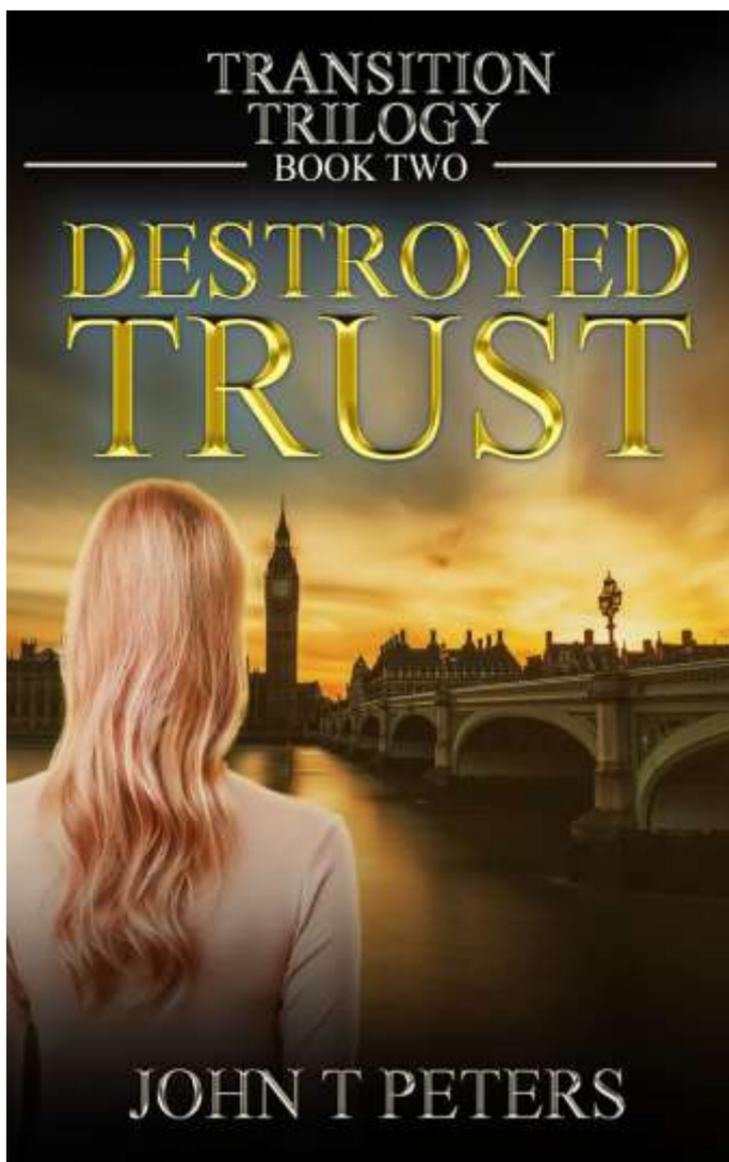


Destroyed Trust



Destroyed Trust



---

# Destroyed Trust

---

Transition Trilogy

Book Two



John T. Peters

Destroyed Trust

This book is a work of fiction, and except in the case of historical fact, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Text copyright © 2019

All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.

Also, by  
John T Peters

Sidetracked  
Africa Beckons

Author Website

<http://www.johntpeters.uk>

## CHAPTER ONE



Work was steady but uninteresting at *Barry and Hammond: Private Investigators*. We were a relatively new concern, and I was a somewhat new investigator, but thus far, chasing down depositions and filling in paperwork hadn't proved particularly inspiring.

That morning, the building's communal receptionist, Jane, my flatmate and lover, was loitering in my office. She was complaining about her friend's partner, Colin, who had violent tendencies. Then the phone rang, and I was grateful for the interruption because I knew both parties involved, Colin and Colleen, and wasn't sure how best to react.

'James!' It was my primary source of income, Mr Ahman, owner of Zurich Precious Metals. 'Our friend, Howard, has contacted me with a proposition. They have many unmarked 10oz gold bars for sale in a safe deposit box in Los Angeles. The CIA paid This gold to a group of mercenaries for their services in a South American country. They offer the gold at 20 per cent below the market value.'

'That's a good price and will generate a fair profit,' I commented.

‘This price is exciting, but with Howard involved, I’m regrettably anxious about the safety of my money. Please look into this for me. I told Howard to contact you. Would you fly out to Los Angeles to inspect the setup and see if it is kosher? If you’re satisfied, we will buy it,’ continued Mr Ahman.

