

## BUT IF

by

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Bradley Griffin was fat, balding and one of the richest men in the world. He could buy anything he wanted but today he was very angry as he punched the button on his desk speaker phone. "Suzie," he bellowed, "Where is Herbert Wells!"

"He hasn't arrived yet, Mr Griffin."

"He was supposed to be here ten minutes ago."

"It is only a few minutes past nine so he will probably be here soon."

"He should be here now – when someone makes an appointment I expect them to be here ready and waiting. Who is this Wells character anyway and what does he want to see me about?"

"I don't know Mr Griffin you made the appointment."

"I most certainly did not."

"It's on the office computer and on your laptop PC calendar so I thought you arranged it."

Bradley glanced at the laptop screen next to his hand. "It says here, 'urgent', but he's not here so it can't be important. If he does show up tell him I can't see him." And with that he flicked off the speakerphone.

"Ha, ha that is really very funny."

"Who said that?" snapped Bradley

"I did."

Bradley looked about him. "Where are you?"

"I'm sitting right in front of you."

"Stop bugging about."

"I'm not bugging about. I'm Herbert Wells. I was here at nine o'clock and I'm sitting on one of your office chairs right in front of you."

"This is a very poor joke." Bradley got up, walked round his desk, patted the chair in question and even peered beneath it. "No one's sitting here. Where's the hidden microphone?"

"No one's sitting there now. I have moved because I did not want you prodding and poking me. Watch this."

His most recent prized possession, an Andy Murray signed tennis ball, floated off his desk and began juggling in thin air.

"This is some trick."

"It's no trick I assure you – here catch!"

The ball suddenly shot in Bradley's direction. Instinctively he stuck out a hand but only succeeded in patting it across the room so that it hit the door, bounced back and rolled under the desk out of sight.

"Butterfingers," said Herbert Wells.

"I paid a lot of money for that at a charity auction," protested Bradley

"I know I was there. After all it was only right after I made sure Djokovic's last few drop shots stayed in the air long enough for Andy to get to them. Don't worry I'll get it."

The ball levitated back into view, swirled in the air and then came to rest in its original position on the desktop. Bradley stared at it mesmerised.

"I suggest you sit down while we talk business." The leather chair behind his desk began to rock slightly and emitted a patting sound. "Come on, sit here and I'll go back to my place."

Bradley shuffled back behind the desk, his eyes still transfixed on the ball, and then sat down.

The chair in front of him shifted slightly and he heard a voice coming from its direction say, "Good."

"This is very unnerving," said Bradley. "I am not comfortable talking to thin air."

"Just one moment." The chair wobbled once more. Then a golfing cap on a stand by an expensive set of clubs in a golf bag by a corner floated off the hook and towards the chair where it hovered above it at head height. "This should give you something to focus on."

"It's still unnerving, but at least I can tell where you are."

"Good now let's get down to business. As you see I have conquered visibility and can make any object including myself invisible. I am prepared to offer this invention to you exclusively for ten million pounds."

"That's an awful lot of money. I will need some guarantees that it is not in fact a trick."

"Oh, it's no trick. I have heard that you are a pretty ruthless businessman who will do almost anything to get an advantage over others and so I've been following you around for some weeks now. Think about it – you will be able to enter your rivals' offices and even their homes undetected and see what they are up to. I've seen the way you have looked at sexy Suzie in the outer office when you think she's not looking. I'd bet you'd love to know what colour panties she is wearing. They are black lace by the way – I followed her into the ladies loo earlier."

"That's disgusting."

"And unethical, but no worse than many of the dubious industrial espionage practices that you have been engaged in. Well my invention will make you richer, more successful and infinitely more powerful."

"If it can do all this why don't you use it yourself?"

"I'm a humble man from lowly origins and am not as devious as you. The invention will only work for you as long as it is kept secret. You are an expert at operating in the shadows. I would soon be found out which is why I decided to sell it for as much as I can. You can have it exclusively and I will sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure that no one else knows you have it."

"Can you make yourself visible again?"

"Of course."

"Prove it."

"I want the money first. You must log on to your bank account and transfer the money to my account. The details are on a slip of paper I placed under your laptop earlier."

"I don't trust you. Tell me how the invention works or you get nothing."

"Okay, I will make myself visible but any funny business and I will become invisible once more and you will never see or hear from me again and your chance of owning it will be lost for ever."

The golfing cap floated higher and drifted towards the door as if it was readying for a quick getaway. Suddenly, beneath the cap, a hooded figure appeared clad in a belted one piece silver suit. There was a slit in the hood through which a pair of goggles poked out.

"Incredible – how does it work?"

"Transfer the money before I tell you or I will disappear for good."

Bradley lifted the laptop, found the piece of paper and transferred the money. Then he turned the laptop and its screen in Wells's direction.

Wells moved closer and verified the transfer. "Good. The suit has a single power source attached to the belt which is touch sensitive. There are miniature cameras sown into the back and the front has a transmitter similar but not quite the same as those found in a flat screen TV. The cameras film the scene behind the suit and transmit it to the front so that I literally hind behind my own background."

He slipped off the hood, unzipped the suit and let it fall to the floor revealing a tubby moustachioed man wearing a grey lounge suit. "I'm about the same size as you so it should fit. The instructions are in an inside pocket."

He opened the door, made to leave and added. "The suit can bring you marvellous benefits and even more riches – but if – you don't take very great care when you cross the road it could be fatal." Then he was gone.

END