

CLASS XII

NOVEL- THE INVISIBLE MAN

H. G. Wells.

STUDY MATERIAL – CHAPTERS: 1-5.

Chapter 1. The Strange Man's Arrival

Summary: A stranger arrives in Bramblehurst railway station. He is bundled from head to foot with only the tip of his nose showing. He enters the Coach & Horses Inn and demands a room and a fire. Mrs. Hall, the owner prepares a supper for him and offers to take his coat and hat, but he refuses to take them off. When he finally removes the hat, his entire head is swathed in a bandage. Mrs. Hall thinks he has endured some accident. She tries to get him to talk about himself, but he is taciturn with her, although not particularly rude.

Notes: This introduction to the Invisible Man through the eyes of the town people is actually about midway through his own story. He has already gone from place to place trying to keep his cover and has committed two acts of violence, one against his own father and the other against the proprietor of a costume shop whom he tied and gagged in order to be able to steal clothing and money. Nevertheless, his intention at this point is simply to find a quiet place and work as quickly as possible to find an antidote to the invisibility. The primary thread of the story-that of the growing rumors and suspicions, which eventually contribute to his exposure-has begun.

Q1. H.G Wells has called Mrs. Hall's guest 'A Strange Man' in the title of the first chapter. Justify.

H. G Wells is absolutely justified in calling Mrs. Hall's guest a strange man. The things that made him strange included his appearance which was far from that of a normal person. His big blue spectacles with sidelights, head swathed in bandages and his thick black hair peeping from here and there made him peculiar. His shiny pink nose stood out as a prominent feature of his otherwise nondescript face. His body language too, was unusual for he spoke from behind a table napkin. He smoked a pipe with the lower part of his jaw securely wrapped with a silk muffler. All this definitely made him strange and abnormal. His insistence on not allowing Mrs. Hall to take away his wet coat and hat for drying also made his behavior questionable. In addition, his disinclination to get into any sort of conversation with his inn-keeper also lent an air of eccentricity to his personality. His curt and concise remarks to cut short Mrs. Hall's narration of

the story of her sister's son's accident sounded equally strange. Hence, H G Wells has appropriately termed Mrs. Hall's guest as 'a strange man'.

Q2. Why did Mrs. Hall consider the stranger's arrival in the 'Coach and Horses' as her 'good fortune'?

Iping was a very small village which hardly ever saw any visitors during the winters. It was a very lean period for business. Mrs. Hall, the inn keeper of the 'Coach and Horses', was therefore elated to have a guest at her inn. His arrival was a pleasant surprise. However, she quoted the peak season price for boarding and lodging because as a shrewd business woman she expected the man to haggle. Surprisingly, he agreed to her terms at once and placed a couple of sovereigns as advance. This was indeed Mrs. Hall's good fortune. But, apart from being a shrewd business woman, she was also conscientious and efficient. She did not let any expression of delight surface and proceeded to promptly to give her guest a perfect service and a very comfortable stay in her inn. She was keen to deliver full worth of the money that the stranger was spending. This episode reveals the lady's professionalism and her will to carry out the responsibility as a good hostess.

Q3. Describe the appearance of the stranger when he arrived at the inn.

Mrs. Hall was a very observant person. Hence, despite all her joy at getting a client for her inn during the winter season, none of the oddities of his appearance and behavior escaped her notice. When he appeared at the inn, Mrs. Hall found her guest all wrapped up from head to foot in his coat, hat, muffler and gloves. The brim of his soft hat hid his face considerably. Only his shiny, pink nose stood out conspicuously on his nondescript face. Later, when he removed his hat, she found his head bandaged all over. His thick black strands of hair showed themselves here and there lending him a very shabby and strange appearance. His big blue spectacles with sidelights completely concealed his eyes. Apart from his strange appearance, his behaviour was also eccentric. He refused to part with his wet clothes, talked to the lady from behind a table napkin, and displayed an utter reluctance to enter into any sort of conversation with her. Thus, she formed a very negative impression about the appearance and behaviour of the stranger.

Q4. Do you agree that Mrs. Hall had excellent hospitality skills? OR What did Mrs. Hall do to prove herself worthy of her good fortune?

