

Maz Evans



**THE GIRL WITH
THE GOLDEN GRAN**

Chicken
House

2 Palmer Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
www.chickenhousebooks.com

Text © Mary Evans 2022
Illustrations © Jez Tuya 2022

First published in Great Britain in 2022
Chicken House
2 Palmer Street
Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
United Kingdom
www.chickenhousebooks.com

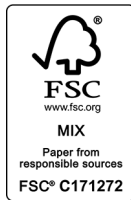
Chicken House/Scholastic Ireland, 89E Lagan Road, Dublin Industrial Estate,
Glasnevin, Dublin D11 HP5F, Republic of Ireland

Mary Evans has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted or utilized
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying
or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover and interior design by Steve Wells and Helen Crawford-White
Cover and interior illustrations by Jez Tuya
Typeset by Dorchester Typesetting Group Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



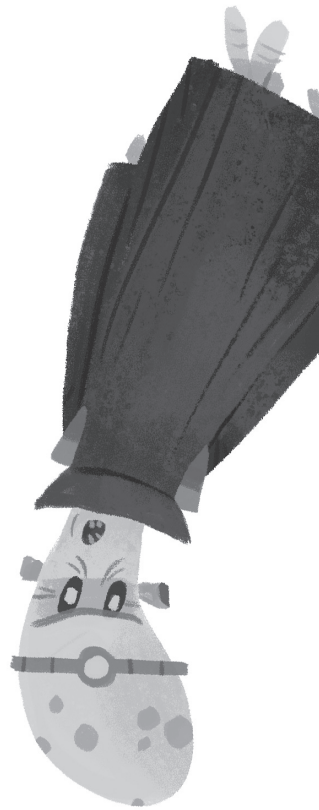
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data available.

PB ISBN 978-1-911490-75-3
eISBN 978-1-915026-00-2



For my dad,
the original Agent Snore
and The Dad Who Loves Me.
From Mazza, with love
xx



**Also by
MAZ EVANS:**

Who Let the Gods Out?
Simply the Quest
Beyond the Odyssey
Against All Gods

Vi Spy: Licence to Chill
Vi Spy: Never Say Whatever Again

And for younger readers

The Exploding Life of Scarlett Fife
The Wobbly Life of Scarlett Fife
The Stormy Life of Scarlett Fife

THE END . . . ?

As the *Spinneret* glided through space, Umbra looked back on the Earth and finally allowed herself a smile.

She'd done it.

The world – that insignificant pebble behind her – was hers. She glanced over to the box containing the Neurotrol, the tiny microchip that would give her everything. Total control over every adult mind on the planet. Power. Wealth. Victory. Revenge.

Umbra's eyes swept over the vast array of controls on her flight deck. She was perfectly on course for NIDUS, the space station with an antenna that, combined with the Neurotrol, would create the universe's first and only mind-control machine. She was on her way. She was unstoppable.

With no small satisfaction, she found her mind drifting back over the past decade, the ten long years it had taken for everything to come together. It had all gone to plan – well, everything except for Robert and his treachery. She had underestimated the pull that troublesome brat Vi would have on her right-hand man, Sir Charge, and nearly paid dearly for it. But she hadn't. And with NIDUS in her control, she would soon make sure that Robert did. She'd force him to destroy the family he'd chosen over her. No one betrayed Umbra and got away with it.

And then there was Easter. Umbra snorted as she celebrated how easy it had been to fool one of the world's greatest spies. Agent Lynx might have been invulnerable to bullets and bombs – but friendship had proved her weakness. As Honey B, it had been insultingly simple to infiltrate Easter's home and heart. Umbra could have taken her revenge at any moment, of course. But shooting someone while they slept or poisoning them over dinner was for amateurs. Villainy was an art form. And Umbra was a grand master. Umbra had hit Easter where it really hurt – she'd made her enemy look stupid. And that was a wound from

which Easter Day would never recover. Robert could take care of Valentine. Easter Day was all Umbra's.

