

The Harm from Smoking Tobacco

by Anton Chekhov
adapted by David Zarko

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Character

IVAN IVANOVICH NYUKIN

A nervous man in his early fifties.

Setting

The podium at a benevolent society.

Time

Saturday afternoon.

The Harm from Smoking Tobacco

The meeting hall of a benevolent society. There is a lectern, a small table with a pitcher of water and a glass, perhaps a potted fern and a chair. The lecturer is Ivan Ivanovich Nyukin. He walks on with great dignity, and bows to the audience, habitually adjusting his waistcoat and stroking his whiskers. He wears an old frock coat.

IVAN IVANOVICH

Ladies and gentlemen, as it were. It has been recommended to me by way of my wife

He gestures in her direction.

that I should speak here on a popular subject for the benefit of charity. So, here I am! I mean, if I speak or not it's all the same to me. After all, I don't pretend to be a professor, or anyone like that, because, you see, I don't have any degrees, but by the same token, I have engaged in relentless inquiry during the past thirty years or so, and at the expense, as it were, of my good health, that could be said to be of a scientific nature. The inquiry. That is. I do enjoy intellectual pursuits, and as such I have from time to time contributed articles on the subject of science, in this example I have just given you not *strictly* on the subject of science, but, if you will forgive my idiomatic usage, more or less on the subject of science. Speaking of which, only the other day I wrote a rather long article, one that I called "Harmful Effects of Various Insects". My daughters had lots of fun with that particular subject, especially with what I said about bed bugs. Nevertheless, I just re-read it and I tore it up, because no matter how well you write, you still have to use bug powder, so what use are learned papers on the subject? Why it's gotten so bad at our house that we have bed bugs in the piano!

He checks to see if he wife is still watching. She apparently is.

This afternoon I have chosen, as it were, to speak on the The Harm from Smoking Tobacco. Or, to put it another way, of smoking. Or to put it another way, the ill effects that tobacco smoke has on... human... beings. Now! I myself smoke. But my wife thought it a wonderful idea that I speak on the ill effects of tobacco, so here we are. Subject closed. That's what I'll do. I'll talk about tobacco. I'm not bothered by this, or upset about it, or involved in the subject at all or in any way. Please, however, don't take that as a suggestion that you can neglect to take my lecture seriously, for if you seem not to take it seriously, well... there may... will... be terrible consequences. But I will understand if a dull, tedious, technical, lengthy oration is not exactly your cup of tea at the moment, so please feel free to go get your hats and leave. If you like. Don't be embarrassed.

He adjusts he waistcoat as he peers anxiously over the crowd for evidence of an exodus. Seeing none, he continues.