

# *The Golden Plan*

PSYCHIC SOLUTIONS, MYSTERY #2

PATRICIA RICE





# *Author's Note*



MY ORIGINAL MAGICAL MALCOLM SERIES WAS BUILT ON THE premise of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century realm where my Druidic-descended Malcolms had no rationale for their inexplicable gifts. The rest of society called them witches, while my scientific Ives did their best to figure them out.

In this series, I welcome you to my 21<sup>st</sup>-century universe of colorful, eccentric characters who march to different drummers and who will never fit into any niche you may wish to cram them into. They're not detectives or policemen. Following procedures might cause their heads to explode, except for legal, military-minded Jax—who does his level best to make them conform, except when he doesn't. But they always get the job done, even if they're dragged screaming out of their comfortable small town into the big, sometimes dangerous, world the rest of us live in.

I hope you'll join us for the journey!

PS: FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO THINK CONAN OSWIN IN THE FIRST chapter sounds familiar, take a look at TROUBLE WITH AIR AND MAGIC (<https://patriciarice.com/books/trouble-with-air-and-magic/>), book two of my California Malcolms series, my first attempt at bringing my Malcolm/Ives characters into the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

# One



*"JACK RABBIT. I COULD CALL MYSELF JACK RABBIT. SINCE I DON'T* have a name, would you mind if I stole yours? Name-stealing seems a common practice out here." Sitting in the California desert twilight, Damon Ives Jackson—or maybe it was just Damon Ives or No Nameatall—poked campfire embers while keeping an eye on the rabbit frozen in the shadows of a Joshua tree.

If he was the son of an identity-stealing killer, he needed to know that before he could proceed. For all he knew, he owed some poor family everything he ever earned.

Learning that his parents were frauds was a pervasive black cloud he couldn't blow off. He'd spent his career fighting fraud—irony at its worst.

The rabbit, of course, did not reply. Three days alone in the desert—maybe he was starting to hallucinate. Or having a psychic vision. Jax—the name he'd been called all his life—was almost envious of the women he'd met back east who thoroughly believed in their paranormal abilities. He could use a magical gift or two to solve his dilemma.

He'd best not think about the miniature whirlwind with orange curls he'd left behind. Evie would have something succinct to say about his current state, if she didn't murder him first.

The rumble of a vehicle hitting the ruts of the old dirt road intruded on his misery.

Jax accepted the incongruity of an approaching vehicle in the middle of nowhere. Someone had to be paying the taxes on acres of dirt. Maybe they'd shoot him for trespassing.

A Jeep parked next to Jax's old Subaru. He'd sold his classic XKE and his condo when he'd left Georgia. The Subaru had served him well as transportation and housing on his quest to find the answer to a decades-old mystery in California. He hated to return defeated, but he had few options left.

The man climbing out of the Jeep was tall and rangy and a total stranger.

"Lost, are you?" Jax asked before the intruder could speak.

"Thought you might be. You drove all the way from Georgia to commune with the Joshua trees?"

His license plate, of course. Just because Evie had taught him there might be magic in the world didn't mean most things didn't have a practical basis.

"You a ranger? I didn't think I was harming anything." Jax didn't get up or even bother looking at the unwanted visitor.

"Conan Oswin, not a ranger, possibly a distant cousin, though. Mind if I have a seat?" He folded up on the ground with the confidence of someone who didn't anticipate refusal and produced two beers from a backpack.

*Cousin*, huh. He'd been roaming this part of California for six weeks and had yet to find more than pieces of paper indicating the existence of the man who might or might not have been his father. He'd left a pretty wide search trail, so even this remark didn't surprise him. Jax popped the top of the beer can without a word. He'd learned interrogation at the hands of masters.

"Military, like my brother Magnus," Conan guessed. "Irritating as all hell when he gets silent like that."

Exactly. Jax took a sip of the cold beer and waited.

His companion stretched long legs encased in worn hiking boots toward the fire. "My sis-in-law leaves sticky trails all over the internet. Genealogy is Nadine's specialty. She has access to databases most people don't know exist."

*Genealogy databases*—DNA. Jax had submitted his over a month ago in hopes of learning who his real father was. He hadn't had any response yet. "I'm guessing Ancestry.com didn't send you out here to tell me I'm 88% Anglo-European."

"Actually, you're in the range of 20% Native American. As soon as the match to my family showed up, Nadine went on red alert. She's a trifle OC." The stranger looked like a laidback surfer. He didn't move a muscle that wasn't necessary and swept his overlong blond hair out of his face with a toss.

“*Your* family?” Maybe he really was hallucinating. Who in hell haunted DNA laboratories? Crazy people and cops.

He’d already seen the percentage. Native American explained his blade of a nose and easily tanned skin. But then, he’d always assumed he’d inherited those from his mother, who never claimed to be a Georgia belle.

Conan Oswin continued. “There are genetic markers distinctive to the Ives family, and we’ve both got them.”

Jax ignored the twitch of confusion at being identified as an Ives. He wanted to be the Jackson he’d thought he was. This stretch of the Mojave had once been the ranch and mine of one Aaron *Ives*, a man he’d never heard of until a few weeks ago. The Franklin Jackson Jax had called dad, who had died in Georgia almost twenty years ago, had the fingerprints of Aaron Ives. *Why?*

Jax took another swig of the man’s beer. Did he dare hope that this Conan Oswin person knew about the mysterious Aaron Ives?

“Don’t know where you picked up the Jackson bit,” Oswin continued. “But you sure got saddled with one of the Ives’ crappy first names. We’re Magnus, Conan, and Dylan. Try one of those on for size.”

Damon Ives maybe-Jackson flung a pebble at the campfire. “Sounds like my theoretical dad must have known yours. I can’t even call myself Jax anymore.”

