finger over the portrait on the coin. “And whatever happened to our friend Brutus?”

“Marc Antony raised an army who were still loyal to Caesar and he tracked Brutus down and defeated him and his supporters outside of Philippi in Greece two years later. When Brutus knew all was lost he committed suicide by falling on his sword. But Mr. Wentworth that is all beside the point I have an urgent matter to discuss with you.”

“What?”

“I am calling regarding the Double Dagger Denarius that you purchased at....”

“Yes I know, Jack interrupted. “ I remember you telling me all about some curse. Listen if this is some lame attempt to try and get me to sell you the coin at some ridiculous price it’s not going to work.”

“Mr. Wentworth, I assure you I have no interest in buying that coin from you. I am trying to warn you before it’s too late. You don’t know what you have gotten yourself into.”

“Too late.” Jack laughed. “C’mon, what the hell do you really want?”

“March Fifteenth is nearing,” Markov replied.

“So, what the hell does that have to do with anything?”

“The Eids of March. The date of Caesar’s assassination. I have researched this subject extensively. I have proof.”

“Proof of what?”

The line went silent for a second before Markov replied, “That tragedies tend to befall certain people when they possess this coin.”

“Jeez,” Jack muttered. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Just hear me out. My father once owned this coin. He was an SS officer under Adolph Hitler. He stole it from a French museum and then gave it to Hitler to demonstrate his loyalty.”

“So your father was a Nazi. Great. So what.”

“My father was executed by Hitler during a secret meeting of his top generals. Hitler was obsessed with the Roman Empire and he believed that the coin was a sign that those nearest to him were plotting against him, just as in Caesar’s case. Hitler shot my father in the back of his head as a warning to the other generals.”

Jack stared at the flashing numbers on his computer screen. He was growing bored and irritated. “Mr. Markov, I appreciate your call but I use the coin as a ball mark and I have lowered my handicap by two strokes since I started using it. So actually,

unlike your father, it has brought me good luck.”

“Ball mark?” Markhov sounded confused.

“You know, golf. Haven’t you ever played? I use the coin to mark my ball before I putt.”

“Mr. Wentworth! I can show you my research. My father wasn’t the only one to have died while in possession of that coin. Over the centuries I have come across no less than twenty-five individuals who have owned that coin and met untimely deaths.”

“I don’t think there would be many people who considered your Nazi father’s death as untimely or a great tragedy.”

“I understand that but what about the others?”

“Ok, like who?” Jack asked, thinking maybe he could get Markhov to buy it for three fifty. After all, if this guy was this desperate to make up such a cockaminy story, he must be willing to pay a pretty good price. And a hundred percent return wouldn’t be so bad.

“The auction house kept this quiet and only a handful of people know but your coin was previously owned by Amschal Rothschild.”

“You mean of the banking family Rothschild?” Jack was impressed. The price of the coin just went to four hundred thousand. The Rothschild dynasty dated back to the 1700’s and it was probably one of the wealthiest families ever. It was unusual for a family to control so much wealth for so long and because of it the Rothschild’s were the subject of a number of conspiracy theories. Most of which associated them with the Illuminati and a worldwide banking cartel that ruled civilization in secrecy.

“Yes . . . and he was found hanging in his Paris hotel. They say it was suicide but I’m not sure, either way it doesn’t matter.”

“Markhov, let me tell you a little secret about life, okay? People die. I’ll sell it to you for Four Hundred thousand. What do you say, do we have a deal.”

“Mr. Wentworth, I have neither the funds nor the desire to buy that coin. I am simply trying to give you a warning.”

Jack glanced at the computer screen. Silver prices were collapsing. Maybe he should get back in.

“Listen, Markhov thanks for the call but if you don’t want to buy it then it’s been nice talking to you. And in regards to that lame curse story don’t worry about Old Jack I alone control my fate.” Jack slammed the phone down.

March roared in like the proverbial lion and like the turbulent weather, Jack’s temperament had grown surly and unpredictable. Trading had not been going well and he was down a couple million in the stock market.

“Damn it,” he swore at the computer. He was close to selling out his entire losing position and taking the loss. His golden rule through the years had been to never, ever sit on a losing position that was going against you. Sell it and get out. He understood that rule better than anyone but for some reason he couldn’t pull the trigger and sell out.

For two straight days Jack had sat in his chair all day watching the market moving lower adding to his losses. He felt paralyzed and couldn’t figure out his reluctance to sell the position. It was a multimillion dollar loss but even though that hurt it was not that big of a deal. So why couldn’t he bring himself to sell.

The market closed down sharply lower adding to Jack's already surly mood. His phone rang and he curtly answered, "What!"

"Mr. Wentworth, this is Ms. Blue."

