

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: FOOTPRINTS WITHOUT FEET



FOOTPRINTS WITHOUT FEET

~Summary~

-by H G Wells

Boys See Footprints in Street

Two boys on a street in London were surprised to see fresh muddy footprints of bare feet on the steps of a house without finding who was making them. Further on, the footprints disappeared. These footprints had been made by Griffin, an eccentric scientist who had discovered how to make his body transparent. He could only be seen with the clothes he was wearing.

Griffin : A Lawless Person

Griffin was having a criminal bent of mind and was a lawless person. He set fire to his landlord's house to take revenge against him for trying to evict (throw out) him. To get away, he had to remove his clothes so that he became invisible. He was a homeless wanderer in London without clothes or money during winter.

Escape of Griffin

Griffin managed to escape from the two keen boys' observation and entered unseen into a big store to get warm. After the store was closed at night, Griffin put on some new clothes, consumed meat and coffee from the restaurant in the store and went to sleep on a pile of quilts. He overslept and only woke up when the shop had opened and the assistants had arrived. On being seen and chased by them, he again took off his clothes so that they could not see him.

Griffin at a Theatrical Company

Then Griffin entered a theatrical company which gave items used in plays. There he wore bandages to outline his face, dark glasses, a false nose and bushy side-whiskers. He robbed the shopkeeper of his money and escaped to a village away from London to avoid being caught.

Griffin Arrives at Iping Village

Griffin booked two rooms at an inn belonging to Mrs Hall in the village Iping. He explained to her that he had an accident and did not want to be disturbed, as Mrs Hall tried to be social with him. Soon his money was finished and so he robbed a clergyman's house by using his invisibility.

Mrs Hall Enters Griffin's Room

That same day, when Mrs Hall found Griffin's room open, with his bandages and clothes lying around, she and her husband entered the room. Suddenly both of them were attacked by the furniture being flung at them, but they could not see who was doing this. Mrs Hall felt that the furniture was haunted by spirits, as she could not see Griffin.

Griffin becomes Invisible and Escapes from Iping

When the clergyman reported the burglary to the police, most people in the village felt that the strange scientist had a hand in it, because he paid his due rent, whereas earlier he was not able to do so. So Mr Jaffers, the village police constable, was called to arrest Griffin on suspicion. Meanwhile, Mrs Hall asked Griffin to explain all the unusual happenings. Griffin lost his temper and decided to tell everything. He started removing his clothes and even Jaffers could not catch someone whom he could not see. He was knocked unconscious by the invisible man, who escaped.

Conclusion of Footprints without Feet

In the chapter – Footprints without Feet describes the tendency of human nature to misuse creative discoveries meant for common good but end up creating menace by misappropriating it.

NCERT SOLUTION

Questions (Page No. 26)

(READ AND FIND OUT)

Question 1: How did the invisible man first become visible?

Answer: The invisible man, Griffin first became visible when he stepped in some mud and his footprints were all over the steps of a house in the middle of London. His footprints were noticed by two boys who followed, fascinated, until the muddy impressions became fainter and fainter and at last disappeared altogether. He escaped easily enough from the boys who followed his footprints in London. As it was mid-winter, he slipped into a big London store to keep himself warm and slept there while picking up a pair of shoes, an overcoat and a wide-brimmed hat from the store. When he wore the clothes, it made him visible to the shop assistants when the shop opened in the morning. Thereafter, he had to shed all his clothes to escape from them and became invisible again.

Question 2: Why was he wandering the streets?

Answer: Although Griffin was a brilliant scientist, but he was a lawless person. His landlord disliked him and tried to evict him from the house. In revenge, the scientist set the house on fire. To escape from the scene, he removed his clothes and became a homeless wanderer without clothes, no money and totally invisible, roaming around the streets of London.

Questions (Page No. 28)

(READ AND FIND OUT)

Question 1: Why does Mrs Hall find the scientist eccentric?

Answer: The arrival of a stranger with an uncommon appearance at an inn in mid-winter was an unusual event in itself. Mrs Hall tried to be friendly with Griffin, but he gave her a cold response. He rebuffed her by saying that he was not interested to talk to anyone and had come there for solitude and did not wish to be disturbed in his work. Considering all these reasons, Mrs Hall found the scientist to be an eccentric person.