Ensuring that her spacecraft was cruising effortlessly towards her destination, Umbra allowed her eyes to close. World domination was a tiring business – and the next few days would see little chance for rest. She sneezed gently – all this sleepless plotting was giving her a cold. No matter. It was a small price to pay. She allowed her eyes to droop and her mind to float. Soon it would all be over. Soon . . .

A cacophony of alarms snatched her from her doze. She checked the flight deck – was there a malfunction? No, all systems were reporting normally. Umbra fixed on the navigation system. The *Spinneret* was being pulled off course. The shuttle was no longer heading for NIDUS; it was being drawn towards a tiny moon . . .

Umbra frantically tried to override whatever was dragging her, but it was no good. The *Spinneret* was in the grip of something strong, something determined not to let her go. With a curse, she angrily surrendered to its force. She was being pulled to the moon and there was nothing

she could do. As her ship entered the moon's atmosphere and sped towards the ground, Umbra looked over at the Neurotrol again. Whatever was attacking her would soon be sorry.

Because Umbra was taking over the world.

And nothing was going to stop her.



CHAPTER 1

‘**A**nd do you, Easter Day, take this man, George Douglas Sprout, to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from the moons of Tatooine to the mountains of Hoth, to love like Leia and to cherish like Chewbacca from this day forth until you are both transported to a galaxy far, far away?’

Vi had to give it to this registrar. At least they had a more interesting script than the previous ones.

Valentine Day had already become something of an expert in weddings at twelve years old, having watched her mother’s two failed attempts to marry George Sprout and her nan’s one successful one marrying Rod Staff. Perhaps if being a spy didn’t work out, she could conduct

weddings? It was certainly a safer career choice.

Although judging by her family's weddings, not necessarily . . .

'I do,' Easter smiled, trying to ignore the R2-D2 bleeping enthusiastically at her feet. Vi's mind drifted to Russell's irritating robot with a love of 1980s pop music.

'Come back, Agadoo,' she muttered to herself. 'All is forgiven.'

A gasping sob from her grandmother made Vi look over at Independence Day, who hadn't even had time to dye her hair her customary wedding pink, so quickly had this wedding been pulled together.

'There's nothing like the end of the world to focus your priorities,' her mum had kinda joked as she and George hastily organized their 'intimate' (Vi had quickly learnt this meant 'small') wedding at the only venue they could get with two days' notice – a *Star Wars* tribute hall that had a last-minute cancellation when the groom admitted to the bride that he preferred *Star Trek*. The only guests were immediate family, which according to the bride had two key advantages.

'Well, firstly, it gets round that whole awkward

Do-I-invite-my-best-friend-who-actually-turned-out-to-be-Umbra,' Easter had said. 'And secondly, it saves a fortune on catering.'

Apparently, she was kinda joking again. (Vi had quickly learnt this meant 'it wasn't very funny'.)

Vi shook her head, trying to dismiss any thoughts of Umbra, the world's greatest supervillain, known to them for years as Vi's godmother, Honey B. Umbra would have to wait. Today was about Mum and George – Umbra was tomorrow's problem. Although with Umbra already in space clutching a mind-control device that would give her total domination of the planet, Vi tried not to worry about how many tomorrows they all had.

Another breathless sob from Nan snapped Vi back to the replica deck of the *Millennium Falcon*, as her nearly-stepbrother, Russell Sprout, handed his dad the ring that would finally make Easter George's wife.

'With this ring – a custom that incidentally dates back to the Ancient Egyptians, who saw the circle as a symbol of eternity –' George sniffed, 'I thee wed.'

Vi and Russell smiled at one another as George

placed a ring on Easter's finger. They were finally going to become a family. She watched Rod hand Nan a hankie, which Indy coughed into emotionally. Nan had been looking forward to this day as much as her own wedding. It was sweet to see her so overcome.

'But first,' the registrar said as solemnly as his large Yoda ears would allow, 'I must ask if anyone here present knows of any lawful objection to this marriage. Raise your lightsabers now, or forever hold your peace.'