Jack sat up in his chair. Ms. Blue was a high ranking insider at the New York Federal Reserve Bank. Ms. Blue was an alias for more than a dozen individuals that Jack had personally recruited over the last twenty years to provide him with information. In Jack's business dealings he would come across certain young individuals who were positioned at the right places and had the potential for advancement. So he invested in them and their careers so to speak because information to make money.

He couldn't recruit just anyone. He had to identify individuals of a particular socioeconomic background and it was as much an art as a science. The typical arrangement was that he gave them a quarter of a million dollars no questions asked when they were poor, young and hungry. The deal was they did not have to provide any information or pay the money back, the only requirement was that if he needed a favor or some information they would reciprocate. Jack liked to think of himself kind of like the Godfather of Wall Street.

And as an added bonus if they freely provided certain information that could be used to make money, he would give them a percentage. Of course not all of these recruits worked out or even provided anything of tangible value. A few refused his offer outright and some after gaining success would not even return his phone calls but as a whole his recruits had made a Jack a lot of money.

Ms. Blue was his last recruit and after six years they had never talked. In fact, Jack had pretty much written Ms. Blue off as a bad investment.

“How are you Ms. Blue?”

“I’m fine, thank you. I won’t ask for a percentage instead I want one million dollars for the information I’m about to give you. ”

Jack laughed. What a piece of work this broad is, he thought remembering her exquisitely fine body. “I’m fine too, thanks for asking. I already paid you a nice little chunk of money, honey. Of which I’m sure I don’t have to remind you but to date I have received no return.”

“Until now,” Ms. Blue replied.

“I forgot you liked to get straight to the point. Okay, tell me what it is and I will think about it.”

“My offer stands. One million dollars wired to an off shore account. Then I’ll give you the information.”

“You’re out of your mind. Forget it.”

“Mr. Wentworth. I guarantee you this information is a once of a lifetime situation. The amount of money you could make is unlimited.”

Jack’s gut told him Ms. Blue wasn’t fooling around. Like all his recruits he had done extensive background research on her but Jack still couldn’t help but wonder why she needed the money? He dismissed the brief moment of apprehension because it wasn’t his problem nor did he really care.

“All right, you got me. Tell me what you got that is so good.”

“First wire the money and then I’ll give you the information. Trust me, Jack. You’ll go down in history on this one. Are you in or out?”

Jack thought for a moment. A million dollars was a lot of money but he needed a big win in the market. Even though he was out of New York, the big traders, no matter where they lived in the world, knew what the score was and that meant they knew Jack was losing. It was like some compulsive desire to have to prove to himself to the world that he was the best.

“Give me your offshore account info and I’ll wire it.”

Ms. Blue gave him the wiring instructions then added, “When the funds hit I’ll call you back.”

Jack hung the phone up and gave his bank the instruction to wire the one million dollars.

Two hours later the phone rang. “Listen carefully,” Ms. Blue said. “This will be the last time we ever talk. As you know the Fed meets next Tuesday. The interest rate policy will be changed. They’re going to lower rates the Fed Funds rate by fifty basis points.”

“What,” Jack almost stammered. “Every damn economist in the world believes they are going to raise rates by a quarter point. Their not going to lower rates. What the hell are you talking about?”

Ms. Blue calmly replied, “The Chairman doesn’t feel that the inflation numbers are that big of a problem and he can bring it down later if he needs to. He is more concerned with the high unemployment rate.”

“I don’t care how high you have risen within the Fed. This is worthless information. They’re not going to lower rates,” Jack repeated

“Jack,” Ms. Blue calmly said. “Hear me out. What is the dual mandate of the Fed?”

“To fight inflation and employment.”

“Right and who appointed the Fed chairman?”

“The President.”

“And who is up for reelection in the fall and looks like he is in for a tight battle because of the persistent high unemployment rates?”

Jack didn't answer as the information began to settle in.

Ms. Blue continued, “It is not well known but the Fed Chairman and the President's families go way back. This is a favor from the Fed to the President to help him win reelection. Plus, it doesn't hurt that the Fed chairman is due for reappointment next year as well and having the president on your side certainly help his reappointment chances either.”

A Quid pro quo between the President and the Fed Chairman, it made perfect sense, Jack thought. He started to get that feeling that he had felt rarely in his career. This was an absolute slam dunk guarantee. He was going to make an absolute fortune.

“Okay, Ms. Blue. Thank you for the information and enjoy your million.”

He hung up. Jack knew that once the announcement hit the wires the stock market would take off. This was an opportunity of a lifetime. Jack called his trader and instructed him to discretely start buying as many S&P futures contracts as he could without setting off too many warning bells.

The day of the surprise Fed interest rate announcement arrived and Jack confidently walked into his office building with his customary copy of the Wall Street

Journal tucked underneath one arm. He sat down at his desk and stared at the stock market indices. He had deleted every other market he followed. This was the only number that mattered.

