

# Footprints Without Feet

## (Class X – NCERT)

### Chapter 5: Footprints without Feet – H.G. Wells

#### Detailed Summary (Expanded, Exam-Oriented)

The story "Footprints without Feet" by H.G. Wells is a science fiction narrative about Griffin, a brilliant but unethical scientist who discovers how to make himself invisible. The title refers to the mysterious footprints left by Griffin when he walks on muddy streets - footprints that appear without any visible person making them.

Griffin is a talented scientist who has been working for years on experiments related to light refraction and optical density. After extensive research, he finally succeeds in making his body completely transparent and invisible to the human eye. This is a remarkable scientific achievement that could have been used for the benefit of humanity.

However, Griffin is not a good or moral person. He is selfish, antisocial, and has a violent temper. Instead of using his discovery responsibly or sharing it with the scientific community, he decides to use invisibility for personal gain and criminal purposes.

The story begins with Griffin already invisible. He has made himself invisible in his laboratory but has run into immediate problems. His landlord, to whom he owes rent, has been trying to evict him. In a fit of rage and to escape without paying, Griffin sets his own laboratory on fire, destroying all his research and equipment.

Griffin removes all his clothes (since clothing does not become invisible with his body) and escapes naked into the streets of London. It is midwinter, and the freezing cold is unbearable. Being invisible might seem like an advantage, but Griffin quickly discovers the practical difficulties. He is naked in freezing weather, can be bumped into by passersby, and desperately needs food and shelter.

To get warm and find food, Griffin enters a large London department store just before closing time. He hides until all the staff leave, then helps himself to the store. He dresses in warm clothes, eats food from the restaurant section, and sleeps comfortably on piles of quilts in the bedding department. He treats the store as his personal property.

The next morning, Griffin wakes up late. The store employees have already arrived and are opening for business. He must quickly remove all his clothes to become invisible again, but this means going back out into the freezing cold. As he escapes, store workers notice strange occurrences - doors opening by themselves, clothing flying through the air.

Griffin, cold and desperate, finds a theatrical company shop that sells costumes and makeup. Since the shop is small and has only the shopkeeper, Griffin attacks the man (his attack seemingly coming from nowhere, which terrifies the victim). He steals a complete disguise - dark glasses, a false nose, bandages, a large hat, and a heavy coat. He also steals all the money he can find.

With clothes on and his face completely bandaged and covered, Griffin is now visible to others, though he looks like someone who has suffered terrible injuries. With the stolen money, he decides to leave London for somewhere quieter where he can continue his research and perhaps find a way to become visible again.

Griffin travels to the village of Iping and checks into the local inn called the Coach and Horses. The landlady, Mrs. Hall, is surprised to have a guest in the middle of winter when business is typically slow. Griffin appears extremely unusual - he is entirely covered in bandages, wears dark glasses and a hat, and refuses to show even a bit of his skin.

Mrs. Hall tries to be friendly and make conversation, but Griffin is extremely rude and antisocial. He snaps at her to stop asking questions and demands complete privacy. He says he is a scientist conducting important experiments and must not be disturbed. Despite his rudeness, Mrs. Hall tolerates him because he pays in advance with cash.

Griffin has scientific equipment delivered to his room in numerous boxes and crates. He sets up a makeshift laboratory and works day and night. He rarely comes out of his room and becomes angry whenever Mrs. Hall tries to clean or bring food.

However, Griffin's money - stolen from the theatrical shop - begins to run out. He owes Mrs. Hall rent but cannot pay. Mrs. Hall, who had been patient because of the payments, now becomes demanding. She and her husband start insisting on payment.

Around this time, strange events begin occurring in Iping. The local vicar (church minister) and his wife wake up early one morning to hear noises downstairs. When they investigate, they find money missing from the vicar's desk, but there is no sign of any burglar. The room appears empty, yet they sense someone is there. Suddenly they hear a sneeze and footsteps rushing past them, but they see nothing. They are terrified, believing a ghost has robbed them.

That same morning, Mrs. Hall and her husband enter Griffin's room early to confront him about unpaid rent. They expect to find him still asleep. Instead, they find the room apparently empty - but Griffin's clothes and bandages are lying on the bed and furniture as if someone had just taken them off. The bedclothes are disturbed as if someone is in the bed.

Suddenly, the furniture begins moving by itself! The chair with Griffin's clothes throws itself at Mrs. Hall. She screams and runs out, believing the room is haunted by evil spirits. The news spreads rapidly through the village - there is something supernatural happening at the Coach and Horses!

Griffin, who has been invisible in his room, realizes his secret is in danger of being discovered. He puts his clothes and bandages back on to become visible again. When confronted by Mrs. Hall about the strange happenings, Griffin loses his temper completely.

In front of the gathered villagers, Griffin begins removing his disguise. First his glasses, then his hat, his false nose, his whiskers, and finally his bandages. The villagers expect to see a terribly injured face beneath, but instead they see nothing - just empty space where a head should be. Griffin is headless, or rather, his head is completely invisible!

The villagers are shocked and frightened. They realize they are dealing with something beyond their understanding - an invisible man. Someone summons Mr. Jaffers, the village constable, to arrest this strange being.

