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Are you superstitious? Do you worry about ghosts and goblins on all hallows eve? Avoid stepping on cracks? Make a wish on the first spring robin? Well, hang on to your hat because this Friday is the 13th.

I think there is a bit of superstition in all of us, at least there is in me. When I was little, I searched for four-leaf clovers. Legend tells us that clover protects us from magicians' spell and fairies' tricks. The real truth is that searching for four-leaf clovers keeps small children busy and out of their parents' hair for at least ten minutes. I also remember subscribing to the popular belief that if I swallowed a watermelon seed, one would sprout and grow in my belly. This myth was a wonderful excuse for countless seed spitting contests around the picnic table. And look where that got us, seedless watermelons. It seems to me that this invention is pretty clear evidence that it is bad luck to have a seed spitting contest when your mother is watching.

To this day I am not above a superstition or two. Take all the business with cats. I don't believe in black magic and bad luck but I have proof that a cat walking towards you brings good luck. My new neighbor's cat has decided she likes my yard and visits frequently. She is more or less invisible; I never know if or when she is there but since she moved in my yard has been free of squawking crows.

But back to Friday the 13th and the fear it brings. (There's even a name for it paraskevidekatriaphobia. Try saying that three times fast.) Friday has had a bit of a bad rap for centuries. Biblical tradition holds that Friday is an all round not good, very bad day. The temptress Eve and her apple, the rambling confusion and kerfuffle at the Tower of Babel and The Great Flood were all unleashed on a Friday. And that's just for starters.

From a few mishaps, gloom and doom myths and stories developed, grew and multiplied. As a general rule it is not a good idea to start anything on a Friday. Legend says that children born on a Friday are doomed to misfortune and Friday marriages are damned to fights and bickering. It's bad luck to move on a Friday, start a new job or project, launch a ship or begin a voyage. There is no particular rhyme or reason as to why but take notice, you've been warned! By the way, the Titanic was launched on a Thursday, set sail on a Wednesday and sunk on a Sunday.

The number thirteen has had a black cloud over it for centuries. A thirteenth man pops up as a villain in ancient mythology and Christianity. Roman witches gathered in covens of twelve and the devil made thirteen. From the Norse gods to the Last Super, malice and mayhem has occurred when an evil, uninvited or unlucky thirteenth guest showed up at the table.

As a result the vast majority of skyscrapers do not have a thirteenth floor. Airports skip number thirteen when lining up arrival and departure gates. Airplane seat rows jump from twelve to fourteen and most hospitals and hotels do not have a room thirteen. Cities skip thirteen when lining up the streets and avenues and rarely stick a house this unlucky number.

It was not all that long ago that a friend refused to come to my Thanksgiving dinner because her boyfriend's cold forced him to cancel. No, she didn't feel compelled to stay home and feed him chicken soup. Nor was she worried about coming dateless. She didn't want to bring bad luck to the table! Superstition be damned, cheer and laughter are the perfect ingredients for creating good luck around your table this Friday the 13th. Enjoy!

Bon appétit!

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Seared Scallops with Lentils

No need to take chances ... lentils are a sign of good luck and fortune. Enjoy them this Friday the 13th!

Serves 4

- 2 slices of thick-cut bacon, cut in small dice
- 1/2 pound lentils, about 1 cup
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 leek, white and light green parts only, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, finely chopped
- 2 stalks celery, finely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 cups chicken stock
- 1 pound fresh baby spinach
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- 12 large sea scallops
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Fresh parsley, chopped

In a large saucepan, over medium heat cook the bacon until crispy. Remove the bacon and drain on paper towels. Drain off most of the fat and reserve. Add the onions, leeks, carrots, celery and thyme to the pan; season with salt and pepper and cook over medium heat until the onions are translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 1-2 minutes more.

Pick over the lentils, rinse and drain. Add the lentils and chicken stock to the pan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low; cover and simmer for 20-30 minutes or until the lentils are tender. Add the spinach and lemon juice and toss until the spinach has wilted. Season to taste.

Meanwhile, season the scallops with pepper. Add a little bacon fat to a skillet, heat the pan over medium high heat. Add the scallops and cook 2-3 minutes per side or until golden brown.

To serve: spoon a mound of lentils on each plate, gently place the scallops on top and garnish with diced bacon and sprinkle with fresh, chopped parsley.