I could feel the thrill of excitement—some action at last!

‘Sir, it would be a pleasure. I agree; we will have to tread carefully. Even though I enjoy Howard’s company, he does seem to mix with the most unsavoury people and gets involved with some fraudulent transactions.

Please fax me all the details you have to help me prepare myself; then, I’ll be ready when Howard calls.’

Howard’s real name was Govard Jankovic, and he originated from Yugoslavia, where his family still lived. Mainly, he resided in Vienna, where he had an office.

Thinking of Howard, the butter deal we did was successful as far as I was concerned. He paid my commission promptly. Afterwards, however, I discovered he used me because he needed a legitimate source to purchase the butter.

So, I immediately disassociated myself from the transaction. The butter was purely a commodity to

claim subsidies from the intervention board by exporting it to various countries and then importing it again, repeating this transaction repeatedly. The butter must have been genuinely rancid by now. I was amazed that the authorities had not discovered it yet.

I looked at Jane with a smile on my face. 'Why don't we go to the Three Anchors pub this evening for a meal? We've not been for a long time, and at least you would have a Colin-free evening as he is banned.'

Jane replied, 'Yes! We need a relaxing evening. Only the two of us.'

I continued, 'An evening alone would be nice. However, that phone call has me thinking that I wish Mr Ahman would come and visit. I also miss seeing Mr Cohen and going to the races. You looked lovely in your outfit at the races and when we went to the Savoy.'

Mr Cohen's brother was my parents' next-door neighbour in South Africa. He had helped Sarah and me when we arrived in England by offering us work and helping us find accommodation. He owns several racehorses and thus frequented the racecourse. I introduced him to Mr Ahman as I knew that he and his friends in the Jewish community always had gold coins for sale, especially to an end-user who owned a gold refinery. He and Mr Ahman got on well together. To our amazement, Mr Ahman got hooked on horse racing, and I wouldn't have been surprised if he invested or purchased shares in Mr Cohen's horses.

Undeniably, it helped to seal my relationship with Mr Ahman as his representative here in London.

During a lovely pub meal of fish and chips, I explained to Jane about Mr Ahman's phone call and what he had asked me to do.

Jane was looking anxious. 'It sounds scary, especially seeing it is not on your home ground. How long do you expect to be away?'

I tried to appease Jane, wondering why the concern was all of a sudden. I'd done this sort of thing before.

'Not more than two weeks. Rest assured, if it looks all dangerous, I will come straight back, and naturally, Howard will be with me.'

'Howard, being with you does not make me feel relieved at all,' Jane remarked, a frown appearing on her forehead.

Jane continued, 'He gets up to all sorts of mischief with these transactions. I think he's a crook, and I wouldn't trust him as far as I can spit.'

Trying to change the subject, I made a suggestion.

'After this transaction, I think we should plan a holiday. Perhaps to South Africa, my mother is complaining that she has not yet met you.'

We finished our meal and took a slow, romantic walk back to the apartment. That night, we made love again like we did the first time. Afterwards, Jane whispered with a twinkle in her eyes. 'I missed you.'

I could only reply. 'I love you.'

The following morning at breakfast, Jane, still sleepy, commented, 'You seem to be surprisingly chirpy... I even heard you singing in the shower this morning.'

Agreeing with Jane, I replied, 'I suppose this new deal with Mr Ahman has cheered me up a bit and has focused my mind on things other than Colin and all his problems. It has been getting heavy lately.'

I poured myself some tea and went to sit beside Jane.

Jane exclaimed, 'You are not kidding! The way he's going on, Colleen will be dead in a month, and yet she can't see what's going on or even find any fault with him.'

I cuddled Jane, trying to calm her. 'There is nothing much we can do to help those two. We need to look after ourselves and leave them to their own devices. Maybe be around to pick up the pieces.'

We caught the underground train to work, both of us in a more relaxed and cheerful mood. The typical grey, dreary London drizzle could not bring my spirit down.

That morning, I filled Tim Barry, my business partner and fellow PI, in on all the details of what I would have to do for Mr Ahman. Before heading to Los Angeles, I planned to complete all existing cases in the next two weeks, but he would handle all new

issues. I gave him a brief overview of my current investigations if he needed to work on them in my absence.