“Call yourself Alien Number One. Your name only matters to you. Choose one.” The intruder didn’t show the least curiosity in Jax’s story — *because he already knew it?*

That thought caused more than a twitch. “You’re an Oswin, not an Ives,” Jax pointed out, irrelevantly. There were far more important questions to ask, but the name problem pressed on him.

“Big brother’s name is Dylan *Ives* Oswin for a reason, just as you got stuck with the Damon *Ives* Jackson moniker.” Conan took another swig of beer. “We’re twigs off the old family tree.”

“How did you find me in the middle of the desert?” Irritated that he was even having this conversation, Jax threw another pebble at the fire.

“Once Nadine reported we had a strange family member roaming around, I tracked you. We keep an eye on the Mojave. Heavy-duty illegal marijuana growers out here. They get mixed up with some bad mad scientist stuff, so we got curious.”

“Can’t say I’ve met any drug dealers or mad scientists yet.” Jax watched

him warily. “Even a satellite can’t track me when my phone is off. For all intents and purposes, I should be invisible.”

Conan snorted. “You’re more visible here than in the city. Let’s say Magnus and I are in the information business. You want to explain why you’re here and want to be invisible? It’s possible we can help.”

Jax sipped his coffee. “You don’t even know who I am.”

“Georgia license plate, driver’s license. . . Not a stretch. You want to know what’s in your credit report?” Conan crushed his beer can.

Definitely the kind of thing Jax’s hacker team would have done—and they were trained military intelligence.

“You’re tracking a name that might not even belong to me,” Jax retorted. “My birth certificate says Damon Ives Jackson, parents Franklin and Hannah Jackson. They died in a car crash nearly twenty years ago. I have just learned that Franklin’s fingerprints belong to Aaron Ives, owner of this patch of dirt.”

“Pretty dangd clever for a lawyer to track property that might belong to him.” Conan spoke with sarcasm. “Proves you might be entertaining.”

Jax scowled. Talking to a human instead of a jackrabbit had its moments. He continued with the revelation that had sent him careening off track. “The Franklin Jackson I called father was actually Aaron Ives’ *attorney*.” It hadn’t taken spy equipment to search databases, but connections had helped. “According to his death certificate, Aaron Ives died in a mining accident in that mound right over there that I’m not even going to call a mountain.”

Conan eyed the rough hillside. “Lots of abandoned mines out here. Digging them up is seldom profitable. That means no body, right? When did he die?”

No body, of course. That would explain heaps and bunches. “Aaron Ives died months before *Franklin Jackson* arrived in Savannah, Georgia and took a job at Stockton and Stockton, LLC.” Stephen Stockton being the man Jax had called his adoptive father since his birth parents had died. “Franklin was married when he arrived, and I was born a year later.”

“Huh. Maybe he named you after his recently deceased client.” Conan scuffed his boot in the dust, thinking.

“The client whose *fingerprints* his matched? What are the chances a military security clearance would have the wrong fingerprints?” Jax had verified the father he thought had died in a car accident had the same fingerprints as the man who had purportedly died in that mine. One man couldn’t die twice.

Which meant his father might have murdered his attorney or vice versa.

“Slim to none,” Conan agreed. “Send us what you’ve found. Magnus has government clearances even the president doesn’t have. You’re wondering who’s buried in that mountain, aren’t you?”

“I’m wondering *why* he’s buried in that mountain. The land is so worthless that no one has claimed it. I’m still digging around in thirty-year-old records, trying to figure out who these men are. They died before DNA was an identifier, so even if I get some hits in a DNA database, they’re likely to be distant relations like you.” And his digging had apparently triggered Conan’s sister-in-law. Interesting. So maybe he did have family out here. Spying did seem to be a genetic flaw.

“We need objects that once belonged to both men, see if we can pull DNA off them. You got anything of your father’s?”

“Old legal files he worked on, maybe. Not much there. My father’s executor sold off everything and set up a trust with the proceeds. I have a few old books and photograph albums dating back to my infancy but not before. And from what little I’m able to find, we’d have to dig up the mountain for the DNA of whoever, if anyone, is in the mine. Both men lacked immediate family. I’ve been traipsing all over this property, looking for anything resembling a house.”

Conan typed notes into his phone. “I’ll have Nadine poke around. Her family has abilities beyond the normal. Don’t know if they’ll be useful in this case, but digging through internet files is what Nadine does best.”

Jax had people back home who could do that. He missed his team. He even missed Evie and Loretta and their craziness. None of them needed him. He’d arranged it that way. But after weeks of not finding out what he needed to know, he was wondering if he’d made a mistake by leaving. He didn’t see how he could have done it any differently though. He couldn’t live a lie.

But since meeting Evangeline Malcolm Carstairs, he’d stumbled into a world he didn’t recognize. The man he owed for giving him and his sister a home, providing them with educations, and Jax with a job, a man he trusted and respected—had turned out to be a criminal fraud.

Flaky con artists running a psychic shop had turned out to be more honest than his respectable adoptive father and his wealthy business clients. And now Jax was sitting in the desert with a man who practically professed to being a spy and quite possibly related to him in ways he might never know.



## THE GOLDEN PLAN

And this intelligent, knowledgeable spy was married to flakes just like Evie and her family, except they weren't flakes? They were geeks like his team?

The roar of a powerful engine cut the early evening silence.

His days of meditating with nature were over.

**The Indigo Solution**  
**Patricia Rice**

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First digital edition Book View Café 2021  
ISBN: 978-1-63632-018-2 ebook  
ISBN: 978-1-63632-019-9 print

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Published by Rice Enterprises, Dana Point, CA, an affiliate of Book View Café Publishing Cooperative

Book View Café  
304 S. Jones Blvd. Suite #2906  
Las Vegas NV 89107