Mrs. Hall was indeed happy to have a guest for her inn during the lean business period of winter time. She considered it to be a piece of unheard luck. On top of it, the guest who came to stay there did not haggle the peak season price quoted by her. Hence, the lady was very keen to prove that the good fortune's favour is not ill-placed. Therefore, she tried to make her guest very comfortable right from the beginning. Exhibiting her excellent hospitality skills, she first lit him a nice fire to relieve him of the biting cold of the wintry February. She then proceeded to prepare him a meal with her own hands. She offered to take away his wet clothes for drying, but when the gentleman refused to part with them, she didn't pester him.

Now and then, she ventured to enter into polite conversation with him but when he repeatedly showed reluctance, she felt a little snubbed. When the stranger expressed his eagerness to get his luggage from Bramblehurst station, she assured him that it would be done the next day. She also fulfilled promptly even his small requirements like matches to light his pipe. Thus, she proved herself worthy of her good fortune.

Chapter 2. Mr. Teddy Henfrey's First Impressions

Summary: Teddy Henfrey, a clock repairman, comes to the inn for tea. Mrs. Hall asks him to “repair the clock” in the stranger’s room. Teddy deliberately takes as long as he can with the clock, taking it apart and reassembling it for no reason. The stranger finally gets him to hurry up and leave. Offended, Teddy talks himself into believing that the stranger is someone of a suspicious nature, perhaps even wanted by the police and is wrapped up to conceal his identity. Teddy runs into Mr. Hall and warns him about the stranger, informing him that a “lot of luggage” will be coming. It would seem that the stranger intends to stay awhile.

Mr. Hall goes home intending to investigate the stranger, but is put off by the short-tempered demeanor of his wife.

Notes: Mrs. Hall, although not a major character, is revealed as rather devious in a harmless sort of way. She really wants to know what the man’s disfigurement is; she assumes he has been in a horrible accident, and the motherly side of her wants to know how to express sympathy. She is a very good innkeeper under the circumstances. While she is not above using Teddy to pry for information, she does not contribute to the spread of rumors. In fact, we are told later that she defends him as long as he is faithful about paying his bill. Teddy is a character typical of the other people of the town. He wants to know the man’s story, and when he is rebuffed for his persistence, he begins to imagine all sorts of things. His imagination soon becomes fact to him, and he spreads his new knowledge to anyone who will listen.

Q1. How was Teddy Henfrey received at the inn by Mrs. Hall? How did the stranger respond to Teddy’s arrival in his room?

Teddy Henfrey was received gladly by Mrs. Hall when he visited her bar. She was all the more happy to see him carrying his tool bag. Actually, his arrival gave her the brilliant ideas of entering the guest’s room on the pretext of getting the parlour clock repaired. However, when he visited the guest’s room, he missed the warmth he had experienced earlier in the bar. After a cold ‘Good morning’, the stranger silently stared at Teddy working at the clock. In an attempt to break the silence of the room Teddy tried to get into some sort of conversation with him. But the guest snubbed him curtly. Rather he rebuked Teddy by prolonging the job that needed just fixing of the hour hand on the axle. Embarrassed by the snubbing, Henfrey finished the work quickly and left the room.

Q2. Why did Teddy Henfrey feel insulted after his encounter with the strange man? What did he do to relieve himself from his nasty mood on his way back from the inn?

Teddy Henfrey looked forward to meet the new guest of the Halls' when he entered the parlour to repair the clock. However, the strange man responded in a cold manner watching the clock-jobber constantly and never opening his mouth once. The stranger's constant gaze and absolute silence started getting on Henfrey's nerves. Still he tried to initiate a formal conversation by commenting on the biting cold weather. The stranger snubbed him at once and asked him to finish the job and leave the place. This set off a bad mood for Teddy Henfrey. He felt insulted. When he left the inn he came across Mr. Hall, the inn-keeper's husband. He gave vent to his nasty mood by sowing the seeds of suspicion in the mind of Hall that his wife had taken in a rum-looking customer. Describing the grotesque guest, Teddy expressed his apprehension about the stranger that he had disguised himself to escape something and also hoped that his luggage did not contain stones. By doing this, Teddy felt relieved.

Q3. What explanation did the stranger give Mrs Hall for coming to Iping and confining himself to a dark room?