Amongst all the faxes from Mr Ahman relating to the transaction, I noticed that he had also included a bank comfort letter stating that the bank guaranteed the availability of funds up to six million dollars for the purchase of 10oz gold bars by Zurich Precious Metals. It was printed on the bank's letterhead and signed by the President of the bank, Credit Suisse Zurich.

According to the documents, the gold seemed to be at the Anaheim Safe Deposit Company, Newport Beach, California. I assumed that this was in Los Angeles. I couldn't trace who the owner was as there seemed to be several people concerned with the transaction. No doubt Howard would let me know when I next spoke to him.

From the onset, the transaction seemed suspicious with such a significant discount. Still, I owed it to Mr Ahman to see it through to the best of my abilities. First, I had to establish if the gold bars were indeed in the Safety Deposit Company and that they were pure gold bars, as there were no assay markings. Only a personal visit could prove that. Secondly, how would the gold be exported if it was not legal to sell in the USA? Then how would the payment be made for something that was not lawful to sell, as there wouldn't be any invoices? Taking such a large amount of dollars into the USA was complicated without the Government's knowledge: questions and more

questions.

I think the safest and only logical way would be to export the gold to England or Switzerland—preferably Switzerland—and pay for the gold in that country. Then, the gold could be smelted into 1kg bars, re-assayed and sold legally.

The procedure called for particularly complicated steps involving a lot of trust in an unknown party, purporting to be a group of mercenaries.

It left a bad taste in my mouth, and I wondered what the outcome would be if I attempted this transaction.

I spent the rest of the day trying to complete all the paperwork for my unfinished investigations.

Later in the day, Tim came into my office and invited Jane and me for drinks after work at his home. ‘That would be wonderful,’ I accepted and then told him my concerns about the gold deal.

His response was entirely in line with my opinion. We could not trust the seller, so I should keep my distance from them. Not to become over-friendly no matter what invitations they may offer. They could use anything I accepted from them to manipulate me into being less cautious.

We spent a pleasant evening with Tim and Sandra. They lived in an old but beautiful detached house in its gardens in Richmond on the Thames. My first thought was that this must have cost a fortune.

Tim later explained that he had inherited the house, and the upkeep was crippling, but they loved it too much to move, and besides, it had been in the family for many years. They planned to pass it on to their children.

A few days later, Howard phoned, stating he was in England and would like to see me. I told him to come straight over. 'You know the way,' I said.

He responded, 'I should know since I was the one who found the office for you. There will be three of us. Therefore, you better get the conference room ready.'

I told Jane that Howard and two of his associates were coming and that I would need the conference room.

Any company could use the conference room in the building on the proviso they booked in advance.

It had wood panelling, a fully stocked bar and counter on one side, and a table to seat twelve people in the centre.

Jane was concerned. 'Why don't you ask Tim to sit in with you? It sounds a bit intimidating, three to one.'

'No, I'll be OK. Tim has to get on with his work. Besides, this is not investigation work, only assisting Mr Ahman.'

Howard arrived in a noticeably jubilant mood. I could hear him laughing from my office three doors

away. I went to the conference room, where Jane served them tea.

Howard greeted me with his arms outstretched to hug me, and in his broken English, he exclaimed, 'Long time no see, how are you, my friend? You are looking to be in good health. London must be treating you well. Let me introduce you to my two friends from Germany; they are bankers. Mr Brauman and Mr Schmidt. They will be coming with us to Los Angeles.'

The two Germans did not look the part—big, surly men dressed in suits with dark, full-length overcoats. They did not utter a word, purely sat there looking menacingly at no one in particular.

I believe they were better suited as Howard's security detail than bankers.

Howard continued, 'Did Mr Ahman give you the authority to buy the gold we found in LA? If this is correct, when can you go?'

I gave Howard the bank letter Mr Ahman faxed to me, which read:

*'To whom it may concern,*

*This is to certify that we are ready, willing and able to pay on behalf of Zurich Precious Metals up to six million dollars to purchase gold for the nominated party as Mr James Hammond of Zurich Precious Metals instructed.*

*This document is valid for 21 days from the date of issue.*

*Signed and dated by the President of Credit Suisse Zurich.'*

Howard showed this to his banker friends, who agreed that the letter gave me full power to purchase the gold.

