

## Baptism by Rotation

### [Excerpt]

By Mikhail Bulgakov

And there was I, all on my own, with a woman in agony on my hands and I was responsible for her. I had no idea, however, what I was supposed to do to help her, because I had seen childbirth at close quarters only twice in my life in a hospital, and both occasions were completely normal. The fact that I was conducting an examination was of no value to me or to the woman; I understood absolutely nothing and could feel nothing of what was inside of her.

It was time to make some sort of decision.

“Transverse lie ... since it’s a transverse lie I must ... I must...”

“Turn it round by the foot,” muttered Anna Nikolaevna as though thinking aloud, unable to restrain herself.

An older, more experienced doctor would have looked askance at her for butting in, but I am not the kind to take offence.

“Yes,” I concurred gravely, “a podalic version.”

The pages of Döderlein flickered before my eyes. Internal method ... Combined method ... External method ... Page after page, covered in illustrations. A pelvis; twisted, crushed babies with enormous heads ... a little dangling arm with a loop on it.

Indeed I had read it not long ago and had underlined it, soaking up every word, mentally picturing the interrelationship of every part of the whole and every method. And as I read it I imagined that the entire text was being imprinted on my brain forever.

Yet now only one sentence of it floated back into my memory:

“A transverse lie is a wholly unfavorable position.”

Too true. Wholly unfavorable both for the woman and for a doctor who only qualified six months ago.

“Very well, we’ll do it,” I said as I stood up.

Anna Nikolaevna’s expression came to life.

“Demyan Lukich,” she turned to the *feldsher*, “get the chloroform ready.”

It was a good thing that she had said so, because I was still not certain whether the operation was supposed to be done under anaesthesia or not! Of course, under anaesthesia—how else?

Still, I must have a look at Döderlein...

As I washed my hands I said:

“All right, then ... prepare her for anaesthesia and make her comfortable. I’ll be back in a moment; I must just go to my room and fetch some cigarettes.”

“Very good, doctor, we’ll be ready by the time you come back,” replied Anna Nikolaevna.

I dried my hands, the nurse threw my coat over my shoulders and without putting my arms into the sleeves I set off for home at a run.

In my study I lit the lamp and, forgetting to take off my cap, rushed straight to the bookcase.

There it was—Döderlein’s *Operative Obstetrics*. I began hastily to leaf through the glossy pages.

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