



Source: Robert Tait, 'Nuclear decision seen as a tactical move to get US attention', *Guardian in Sydney Morning Herald online*, 13/01/06.

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I needed to catch a leech to use in my spell and Nana's dam in summer was infested with them. My sister was heavily pregnant and that year New Year's Eve coincided with a full moon. So, I decided to cast a spell to welcome the new baby into the world. It was after midnight. Everyone had gone to bed when I gathered my things and crept from my Nana's house.

In order to avoid a fuss, I let the dogs come with me: Goldie, my Nana's old labrador, and Kojo, my brother-in-law's police-trained doberman. Hissing at them to be quiet, I opened the laundry door and we stumbled out into the yard, scattering a spray of moonlit rabbits across the lawn. Goldie immediately wheezed off after one of these, and I followed with Kojo at my heel. She led us out of the yard, past the row of big pine trees and down the hill towards the dam.

I had with me, in a plastic bag, some grains of rice, a small round mirror, a bottle of water and a Stanley knife. On the way I paused to pick a few dandelion thistles, Kojo halting smartly beside me and only moving again once I resumed walking. We reached the dam and I was pleased to see Goldie paddling out into the water already. Having the dog's body as well as my own doubled my chances of finding a leech and I liked the idea of using dog and human blood in the spell. I quickly dumped my bag, stripped off my clothes and waded in to join Goldie. She was delighted and swam madly about me as I squelched up and down in the thigh deep water. Together we turned the shallows to a churning cauldron of mud and it wasn't long before I felt on the back of my thigh, the sticky tug of a leech.

I clambered out of the dam, craning my neck around my body to see the monster I had caught, the fat stripy kind that had horrified me as a child. Goldie waddled out after me, planting her legs wide then shaking from her hips up to her ears, so water and mud flew everywhere. Laughing, I squatted down to scratch and rub over her body looking for more leeches. There was a small one on her tummy. Good. I let myself down gingerly onto the gravel. Now we had just to wait for them to get fat and full of blood so I could kill them in the spell. I reached for my plastic bag and started my preparations—all the while Kojo sat motionless beside my clothes like Cerberus guarding hell.

I kept fiddling with Goldie's leech, afraid I would miss it falling off. Eventually it came away in my fingers and I placed it on the mirror, which I had arranged on a bed of rice grains so it would reflect the moon above us. I poured some water onto the leech and poked it around a bit with the knife. When the big stripy one on my thigh was sated, it dropped off too. I scooped it up and put it on the mirror with the other. Then, pinning both leeches together with my right hand I pushed them down hard onto the mirror

surface. With my other hand I took up the Stanley knife and steadied it over them. Breathing out, I quickly sliced both leeches straight across the middle of their bodies. Blood poured out of them like water over the mirror and onto to the white rice beneath, and their strange severed half-bodies seemed to wriggle on the surface of the moon. Looking down into the mess of blood water doghair moon glass and leech-halves and holding the knife, I imagined myself addressing the baby and spoke:

'Dear Baby, Here's water for where you come from
And grain to sustain your long life on earth
Here's blood from my body and from the dog's body, and
from the body of the leeches,
For violent acts create us at every turn, and violent acts
shall create you too.
Here's moonlight from heaven to make you beautiful and
wise
And mirror light to bind all you are, all I am, all we are'.

Then I picked the most perfect of the dandelion thistles and turning my face up to the moon, blew on it, so the seeds flew off the stem into the night.

'May the family of power protect you and bless you, and thank you so much for coming to live in our family'.

As I finished the spell I looked back down into the mirror and suddenly felt a ferocious rush of light-headedness, as though I were going to faint.

'She's ill!' Kojo cried.
'Don't worry about it', Goldie laughed. 'The baby's here!'

Ten years later it is my niece's birthday. She is so pretty your heart melts. We walk together through cicada-ringing bush discussing Friday the 13th. 'It's unlucky for Christians, because Jesus was crucified on a Friday, plus 13 is a sacred number for pagans so the Christians didn't like that very much'. She nods. 'Do you know that any month with a Friday the 13th starts on a Sunday the 1st?' she asks. I laugh. 'How would you know such a thing?' 'I worked it out', she says. 'You're crazy', I say. 'You are!' She says.

We arrive at a wire fence and stand watching the park rangers feed eucalyptus leaves to a battered looking koala. Despite the January heat it is held by one of the rangers and wrapped tightly in a thick protective blanket. 'She has no ears', my niece explains, 'they were burned off in the bushfire and now if it rains the water goes straight into her head'. 'Ow!' I say, feeling cold water ring against my brain. 'You can feel it in your head can't you?' she laughs. 'Yes!' I say.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Margaret Trail.