On arrival, the stranger did not reveal either his name or his purpose of coming to Iping. Mrs. Hall took him in as it was a lean business period and she did not wish to lose a guest who paid the peak season price. However, his eccentricity did make her ill-at-ease. Later in the afternoon the stranger appeared relaxed and told Mrs. Hall that he was 'an experimental investigator' and had come to Iping to carry out his work in peace and solitude. He also added that he needed to shut himself in a dark room for hours together because an accident had left his eyes very weak and painful. He justified his insistence on getting his luggage at the earliest as it carried his apparatus and appliances. His vehemence at safeguarding his privacy was explained by him as an attempt to save him from excruciating annoyance. Thus he gave a convincing explanation regarding his identity and the purpose of his visit to Iping to allay all doubts about him.

Chapter 3. The Thousand and One Bottles

Summary: The stranger's luggage arrives at the inn. Numerous crates fill the deliveryman's cart, some of them containing bottles packaged in straw. Fearenside, the cartman, owns a dog that starts to growl when the stranger comes down the steps to help with the boxes. The dog jumps for the stranger's hand, but misses and sinks his teeth in a pant leg. The dog tears open the trouser leg, whereupon the stranger goes quickly back into the inn and to his room.

Concerned about the possibility of injury, Mr. Hall goes to the stranger's room. He gets a glimpse of what seems like a white mottled face before he is shoved by an unseen force back through the door. The stranger soon reappears at the door; his trouser changed, and gives orders for the rest of his luggage. The stranger unpacks 6 crates of bottles, which he arranges across the windowsill and all the available table and shelf space in the inn's parlor—a space he seems to have commandeered for himself.

Mrs. Hall enters later to tend to his needs and catches a quick glimpse of him without his glasses. His eyes seem hollow; he quickly puts his glasses on. She starts to complain about the straw on the floor, but he tells her to put it on the bill and to knock before entering his rooms. She points

out that he could lock his door if he doesn't want to be bothered, advice that he takes. He then works behind the locked door all afternoon. At one point, Mrs. Hall hears him raving about not being able to 'go on.' She hears a sound like a bottle being broken. Later she takes him tea and notes the broken glass and a stain on the floor. He again tells her to 'put it on the bill.'

Meanwhile Fearenside talks in the beer shop of Iping Hangar. Fearenside says that the stranger is a "black man," an assumption derived from the absence of "pink flesh" when the trouser leg was ripped open. When reminded of the pink nose, Fearenside claims that the man must therefore be a "piebald," or a part white, part black creature.

Notes: Fearenside is more observant than even he realizes. Of course, Griffin knows that a close look at his torn pant leg will reveal a "missing" leg, but he also needs to get away from the dog until they can get the animal under control. Subtle differences among characters of the town are beginning to be revealed. Mrs. Hall notices a "hollow" look to the guest's eyes, an appearance masked by the dark glasses he usually wears. His frustration is over the failure of his experiments; she notes the mess he makes but cleans up after him with minimal complaint when he gives her extra money. Fearenside, on the other hand, liberally discusses the "discoveries" he has made as a result of the brief encounter. Fearenside refers to horses as an example of the "patchy" color that can happen when black and white are mixed.

Q1. Describe the incident when the stranger was bitten by Fearenside's dog.

Fearenside, the cart driver, brought the stranger's luggage from Bramblehurst station to the 'Coaches and Horses' inn. It consisted of numerous crates, a box of books and a couple of trunks. The stranger emerged from his room for the first time since his arrival, all covered from head to toe. He saw Fearenside and Mr. Hall getting prepared to carry the luggage to his room. In all his excitement, the stranger rushed to the cart. Just as he was trying to help picking up a small crate, Fearenside's dog growled fiercely. The animal pounced upon the stranger and before anyone could do anything. The stranger kicked the dog in self-defense, Hall ran for his life and Fearenside snatched his whip to stop the dog from attacking further. In the meantime, the dog made another attempt and bit the stranger's leg. Now, both his glove and trousers had been torn by the dog. The stranger rushed back to his room and Hall followed him out of sympathy. Fearenside whipped his dog which retreated under the carriage whining. This attracted a lot of villagers who had gathered outside the wagon out of curiosity. All started offering suggestions.

