Travel with a Nihilist

It happened that I spent Christmas night in a railway carriage, and not without adventures.

The matter was on one of the small railway branches, so to speak, quite far from the "big world." The line was not yet fully completed, the trains ran irregularly, and the passengers were packed in any which way. Whichever class you took, it all came out the same — everyone ended up together.

There were no buffets yet; many, feeling the cold, warmed themselves from their traveling flasks.

Warming drinks loosen tongues and spark conversation. Most of all they talked about the road and spoke of it indulgently, which is not often the case with us.

— Yes, they're taking us badly, — said some military man, — but still, thank them, — better than on horseback. On horses we wouldn't have made it in a day, but here by tomorrow morning we'll be there, and tomorrow we can go back. For officials the convenience is that tomorrow you'll see your family, and the day after tomorrow you're back at work.

— That's just what I say too, — chimed in a tall, lean cleric, standing up and holding onto the back of the bench. — Just like in their city the deacon, with a faltering voice, drawls out the polychronion like a rooster crowing. They invited me to say the late liturgy for ten rubles. I'll mutter through the polychronion and off again at night to my village.

One thing they found better on horses: you can travel in your own company and stop anywhere you like.

— Well, yes, but here the company isn't for keeps, just for an hour, — said the merchant.

— However, if someone, even for an hour, attaches himself to you, you can remember him all your life, — replied the deacon.

— Why is that?

— Well, if, for example, a nihilist, in full regalia, with all the trimmings and a revolver-bulldog.

— That's a matter for the police.

— It concerns everyone, because, you know, from a single tremor... bang — and it's over.

— Leave it, please... Why bring this up at night. We don't have that kind here yet.

— It could come from anywhere.

— Let's sleep instead.

Everyone listened to the merchant and fell asleep, and I can no longer tell you how long we slept, when suddenly we were jolted so hard that we all woke up, and in the carriage with us was already a nihilist.