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free will astrology

BY ROB BREZSNY

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Some freaks of nature, like four-leaf clovers, are considered good luck. Others, like six-legged frogs, are omens that something is amiss. Then there are the prodigies that are a little scary because they're so bizarrely extraordinary, even if they're also signs of hope. A few years back, for example, some Native Americans believed the birth of a white buffalo in Wisconsin heralded the healing of Grandmother Earth and the unification of the races. It's quite possible, Aries, that you will soon have brushes with all three types of mutants. To increase the likelihood that you'll escape an encounter with the six-legged frog variety, all you have to do is avoid indulging in negative thoughts about people.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): One Christmas, I went to a Buddhist retreat center to hear Hindu prayers sung by world music pioneer Jai Uttal, who was raised in the Jewish faith. The all-embracing spirit of this event is what I urge you to cultivate in the coming days, Taurus. It's time to erase boundaries and bulldoze pigeonholes; to expand your imagination as you welcome in the widest variety of influences you can summon. You're ready to get so far out of the box that you can't even see the box anymore.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Let's add a new word to your vocabulary: *veraison*. It's used by grape growers to define the explosive ripening their crop undergoes about a month before the harvest. Up to this point, the grapes are small and hard and pale. Then, within a few days, they get softer and sweeter as they darken in color and grow dramatically bigger. Even experienced viticulturalists don't know when exactly *veraison* will occur. It happens fast and without warning. But I can pretty confidently predict that you're about to enjoy the human version of *veraison*, Gemini. Happy ripening season!

CANCER (June 21-July 22): An intractable dispute between players and owners has caused the National Hockey League to cancel its entire season. Many long-time fans are rethinking their devotion to the sport. "The distressing thing is, my heroes are morons," Vaughn Derderian told the *Detroit Free Press*. "And that's a reflection on me." I bring this to your attention, Cancerian, in the hope it will prod you into taking inventory of your own heroes, teachers, and role models. Are they truly serving you? Is it possible they served you at one time but have become nostalgic artifacts of an earlier phase of your development? Could you make them work better for you if you were more analytical about their impact on you? Meditate on questions like these as you consider the possibility that you're ready to go hunting for a fresh batch of inspiring influences.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): For over two decades, Peter Jouvanel worked as a journalist and cameraman who filmed war-battered hotspots, including Iraq in the Gulf War and Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion. Now he's retired from that gig and owns a restaurant in Kabul. He has few regrets, but one came after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. While exploring the organization's deserted safe houses, he happened upon a place where Osama bin Laden and his wife had lived. Among the items the couple left behind was one of her bras. In retrospect Jouvanel realized he should have pocketed the exotic piece of lingerie; a tabloid newspaper would have paid him a fortune for it. But because he had spent his entire career dealing with more respectable news media, the idea didn't even occur to him at the time. Remember this tale, Leo. Don't overlook things that could prove valuable even though you wouldn't normally think they were.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Shortly after the year 1000, Icelandic Vikings made two sojourns in the land that's now called North America. During the second expedition, one of the brave explorers, Gudrid Thorbjarnardottir, gave birth to a son. Snorri Thorfinnsson became the first European born in the New World. I hereby appoint Snorri to be your patron saint in the coming weeks, Virgo. May he inspire you to beget a brainchild as you acclimate yourself to living in a frontier.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Russian President Vladimir Putin says global warming might be a boon for his country because people "would spend less money on fur coats and other warm things." Similarly, my meteorologist friend Kurt notes that as air pollution has grown worse, sunsets have become more spectacularly beautiful. I like to think that you will find comparable redemption from your recent crises, Libra. In fact, I will make this prediction: The metaphorical version of a toxic spill will somehow lead you to a magical elixir.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): "Many of us don't change until we're in crisis mode," notes psychologist Robert Maurer, "until our mate leaves us or we lose our job. Once that moment comes we look for a big leap to get out of pain." Unfortunately, big leaps under pressure usually don't work. If you really want to change, you have to accomplish it little by little, and it's best to begin long before you're feeling miserable, scared, or backed into a corner. I mention this, Scorpio, because it's a perfect time to launch a step-by-step course correction that will ensure you won't get pinched by a predicament in April. Start modifying your behavior and adjusting your attitude while you're at the top of your game.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Your metaphor for the week is a spork, the dining implement that combines the features of a spoon and a fork. It has a rounded basin to hold liquids as well as a few tines on the end to stab solid food. Like the spork, you should be versatile as you gather nourishment for body and soul. On the one hand, you should be willing to make yourself a receptive vessel that can draw sustenance from ephemeral or mercurial stimuli; on the other hand you should be poised to aggressively snag more substantial fare.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Michael Weliky, a professor of brain and cognitive sciences, decided to test the accuracy of the old saw that we only use 10 percent of our brains. He dreamed up a brilliant experiment that involved 12 ferrets watching the movie, *The Matrix*. His research was so convincing that the prestigious journal *Nature* published it. He concluded that we actually use 80 percent of our available brainpower, though much of the activity takes place unconsciously. I predict your own efficiency will be even higher in the coming weeks, Capricorn, perhaps zooming above the 90-percent level. It might be time for you to try solving some of your most enduring mysteries. You'll no doubt be able to come up with approaches as innovative as having ferrets watch *The Matrix*.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Be very discriminating about how you give and receive gifts, Aquarius. Unless everyone's motives are clear and impeccable, seeming acts of generosity could get distorted by hidden agendas. Please know that I am by no means making a prediction that there will be trouble. It's just that you must exercise even more than the usual amount of care to ensure that the bestowing of blessings doesn't lead to unintended consequences. Did you hear about the two teenage girls in Colorado who got sued by a neighbor after they brought her a late-night surprise gift of freshly baked cookies?

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): The hero of Haruki Murakami's surrealist novel, *Kafka on the Shore*, can cause schools of fish to fall like rain from the sky. I suspect that you might be able to do that yourself, Pisces. At least temporarily, you have uncanny abilities; I'm tempted to say that you actually possess magical powers. Be careful how you use your wizardry, please. Use it exclusively to perform good works. There's no need to turn your adversaries into jack-in-the-boxes if you can simply make them less adversarial. You shouldn't waste your talent on materializing \$20 bills on the sidewalk when you can just as easily manifest an improvement in your working conditions.

HOMEWORK: What would the people who love you best say is the most important thing for you to learn? Testify at www.freewillastrology.com

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