Q2. What did Hall experience when he entered the stranger's room after the latter had been bit by Fearenside's dog? Why didn't he share his experience with others?

Mr. Hall followed the stranger to his room out of sheer sympathy when the latter had been bit by Fearenside's dog. He entered the dimly lit room without knocking at the door. To his utter dismay, he encountered an indescribable sight.

He saw a handless arm moving towards him. In place of a face he saw three huge indeterminate spots of white. Perhaps the stranger removed his spectacles and what Hall saw were two hollows

in place of eyes and one hollow in place of mouth. He received a violent blow in his chest before he could see any further. He was pushed out of the room and the door was shut on his face. Shocked and perplexed at the drastic turn of events, he tried to comprehend what he had just encountered. He came out confused and unsure of himself. He was doubtful about anybody believing him if he narrated what he had seen. He simply announced that the strange man was fine and needed no help.

Q3. Why did a good number of villagers gather outside the ‘Coach and Horses’ after the guest was bitten by Fearenside’s dog? What impression do you gather about the villagers from this episode?

The simple villagers gathered around Fearenside’s cart after the dog had bitten the guest because the easy village life permitted them quite a leisure time to assemble at the scene and quell their curiosity. Their sympathy towards the stranger was also one of the reasons that brought them around. They were unhappy about the incident and they felt that the dog had bitten the man without any rhyme or reason. Many of them felt such pets should not be kept at all. Some of them claimed that they had a way with the dogs and they wouldn’t allow any dog to bite them. A lady went to the extent of saying that she would shoot the dog for the kind of mischief that he had indulged in. One of the villagers suggested that immediate cauterization was needed in such cases, particularly if there was some inflammation. Mrs. Hall was quite annoyed with Fearenside’s dog for having bitten her guest. He was himself very sorry for his dog’s conduct and offered his apologies to the guest for the unfortunate incident.

The concern of the villagers for an unknown man indicated that they were still untouched by the unconcerned attitude of city life. Their willingness to offer help, even when it was not asked for, showed their humane aspect. This incident establishes the simplicity governing the village-folk.

Q4. Describe the skirmish between Mrs. Hall and the stranger that ensued after the unpacking of the latter’s luggage. How was it finally settled?

As soon as the stranger’s luggage reached his room, he eagerly started unpacking the first crate. He pulled out bottles of different colours, shapes and sizes carelessly throwing the packaging-straw all over the carpet. He arranged the bottles everywhere- over the shelves, chest of drawers, on the table, on the bookshelf, and the floor. By the time all the crates had been emptied, the room looked more like a chemist’s shop rather than the guest parlour. When Mrs. Hall came to the room with her guest’s dinner, he was so engrossed in his work that he didn’t hear her. Hence he turned towards her without caring to cover his eyes with large spectacles. The lady was startled to see his extraordinarily hollow sockets. When she saw the place strewn with straw she was irritated and tried to express her displeasure. The stranger snubbed her at once and told her that if the straw troubled her she could put down the damage in the bill. Hence, despite the mess irritating the lady, the offer of a shilling as compensation silenced her and the matter was settled.

Chapter 4. Mr. Cuss Interviews the Stranger

Summary: The stranger works diligently in his room until the end of April with only occasional skirmishes with Mrs. Hall. Whenever she disapproves of anything he does, he quietens her with additional payment. He rarely goes out during the day, but goes out nearly every night, muffled up regardless of the weather.

His identity becomes a topic of speculation in the town. Mrs. Hall defends him, repeating his own words that he is an “experimental investigator.” The view of the town is that he is a criminal trying to escape justice. Mr. Gould, the probationary assistant imagines that the man must be an “anarchist” who is preparing explosives.

Another group of people believe he is a piebald and could make a lot of money if he chose to show himself at the fairs. All agree, however, that due to his habits of secrecy, they dislike him. The young men begin to mock his bearing; a song called “Bogey Man” becomes popular and children follow at a distance calling out “Bogey Man.”