The stock market was pretty much flat which was pretty typical until after the official Fed policy release. Jack couldn't wait to get the announcement over with because his huge purchases had really hit his account hard. Since his buying spree the stock market had fallen more than five percent and that had caused his net worth to decline substantially. He was sitting on an enormous loss and was even having a hard time keeping the margin clerks off his back.

But he wasn't worried, that would all change after the two-fifteen announcement.

The day agonizingly crept by. The television was set to the twenty-four hour business channel, and just like his informer had told him, at two fifteen sharp breaking news appeared on the screen. The news anchored fiddled with his earpiece and then announced that the Federal Reserve Board would be making a major policy statement at any moment.

Jack smiled deeply and for one of those rare times in his life, his mind stopped scheming about making money. He looked away from the television and stared out of the window. The sun was high in the clear, blue sky and its rays reflected brilliantly off the Harbor's calm surface. As he stared at the ocean water a strange feeling of impending doom suddenly overcame him.

He grabbed the Wall Street Journal and scanned the headlines as if he was expecting to find something that would explain his sudden fear. Then, he saw the date,

March Fifteenth. He knew the date was significant for some reason, but he couldn't quite figure out why.

“What was the hell does that date mean?” he cursed out loud.

A premonition that disaster was about to strike swept through his racing mind. Then it hit him. He realized what the significance of the date was, the Ides of March. Today was March Fifteenth, the date of Caesar's assassination. The coin, Berkhov's warning”

“Oh my god,” he mumbled grabbing his black phone.

“C'mon.” He yelled as the line to his trader rang. Something was terribly wrong. He could feel it with every bit of trading instinct he had ever learned over the years.

His trader picked up the line, but it was too late. Before Jack could give the instructions to liquidate his massive stock position he heard the reporter announce over the TV, “In a stunning policy change the Federal Reserve has announced plans to raise the Federal Funds rate by fifty basis points to stave off future inflation . . .”

Jack couldn't comprehend what was happening. He stared at the computer screen as the market began to plummet. He had been set up. The markets spiraled out of control downwards like they had during the 1000 point Flash Crash. With every blink of an eye Jack knew he was incurring losses of epic proportions and that his entire fortune had been completely wiped out.

He stood watching the plunging stock indices when the phone rang. He picked up without answering.

“Hi Jack,” Ms. Blue said with no emotion. “Oops I guess I was wrong on that pick, huh.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“You remember Don Stiles.”

Jack winced at the mention of the name. Stiles had been a managing partner at the bank and Jack had bet a trader a Porsche that he could get him fired within six months. Jack had won the car.

“You destroyed him for no reason whatsoever,” Ms. Blue continued, “I bet you never once thought about how that would affect his family, did you. I bet you didn’t even know that he committed suicide?”

“What does that have to do with you?” Jack stammered.

“Let me tell you something Jack, Long time paybacks are the best. You still don’t realize that it was I who actually recruited you. I gave my name to your contact at the Wall Street Journal to pass along to you. I know you would have done extensive background check on me before trying to recruit me into your little nest of vipers and I thought you would have connected the dots but I guess you got sloppy.”

“How.”

“You never looked into my husband. His last name is Stiles. I kept my name when we got married. My husband’s father was Don Stiles. Your little bet ruined many lives. Well, now you know what it is like to be destroyed by another just for the fun of it. I know how much you bet on the stock market so that means I know you are completely wiped out. You forgot, Jack?”

“Forgot what?”

“Beware the Ides of March.”

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Jack stood up, and without a further thought turned his computer off. He left the room and slowly walked down the circular stairway that led to the foyer in the front hall. He opened a closet door and saw his bag of golf clubs. He reached inside the bag's front pocket and pulled out the tiny case. Slowly, he opened it and inside was his one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollar ball mark, the Double Dagger Denarius.

He slipped the coin into his coat pocket and left the building. He walked along the crooked, centuries old sidewalk that separated the peninsula from Charleston's harbor. The water lapped high up against the seawall and a calm ocean breeze gently rustled the palm trees that lined the path.

Jack had walked this very path hundreds of times before, but never as a poor man, never as a failure. He was surprised to discover that all he could think about was how beautiful the entire area was. The water, the colorful gardens, the Spanish moss dangling off the limbs of the giant oak trees that had survived wars, hurricanes, fires and earthquakes. How come he had never noticed all this before?

He stopped walking and leaned over the railing and stared out into Charleston's Harbor. Way off in the distance he could see a giant green cargo ship making it's way into the safety of Charleston's harbor. He wondered where the ship had come from and what it would be like to sail across an entire ocean on such a vessel. Maybe he should go down to the docks and see if any of the ships needed a deckhand for their return voyages. That way, he could just disappear without having to explain to the world how he lost a life's fortune on a single trade.