Vi forced a smile. This had historically been the sticking point with her mum's previous weddings, the first interrupted by the return of Vi's reformed super-villain father, Robert Ford, and the second by George's ex-wife, Genevieve. But today, nothing could go wrong. Everyone here was thrilled for the bride and groom. There wasn't anyone to object.

Though Vi still willed Yoda-ears to get a move on, just in case.

'In which case,' the registrar finally announced with a smile, 'I now pronounce you—'

'I'm so sorry!' Nan suddenly cried out. 'I can't carry on!'

Vi felt her blood freeze in her veins. Surely her nan couldn't object to her own daughter's marriage? They'd all had to sign a pre-wedding declaration promising they wouldn't defect to the dark side, for pity's sake.

'Nan?' Vi exclaimed.

'Indy?' George cried out.

'Lotus Flower?' Rod growled.

'Mum?' Easter yelled.

'Darth Vader?' Russell asked.

Everyone turned to look at Russell Sprout, who simply shrugged.

'Come on,' he muttered. 'It wouldn't be the weirdest thing to have happened at one of these weddings.'

'Mum, what is going on?' said Easter through strained teeth.

'I . . . need . . . to . . . stop . . . this . . . wedding,' Indy gasped.

'FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, MUM!' shouted Easter, throwing her bouquet on the floor. 'All this time you've had to say something and you choose now! I know that things didn't work out with Robert and you said I shouldn't have married him because he's—'

‘—a complete idiot,’ George added enthusiastically.

‘Yes, that,’ Easter continued. ‘And maybe you have reservations about my judgement because of that. But George is a good man. A kind man. He’s made me happier than you’ll ever know and you need to trust my judgement as a grown woman because I need this man in my life and I just want to MARRY HIM!’

‘I know all of that, you daft mare,’ Indy gasped, holding on to Rod. ‘But I need something too.’

‘WHAT?!’ everyone cried together.

‘An ambulance,’ whimpered Nan faintly, leaving Vi watching in horror as her beloved grandmother crumpled to the floor unconscious.



‘Why didn’t you tell us?’ whispered Easter as they gathered around Nan’s hospital bed later that afternoon. Vi watched as Nan slipped her fingers through her daughter’s. Indy’s hand somehow looked much smaller than usual. But maybe Vi’s mind was playing tricks on her. She hoped so. Anything was better than what Indy had

just told them.

‘And just when was I supposed to slip it into the conversation?’ scoffed Nan. ‘*Hi, love, the doctors have given me a few months to live. Fancy a cuppa?*’

‘You should have told me,’ said Easter unevenly. ‘I could have helped you.’

Vi could see her mum was trying very hard not to cry. She felt George’s arm slide gently around her shoulders. That made Vi want to cry too.

‘A bloomin’ wizard couldn’t help me now,’ Indy grinned. ‘My time’s up. I’ve had a good run – more than many I’ve known in our profession.’

‘That’s not the point,’ said Easter more forcefully, turning to Nan’s husband. ‘I suppose you knew about this?’

She gave Rod Staff a look that would terrify anyone who wasn’t Rod Staff.

‘This was your mother’s information,’ he growled. ‘She wanted it to stay on a need-to-know basis.’

‘I’m her daughter and I needed to know!’ Easter cried, her tears now readily escaping. ‘I have a right to know, I deserve to know, I—’

‘Well, you know now,’ said Nan. ‘So let’s not waste what time we have left digging over it. It’s

not quite the end game I had in mind. I'd always hoped to go out more like a supernova than a supermarket candle. But what's done is done. Let's enjoy what's ahead together. And when my time comes, you need to let me go.'

'NO!' Vi found herself screaming before she realized the word was in her head. 'No, no, no! There has to be something – a . . . a . . . medicine or a . . . a . . . an operation or . . . just . . . a . . . something! You can't give up like this! You can't!'

Vi wiped away the tears that were spilling down her cheeks. She didn't care about crying now. She just wanted her nan.

Indy looked at her granddaughter with a kind smile.

'Could you give us a moment, everyone?' she asked.

'I'll stay,' said Easter, wiping away her tears.

'No, you won't,' said Indy firmly. 'You'll do what you're told, madam.'