The curiosity of a general practitioner named Cuss is aroused, and he contrives for an interview. During the interview the stranger accidentally removes his hand from his pocket. Cuss is able to see down the empty sleeve to the elbow. Cuss questions him about “moving an empty sleeve.” The stranger laughs, then extends the empty sleeve toward Cuss’s face and pinches his nose. Cuss leaves in terror and tells his story to Bunting, the vicar.

Notes: In spite of Hall’s defense, Griffin will be the cause of his own destruction. Perhaps it is the frustration of always having to guard his secret that causes him to act offensively when challenged, but in any case, he could have handled the situation differently. The deliberate pinching of Cuss’s nose is not only an unnecessary affront, but is also a mark of Griffin’s immaturity. Bringing pain upon others for the sake of his own amusement, however, will soon deteriorate to performing criminal acts. In fact, although Bunting is about to become Griffin’s new victim, Griffin has already been foraging at night for places that he could rob in order to maintain his materials and keep up with his rent.

This chapter nudges the plot forward a bit by bringing in Bunting the vicar. The actions which will follow begin to bring the town together in an awareness of a stranger in their midst.

Q1. What sort of stories or rumours about the stranger circulated in Iping? Why?

Mrs. Hall, who was apparently the closest to the stranger, defended him while other people in the village had a negative attitude towards him. However, she too got into an argument with him because of domestic indiscipline. Her husband Hall already had a strong dislike for the guest and he wanted to get rid of him at the earliest. Despite his dislike, Hall did not have any say in the matter because Mrs. Hall wanted to retain the guest for his punctuality in settling bills. Almost all the villagers had a story for the stranger's weird appearance. Many thought that he was a criminal trying to conceal himself behind bandages to escape justice. Others thought him to be an Anarchist busy preparing explosives. Some took him to be freak who could make a lot of money

by showing himself at the village fair. Some brushed him aside as a lunatic. The women folk believed that there was something supernatural about him. Thus, with the exception of Mrs. Hall, no one sympathized with him in the village. Their inability to discover the truth about him led to speculation and rumours.

Q2. Despite her apprehensions, Mrs. Hall defended her guest. Why? What light does this throw on her character?

The weird appearance and eccentric behaviour of Mrs. Hall's Guest earned him the displeasure of everyone. Mrs Hall was least interested in getting rid of this man because he was so prompt in his payments. So, she spoke in defence and told people that by profession he was an 'experimental investigator', who kept himself, occupied conducting scientific experiments. She also stood up for him when people questioned regarding his appearance. She explained that he had had a nasty accident that had temporarily disfigured his face. This necessitated the constant use of bandage and gloves.

The strong support of Mrs. Hall for the stranger showed that she played her role as the hostess to perfection. Although her decision to retain her guest was influenced by the good business he offered, she still took up the responsibility of taking good care of him. We see her compassion being highlighted through this episode.

Q3. Why was Cuss so keen to see the stranger?

There were several reasons that resulted in Cuss's keenness to see the stranger. Firstly, the stranger's reputation of being an 'experimental investigator' aroused Cuss's curiosity. As the general practitioner of Iping, he felt there must be something akin between the two of them. Secondly, when people all over Iping had nothing but the stranger to talk about, Cuss felt left out because it seemed to him that he was the only one who had missed seeing him. Moreover, Cuss had heard about the countless bottles in the stranger's room. He wondered whether these bottles outnumbered the bottles he possessed at his clinic. The description of the stranger's bandages also aroused his professional interest. So, he eagerly awaited an opportunity to meet the stranger.

Q4. Describe Cuss's encounter with the stranger?

Cuss hit upon a plan to visit the stranger without appearing to be obtrusive. He decided to go to him on the pretext of collecting subscription for Nurse Fund. He tried to gather his name from Mrs. Hall to be added to the subscription list. However, he was quite shocked to learn that the Halls were not aware of their guest's name. He proceeded to the guest's room, apologized for the intrusion and stated the purpose of his visit. The stranger did not respond initially but later promised to consider subscribing for the good cause. Cuss's roving eyes saw numberless bottles, a balance and lots of test-tubes in stands. He also sniffed the smell of chemicals all over the place. Intending to continue with the conversation, Cuss inquired if he was doing some research. The stranger affirmed and elaborated that he had lost his formula while he pointed to the

fireplace with his handless arm. This gave Cuss the shock of his life. A dismayed Cuss sought an explanation from the stranger for his empty sleeve. He in turn lifted his hollow sleeve bringing it to Cuss's face. Before the practitioner could register this unusual thing, an invisible thumb and finger tweaked his nose. Hitting back hard at the cuff, Cuss ran out of the room and went straight to Vicar Bunting to narrate this weird encounter.