Jaffers arrives with a warrant for Griffin's arrest, charged with burglary at the vicar's house and not paying his bills. But how do you arrest someone you cannot see? Griffin begins removing the rest of his clothes. With each garment removed, more of his body disappears until he is completely invisible and completely naked.

A chaotic struggle ensues. Jaffers and several villagers try to capture Griffin, but fighting an invisible opponent is nearly impossible. They grab at empty air, getting hit, kicked, and pushed by someone they cannot see. People are knocked down, hit, and injured by the invisible force.

During the melee, Griffin fights desperately, striking out at everyone around him. Despite his invisibility, the sheer number of people makes it difficult for him. However, his invisibility gives him a crucial advantage. Eventually, he manages to break free from the crowd, leaving several people injured, including the unconscious Jaffers.

Griffin escapes from Iping completely naked and invisible, disappearing into the countryside. The villagers are left bewildered, frightened, and nursing their injuries. News of the "Invisible Man" spreads across England, causing both fascination and fear.

The story reveals through various accounts that Griffin was a brilliant medical student who spent years researching light, optics, and the refractive properties of various materials. He successfully discovered how to make the human body transparent by altering how light passes through it. This should have been a magnificent contribution to science.

However, the narrative makes clear that scientific brilliance does not equal moral goodness. Griffin possesses remarkable intelligence but completely lacks ethics, empathy, or social responsibility. He uses his discovery not to benefit humanity but solely for personal gain, theft, and violence.

The story also explores the practical realities of invisibility. Griffin cannot eat without the food being visible in his stomach until digested. He cannot walk in rain or snow without leaving footprints or revealing his shape. He must remain naked to be invisible, which is uncomfortable in any weather. He can never truly connect with other people or have normal relationships.

Most significantly, the power of invisibility, which could have been used for good, only amplifies Griffin's worst qualities. Without the social constraints of being seen, he becomes increasingly violent, selfish, and dangerous. His invisibility liberates him from social accountability, which makes him more, not less, inhuman.

The story is ultimately a cautionary tale about the misuse of scientific knowledge. It demonstrates that great discoveries in the wrong hands can be extremely dangerous. Scientific advancement without ethical responsibility can lead to chaos and harm rather than progress and benefit.

## Central Themes

1. Science Without Ethics is Dangerous

Griffin's brilliant scientific achievement becomes a force for evil because he lacks moral principles. The story warns against pursuing scientific knowledge without considering ethical implications and social responsibility.

#### 2. Power Corrupts Without Accountability

Invisibility gives Griffin power without accountability. When social constraints are removed, his worst impulses dominate. The story suggests that external accountability is necessary for moral behavior.

#### 3. Isolation and Inhumanity

Griffin's invisibility isolates him from normal human society and relationships. This isolation, combined with his antisocial nature, makes him increasingly inhuman in his behavior and values.

#### 4. Practical Limitations of Power

The story shows that even extraordinary powers have limitations and create their own problems. Invisibility solves some problems but creates many others - cold, hunger, the impossibility of normal interaction.

#### 5. Misuse of Genius

Griffin represents wasted potential. His intelligence could have benefited humanity, but his selfishness transforms his discovery into a source of fear and harm.

### Character Sketches

#### 1. Griffin

A brilliant but deeply flawed scientist. He is intelligent, innovative, and capable of remarkable scientific achievement, but he is also selfish, violent, antisocial, and morally bankrupt. His invisibility both empowers and isolates him, ultimately making him a danger to himself and others. He represents the tragedy of genius without ethics.

#### 2. Mrs. Hall

The landlady of the Coach and Horses inn in Iping. She is practical, businesslike, and initially tolerant of Griffin's oddness because he pays well. She represents ordinary people confronting extraordinary and frightening circumstances. Her mix of hospitality and fear shows normal human reactions to the inexplicable.

#### 3. Mr. Jaffers

The village constable who attempts to arrest Griffin. He represents law and order confronting something beyond normal law enforcement capabilities. His determination to do his duty despite the impossibility of the situation shows both courage and the limitations of conventional authority.

### Important Vocabulary (With Meanings)

- **Invisible** – unable to be seen; not visible to the eye
- **Bewildered** – completely puzzled or confused

- **Landlord** – a person who rents out property
- **Remarkable** – worthy of attention; extraordinary
- **Eccentric** – unconventional and slightly strange in behavior
- **Constable** – a police officer of the lowest rank
- **Scientific** – based on systematic study and experimentation
- **Peculiar** – strange or odd; unusual
- **Transparent** – allowing light to pass through so objects behind can be seen
- **Footprints** – impressions or marks left by feet

### Exam-Ready Key Points

- Griffin is a brilliant scientist who discovers how to make himself invisible
- He uses his discovery unethically - for theft, violence, and personal gain
- Griffin sets his laboratory on fire to escape his landlord and becomes invisible
- He faces practical problems - cold, hunger, and difficulty interacting with society
- Griffin steals clothes and money from a London store and theatrical shop
- He goes to the village of Iping and stays at the Coach and Horses inn
- His bandages and clothes hide his invisibility, making him appear to be an injured person
- When his secret is discovered, Griffin removes his disguise, shocking the villagers
- He fights off the constable and villagers while invisible and escapes
- The story teaches that scientific knowledge without ethics is dangerous
- Invisibility creates as many problems as it solves
- Great power without moral responsibility leads to chaos and harm