Vi waited for Easter to fight back, to tell her mum she was staying and that was that. But Easter simply nodded and said nothing. Rod kissed his wife on the head, ushering everyone out of the cubicle. Easter clung to her mother's hand. Then,

with a reassuring squeeze and a wink from Indy, she finally let it go.

‘I’ll be in the relatives’ room,’ Vi’s mum said. ‘If you need anything at all . . .’

‘You’ll be the first to know,’ Indy smiled back. ‘Now clear off, the lot of you.’

Easter trudged from her mother’s bedside, pulling the curtain back around the bed as she left.

‘Well, thank goodness for that,’ said Nan, heaving herself up on the bed. ‘It was getting like Jabba the Hutt’s pub in here. Now come here, you.’

She patted the blanket next to her. Vi stuck stubbornly to her spot. This wasn’t happening. She wasn’t going over there to let her nan talk her into this. She was going to—

A single raised eyebrow from Independence Day informed her she was going to do exactly what her grandmother said.

Vi dragged her feet reluctantly to the bed and sat at the end of it. Nan frowned.

‘I realize I haven’t had my bed bath yet, but I don’t think I smell that bad,’ said Nan, sniffing her armpits before gagging. ‘Actually . . . *eurgh*.’

A treacherous smile formed on Vi’s lips. She hated it. None of this was funny. Whatever her

stupid mouth did. There was nothing to smile about. She wasn't sure there ever would be again.

'Get over here, you chump,' Nan commanded, scooting across the bed so Vi could sit next to her. Vi crawled up the sheets and snuggled in next to her nan. Indy did smell – of lavender. Vi hadn't realized how much she loved it until now. How much she needed it. How much she couldn't manage without it . . .

'Now you listen to me, madam,' said Indy sternly. 'You are training to be a spy – and I have a feeling you're going to be our best one yet.'

Vi shrugged as if she didn't care. Largely because she didn't.

'Whatever,' she muttered. 'I might not even bother now. If you're giving up, why shouldn't I?'

'Giving up!' laughed Indy, causing a cascade of coughs that made Vi feel guilty for provoking them. 'Giving up! I made it to old age! I've packed more into my seventy-nine years than most people could squeeze into seven hundred! I've travelled the world – and saved it more than once! I've loved two wonderful men and created two wonderful women! I've lived over twenty-eight thousand days – George told me that – to make

these old bones and I wouldn't change a single one of them! So I'm not giving up on anything, missy. I'm celebrating.'

'But how can you celebrate . . . this?' Vi cried. 'You're going to—'

'Die,' said Nan plainly. 'You can say it. You should say it. The more you say it, the less power it has over you. I'm going to die, Vi. That's just part of life, my love. You'll be sad for a while. And then you'll find your joy again. It's the way it's always been. The way it always should be.'

Vi shook her head and snuggled back into her nan. She wasn't going to say it. She wasn't even going to think it. This wasn't happening. She felt Indy's arms pull her closer.

'You are going to be a fantastic spy,' she repeated. 'The very best. But I said it to your mother and I'll say it you: a spy's greatest weapon is their mind. A huge part of the spy adventure is to know who you can save – and to know who needs saving. My mission is nearly accomplished here – and it's been a roaring success. Life is a ticking bomb, darling. At least I know roughly what's left on my clock. Do you understand what I'm saying?'

Vi sat in warm silence with her grandmother as she thought about what Nan had just said. As she turned the words over and over, suddenly it all started to make more sense. She sat up, wiped her eyes and gave her nan a weak smile.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I think I do.’

‘Atta girl,’ said Indy, giving her cheek a big squeeze. ‘Now go and get the others so I can say goodbye and get some rest. And tell your mum to bring me something decent from the canteen – the food here is almost as bad as hers . . .’

Vi jumped off the bed and gave her nan a big kiss. She skipped out of the ward and went to find her family in the relatives’ room. She was so glad she and Indy had that chat – she was feeling much better now. Nan was right. Her job was to decide who needed saving – so now it was perfectly clear what she had to do:

Vi needed to save Independence Day.