It was time to let Howard know what my terms would be. However, the first thing is to see if the gold is indeed there and check if it is pure gold. Only then can I decide if a transaction is possible.'

Surprised and slightly thrown off balance, Howard replied, 'Certainly, the gold is real. The seller supplied a certificate from a top LA jeweller on the purity of the gold and a letter from the Safety Deposit Company verifying the quantity and weight. All you have to do is pay the money; the gold is yours. They will pay all expenses, plane tickets and five-star hotel accommodation.'

I could tell that Howard was becoming annoyed. He kept glancing at the bankers and started to fidget. He seemed to think I would agree to the operation without any thought.

These transactions are generally completed on the strength of the paperwork—for example, confirmation of the purity and weight by a trusted third-party company.

Not knowing the companies involved, I had the distinct feeling that Howard and his associates thought that I would be an easy pushover and that they could

do as they wished due to my inexperience and youth.

Mindful of this, I explained to Howard that I would prefer to pay my flight expenses and stay with a friend in Anaheim.

‘I must remain completely neutral to protect Mr Ahman in this transaction. Suppose I allow the seller to pay my expenses. In that case, Mr Ahman may feel this influences me and cannot make an accurate decision.’

I also told Howard I could fly out that Friday and visit the Safety Deposit Company on Monday, which cheered him up. He asked if I could make him a copy of the bank letter, and I obliged.

Howard and the bankers were flying out that day, and he could use the bank letter to show the seller that they were genuine and prepare the transaction for my arrival on Monday.

I still felt a bit suspicious and needed to know more details.

‘Who is the seller of this gold? Is it the Safety Deposit Company or a private individual?’ I enquired.

Howard responded, ‘We are dealing with a man named Jim Larkin, who I think represents a group, the original mercenaries, paid with this gold. He is a shareholder of the Safety Deposit Company and the owner of Anaheim Scrap Metal.’

It was virtually impossible to check such a vast

quantity of gold bars for weight and purity on your own. Therefore, you had to rely on an independent company to certify the purity and weight before payment.

Ordinarily, such companies were of international reputations like SGS or Brinks, both large multinational companies whose expertise were testing, verification and certification, not a jeweller verifying the purity and the seller confirming the weight (Quantity).

Howard's hesitancy to use these companies raised further suspicions in my mind.

'OK, I will meet you at the Safety Deposit Company on Monday, say 12:30 am. Where are you staying, in case I need to contact you?' I asked Howard.

Howard replied, 'We have booked in at the Hilton Hotel Anaheim.'

With that, Howard and his two associates left, and I returned to my office to phone my good friend, Richard Stannard, commonly known amongst his friends as Dick.

I had been friends with Dick for many years. We initially met when we were both in boarding school together. His parents were attached to the US embassy in Zambia. Being far from South Africa, he spent all his short school holidays with me at my parents' home.

His parents' tour of duty in Africa ended, and the family settled on a maize farm in Waterloo, Iowa.

Dick did not live in Anaheim. He spent most of his time in Chicago promoting the sale of the crops from a syndicate of smaller farmers from Waterloo.

I was sure he would join me in Anaheim as he had family there. I explained to him about the transaction, asking him to meet me there as I needed his help checking out the companies involved and Mr Jim Larkin.

'Please, could you book the two of us into a good hotel in the area, not too expensive as Mr Ahman is paying and I don't want him to think I'm wasteful?

Could you also hire a car and meet me at the airport on Friday if you are flying down? I'll fax you my time of arrival. I will make sure we pay all your expenses,' I said.

Dick laughingly replied, 'You sure don't expect much, but I will be there. Should I bring a gun? Are these people dangerous?'

'I don't know, you are the muscle, and it's your country.'

'OK, see you on Friday,' Dick replied.

Smiling to myself, I replaced the telephone handset. Dick was about 6'3' and weighed about 18 stone—all of it muscle. With him to accompany me, I felt in safe hands.

Satisfied that my plans were all coming together, I phoned Mr Ahman, explaining what I planned, and apologised for the extra expenses in the precaution of hiring Dick Stannard for protection.

Mr Ahman commented that I had done the right thing and that maybe we should put Dick on the company books. Then, he could also use him for protection when in America. 'Now that you have this bodyguard, I would be happy to fly out if you need my help with the transaction.'