Q5. How did the Vicar respond to Cuss's encounter with the stranger?

Cuss came out of the stranger's room utterly shocked after the weird encounter. He dashed straight to Vicar Bunting in order to normalize himself. He was so dazed after meeting the stranger that he initially spoke incoherently and asked for something to drink to cool his agitated mind. Bunting gave him a glass of cheap sherry. Cuss, then related a detailed account of the weird encounter that he had earlier with the stranger. Bunting listened to the whole story with rapt attention. However, he couldn't help laughing when Cuss described his feelings on getting his nose tweaked by the invisible finger and thumb of the stranger. Bunting's laugh hurt Cuss and he commented that the incident was startling and it did not deserve to be laughed over. The vicar saw a genuine panic in Cuss's eyes. Though he still looked at Cuss with suspicion, doubting the veracity of his account, he tried to pacify him by observing that the story was indeed remarkable. He assured Cuss that his wisdom and judiciousness were definitely an extraordinary one.

Chapter 5. The Burglary and the Vicarage

Summary: Mrs. Bunting, the vicar's wife, wakes up at the sound of bare feet walking through her house. She wakes her husband and the two watch and listen as a candle is lit and papers are rustled in the study. When they hear the telltale clink of money, Rev. Bunting rushes into the study with a raised poker, but the room appears to be empty. Their money disappears and at one point they hear a sneeze in the hallway but are unable to locate or see the intruder.

Notes: Due to the necessity of running about naked, Griffin has caught a cold, which he is unable to completely hide. His sneezes begin to give him away even though people don't yet understand what they are hearing. In robbing the Buntings, Griffin also sets himself up for accusations and criminal charges. Thus when his presence is discovered, it is inevitable that people will begin to expect the worst and will be concentrating on apprehending him rather than helping him.

Q1. Why did the Buntings fail to capture the burglar in spite of all the presence of mind and courage?

Mrs. Bunting had inkling that there was an intruder in the house when she heard the noise made by the opening and the closing of the door. She sat on the bed trying to catch some sounds that would confirm the presence of the intruder. The minute she realized that her doubt was not

unfounded, she woke up her husband. Mr. Bunting too took stalk of the situation without raising an alarm. He put on his spectacles, wore his wife's dressing gown and his bath slippers without striking light. He went down to the landing to listen further to the sounds made by the burglar and guess his exact location. He could hear distinctly some ruffling sound in his study. In addition, someone's violent sneeze left him without doubt about the presence of the intruder. He chose a poker and proceeded towards the study room where they saw a candle being lit and heard the clinking of the money they had saved. Not able to hold back anymore the Buntings entered the room bravely demanding the burglar to surrender. However, they couldn't capture the intruder because they failed to see anybody in the room. They heard the burglar sneeze in the passage, and following the sound they saw the kitchen door open and close. Despite their grit and presence of mind the buntings were unable to catch the burglar.

Q2. Do you find the break-in at the vicarage humourous? Why?

Burglaries are scary and fearsome. People panic and are left terror-stricken whenever such an episode occurs. Contrary to the expected reaction, the buntings managed the crisis very boldly and coolly. However, the suspense did not stress or unnerve the reader because the narration of the episode is somewhat amusing. Mr. Bunting's hurried attire evokes humour. He dons his wife's dressing gown and moves gingerly with the poker in his hand to encounter the intruder. A couple of ill-timed sneezes of the burglar amuse the reader. The couple's attempt to search the house thoroughly is yet another comical image. They go about looking desperately in the most impossible hiding places – behind the screen, under the desk and probe even the chimney. Before wrapping up the search, the dustbin and the container for the coal are also peeped into. The concluding sentence of the chapter further arouses laughter. It was full daylight and the Buntings were using a candle light to search for the intruder. Thus a serious incident is presented in a humourous way to provide a comical relief to the reader in an otherwise suspense story.