Question 2: What curious episode occurs in the study?

Answer: In the early hours of one morning, the clergyman and his wife woke up owing to noises coming from their study. Creeping downstairs, they heard the sound of coins being taken from the clergyman's desk. To their amazement, when they entered the study, the room was empty. He and his wife looked under the desk and behind the curtains and even up the chimney.

However, they did not find anybody there. Yet the desk was found open and the housekeeping money was also missing.

Question 3: What other extraordinary things happen at the inn?

Answer: A series of extraordinary things happened at the inn. When Mrs Hall and her husband went into the scientist's room, they found its door wide open. Usually it was always shut and locked and the scientist became furious if anyone entered his room. However, when Mrs Hall and her husband peeped round the door, he was nowhere to be seen in the room. His clothes and bandages that he always wore were lying about the room. Suddenly, Mrs Hall heard a sniff close to her ear and the hat on the bedpost leapt up and dashed itself into her face. Out of nowhere, the bedroom chair sprang into the air and pushed them both out of the room and then it slammed and locked the door after them. All these incidents made Mrs Hall believe that her furniture and the room was haunted by spirits, and that the stranger had somehow caused these to enter into her furniture.

Questions (Page No. 31)

(THINK ABOUT IT)

Question 1: "Griffin was rather a lawless person." Comment.

Answer: Griffin was indeed a lawless person as he did not refrain from harming others to fulfill his selfish interests. He set his landlord's house on fire when he tried to evict the scientist from his house. Thereafter, he robbed clothes from shops and stole money from Mrs. Hall's house that was kept for housekeeping purposes inside the desk in the study room. However, when the landlady encountered him at the inn, he threw a chair at her and her husband. Finally, he also escaped from the clutches of Mr Jaffers, the constable who had come to arrest him for his misdeeds. Lawless people like Griffin are very vengeful in nature and do not think about the safety and well-being of others in the society. They are only self-obsessed, thinking about themselves.

Question 2: How would you assess Griffin as a scientist?

Answer: Griffin was a brilliant scientist, as he discovered the scientific formula to make a human body invisible. This was indeed a big achievement in science. But he seemed to enjoy the feeling of power when he became invisible. He misused his discovery to satisfy his personal needs and got sadistic pleasure by hurting others. Although he was brilliant in his job, but he was not a noble scientist who made contribution to the larger benefit of society. His discovery of invisibility was therefore, done just for his own benefit.

Questions (Page No. 31)

(TALK ABOUT IT)

Question 1: Would you like to become invisible? What advantages and disadvantages do you foresee, if you did?

Answer: Yes, it would be an exciting idea for most people to become invisible. Just like there are two facets of every coin, invisibility can also have certain advantages and disadvantages. A prime advantage of becoming invisible for military personnel could help them in maintaining law and order in the society by tracking illegal crimes caused by anti-social elements without their knowledge and put an end to the nuisance created by terrorists or criminals. On a lighter note, for a child being invisible is an open license to play pranks on his friends without getting caught. On the other hand, a disadvantage of invisibility would mean isolation and having no friends and family to share joys and sorrows with. A person is likely to become like the eccentric scientist, Griffin, as mentioned in this story.

Question 2: Are there forces around us that are invisible, for example, magnetism? Are there aspects of matter that are 'invisible' or not visible to the naked eye? What would the world be like if you could see such forces or such aspects of matter?

Answer: Yes, electrostatic and magnetic forces are good examples of invisible forces. The atoms and molecules in a particular matter are so tiny that they cannot be seen with the naked eye. Similarly, sound and heat energy are transparent and cannot be seen. Although it is quite an exciting idea to see invisible things, their visibility could create a lot of issues too. For instance, if we are able to view the magnetic force, it might cause a lot of irritation to our senses.

Question 3: What makes glass or water transparent (what is the scientific explanation for this)? Do you think it would be scientifically possible for a man to become invisible, or transparent? (Keep in mind that writers of science fiction have often turned out to be prophetic in their imagination!)

Answer: We know that light can pass through glass or water as they are transparent. When light rays fall on an object, the reflection of that light from the object makes it visible for us. Similarly, if any device of similar kind can be made that can prevent reflection of light from the human body, then the human body can also become transparent and invisible.