'You know,' he said, 'I have always been a bit edgy about going to America. There seem to be too many hoodlums. I would feel safe with the two of you there.'

The rest of the week was uneventful and proceeded smoothly. Even my relationship with Jane seemed to be in calmer waters.

She must have been getting fed up with me sulking around all the time. I did, however, miss Sarah dreadfully. Her death was a great shock to my system, and I could not get her out of my mind, which made me doubt how much I loved Jane. If I truly loved her, surely I would not be thinking of Sarah all the time.

Thankfully, preparing for the trip to America kept me occupied and suppressed my doubts. I think that is what was missing—being busy. The minute boredom sets in, I seem to turn to whisky to help lessen the sorrow caused by the demise of Sarah.

I had thought that being a private investigator

would be more exciting than this. So far, it had primarily been paperwork, photographing some fraudulent insurance claimants and following a few wives on behalf of their husbands to prove their infidelity in upcoming divorce trials.

The most exciting thing about being a private investigator was seeing the brass plaque on the wall displaying our name, '*Barry and Hammond: Private Investigators*, 'every morning when arriving at work. I was the latter on the sign, James Hammond.

Working as a private detective in London was a far cry from my previous experiences. Born and educated in South Africa by British parents, I joined the Post Office. I was posted to the lovely village of Lusikisiki on the wild coast. After catching sight of the beautiful Sarah Meth in apartheid-era South Africa, we soon found ourselves plunging headlong down a dangerous and unexpected path. Sarah was classified as non-white, which made our love forbidden by law.

Seeking to find a way out of South Africa where our relationship could thrive, Sarah and I embarked on an audacious plan to find a lost treasure from an 18<sup>th</sup>-century shipwreck. Still, an unexpected discovery occurred when we found a cache of uncut diamonds that armed dealers also sought. We smuggled the stones out of South Africa to help establish ourselves in England. Still, tragedy struck just when everything seemed to go our way. They murdered Sarah, and I sought revenge.

One of my worst qualities has always been that I plunge head over heels into any situation confronting me. As a youngster, I was continuously bullied because of my difference from my fellow pupils; I got into all sorts of trouble in school. I hated living up to other people's expectations. Rugby was the primary school sport, and everyone had to play.

I liked soccer and joined a private club. My parents then sent me to boarding school. I rebelled and did everything against the rules. I was given a caning for passing my exams because I did not once do my homework.

As I grew older, I struggled to make lasting friendships due to my anxiety that everyone was judgemental towards me. I became anti-social. Not that I liked the Africans. More, the dislike of the rules that the Government imposed against them and all of us. Even the Beatles were banned!

My friend, Tim Barry, helped me punish Sarah's killers. He was 6 ft 3 inches, ex-MI 5, with knowledge of the law and lots of experience. Plus, my capital from the sale of the uncut diamonds, we started the agency in London.

Fortunately, with the recommendation of Chief Detective Mike Ashton, who helped me with Sarah's murder, the clients had been rolling in, and we became reasonably successful. Also, I am the representative in London of Mr Ahman, the owner of Zurich Precious Metals.

Although I'd been in London for some time, I always avoided central London at peak times.

I will never forget the shock to my system the first time I stepped out of our office block onto the pavement, meeting the 5 o'clock rush of pedestrians all leaving work.

It reminded me of a colony of ants. Only ants are organised and moved in an orderly manner to and from the nest. It was chaos, thousands of humans hurrying in different directions, taking you along in vast waves. And the traffic, hundreds of cars pointing in different directions, some forward but most sideways, hoping to get in a faster lane. However, no one was moving anywhere except for bicycles darting in and out between the stationary cars.

I spotted a pub, 'The Pig and Something', unable to read the sign before being shoved forward. I somehow forced my way into the pub, thinking I would have a few beers while waiting for the rush hour to subside. Unfortunately, half of London had the same idea, and customers stood three to four deep around the bar.

It was a sharp contrast to the village in South Africa, where it seemed crowded when more than three people were in the bar.

Eventually, I managed to buy a pint of beer but had to stand in a corner as there was no sitting room. I soon learnt that it was wise to stay at work until after the rush hour.

In London, you only had to move a metre away from your office block, and the chance that you would meet someone you know must be at least one in a million. If you seek anonymity, this is the right place to be.

**[Back to E-Book](#)**