He laughed at the thought. He was fifty-six years old and possessed absolutely no skills whatsoever. The only thing he had ever been good at was trading paper over a computer, and he would never be able to do that again.

A stiff breeze suddenly picked up and Jack shivered, not from being cold, but because he fully understood the ramifications of his actions and what now must be done. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out the coin. He studied the portrait of Brutus and wondered what thoughts had passed through his mind when he knew that all had been lost.

Jack turned the coin over and looked at the double daggers. For the first time it occurred to him that it was simply amazing that a coin minted over two thousand years ago could survive to this day. He stared at the daggers for what seemed like an eternity, then without hesitation threw the coin into the deep waters of Charleston's harbor.

Jack took one last look at the beauty that surrounded him, and again, wondered how he could have been so blind to it all. He took a deep breath and pulled the revolver out of his coat.

Just like Brutus, and all the others, his life had been ruled by ambition, greed, and power. And now, like all the others, his time was up.

Authors note: If you like this story the book is a hell of a lot better. It is titled Double Daggers and was an award-winning finalist in the National Indie Excellence Awards.

You can check it out at www.jrclifford.com

The next section contains the historical facts about the famous Brutus Ides of March Denarius.

THE BRUTUS EID OF MAR DENARIUS



Beware of the IDES of MARCH!

No other date carries such sinister connotations because it was on March 15, 44 BC that Julius Caesar was murdered. Many historians believe the Caesar's assassination changed the direction of Western Civilization forever and the events surrounding the historic day has fascinated scholars, historians and writers ever since.

On that fateful day Caesar went to the Forum to deliver a speech to the Roman Senate in the portico of Pompey's Theater despite warnings from close associates, "that something dastardly is brewing."

As Caesar entered the theater he was attacked by a group of senators led by Marcus Brutus and his brother-in-law, Cassius. The conspirators who numbered more than sixty had hidden daggers underneath their togas and they attacked Caesar with a vengeance.

Caesar was mortally wounded and ironically fell beneath a statue of Pompey. It was there that Caesar uttered the famous line to his last assassin, "Et tu, Brute?"—"and even you, Brutus."

Brutus and Caesar had a long, complicated relationship going back decades. In fact, Brutus' own mother, Servilia, had been a mistress of Caesar's and some ancient and modern writers have speculated that Caesar was actually Brutus' father. However, that fact is mostly disputed by modern day historians because of the proximity of the two men's ages. But, there is no disputing the fact that Caesar repeatedly acted favorably regarding Brutus for reasons that were not completely clear.

The Eid of Mar coinage of Marcus Brutus is the most famous of all ancient Roman coin types. The coin was minted in the late summer or early fall of 42 BC in western Asia Minor or northern Greece. It was the final issue minted in the name of Marcus Brutus before he committed suicide after losing the battle of Philippi to Marc Antony on October 42 BC.

The coin celebrated Brutus' role in the assassination of Caesar and a depiction of Marcus Brutus is on the obverse (front of the coin). Along the exergue on the right is the inscription IMP (IMPERATOR) which was a military title for leader. Next to IMP at the top of the coin is BRVT (Brutus) and on the left side of the coin is the mint master or Moneyer who issued the coins, L Plaet Cest (Lucius Plaetorius Cestianus).

On the reverse are two daggers, the murder instrument, and situated between them is the liberty cap which symbolized the freedom of all Romans. Underneath the liberty cap and daggers is the date of the assassination—EID MAR.

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The Roman Republic had stood for over 500 years with the core belief that no individual was considered greater than the Republic. Brutus argued that the assassination of Caesar, who was very popular especially among his troops, was necessary to protect Rome from the emergence of a dictator or king.

But were Brutus' motivations dictated because he was trying to defend the Republic from a tyrant, or was he jealous of Caesar's power and wanted to rule Rome for himself.

Brutus' conflicting actions were written about by two of the world's most famous authors.

In Shakespeare's, *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is portrayed as the tragic hero trying to win freedom from Rome while Caesar is depicted as a ruthless tyrant.

But the poet Dante has a much different take on Brutus. In his classic, *Divine Comedy*, Brutus is confined to the lowest level of hell where he is eternally eaten alive by Satan for his crime of betrayal.

Who is right? Those questions have been argued about for over 2000 years and the answers will probably never be known.

Fewer than a hundred of the EID MAR DENARII are known to exist today. Most sell for over a hundred thousand dollars.

—Jamie Clifford, author of *Double Daggers*.

Sources consulted: [Imperial Coinage](#), [David Vagi](#) *Bellum Civile*, [Michael Dakins](#) *100 Greatest Ancient Coins* [Harlan J. Berk](#)

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