

## Botox Me Up, Scotty!

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“New York, New York it’s a hell of a town, the faces are UP and the market’s DOWN.” Yeah, there are bear droppings all over Wall Street. The phrase, “cut the crap” never made so much sense. So what do you do. you go get a do: a botox do. With me so far? Excellent. IMPORTANT ADVICE for those of you with English as a second language: there is no return after this point.

I’m in New York for a week. I’m visiting my friend Steve. I see Steve every time I come to what I call the “rotten core of capitalism” (a big apple, going bad on the greed of some very colourful worms indeed).

Steve is in consulting. Not only that, he is a partner in one of those, Big seven, Big six, Big five, Big four ... so-called accounting firms. I cannot remember, how many are left since Big A, was electrocuted by its biggest client, Enron.

Anyhoo, as they say over here, Steve takes me out to lunch, and I tell him about stuff in Europe. In reality I probably give him about \$3million-worth of free information. Information, which he then spends the next six months – until I hit the big city again - selling to his client base. This means we get to do VERY NICE lunches. And we are talking lunches. We’ve never done dinner, ‘cos he lives on Long Island. It is a known fact that rotten-apple commuters don’t do dinner: never have, never will.

This time, Steve calls and says, “Hey, I’ve two of my colleagues who would like to meet you.” I’m not surprised at this. The first thoughts of the Sarbannes Oxley Commission on naughty corporate behaviour has recommended breaking up the big whatever firms into lots and lots of small ones. These guys are running scared. Uncle George junior, flipping through his world atlas (he is now on page 17) may be too busy to save them.

So we meet. It’s Friday. It’s Midtown. It’s noon. It is also snowing. So we head to a local hostelry, where the waiter’s wrists are as limp as the linguine. I finally unwrap myself from several yards of scarves and other winter paraphernalia. So do my hosts; highly paid, high living denizens of the Upper East Side’s best apartments.

We sit. We introduce ourselves. We order food. We talk of events of the week. These (as ever in New York) have nothing to do with anything outside of Manhattan. Even Brooklyn and the Bronx, where most of their employees commute from, are NO-NO topics of discussion.

One of them, Frank, he’s called, says, “Well it’s Friday, I have my grand daughter coming for the weekend.” I look at him. He has the air of a 40-year-old. However, this IS Manhattan. This IS dress down

Friday. He IS wearing a polo shirt that I KNOW costs about as much as my air ticket from Europe. All the same, he DOES NOT look old enough to be a granddaddy. Neither does my other new chum, busily scooping up clams on my right.

I take a carefully calculated, casual peek at both of them. Wow! No wrinkles! Nary a one. More sneaked-glances-investigation later and both of them (Steve always looks like he hasn’t had enough sleep or has ever seen the sun) look to me like extras from some Sci-fi movie: “Invasion of the Body-snatchers” leaps to mind. When they talk – and they emote, enthuse, extemporise, like the highly intelligent, highly paid dwellers of East 63rd Street they are – nothing seems to move. Their facial language is missing. I am truly in the presence of aliens.

My Goodness! One of the largest firms of professional people in the world is being taken over by aliens! Frightening thought. Can you imagine if they came up with crazy ideas? Ideas like giving clients WHAT THEY REALLY NEED.

Another look. Another thought.

Imagine this. PLEASE DON’T TRY THIS AT HOME!!! You take a large piece of cling film (Saran Wrap to you Yankees) and pull it over your face – very tight. Well, that is what my two new pals looked like: they were bank-robbers with women’s tights over their heads, without the tights.

Then – in a flash of completely scary understanding – it came to me. These were not aliens at all. These were business people who had had IT done. We weren’t talking phasers at dawn here. This was not a job for Captain Kirk. This was botox injections.

These guys – in the high-end, fashionable, east sixties world – had joined the celebs and gone and done it. The fact that you couldn’t read their faces meant nothing to them. The fact that they looked like they had borrowed “themselves” from Madame Tussauds meant nothing either. In their world they were the epitome of COOL.

Sadly, also they had dyed their hair. The overall effect wasn’t cool at all.

Botox does work, I know. But while it might be OK for those who live in the rarefied air of Manhattan, I don’t think it would be quite the move for Mr Average. Those of you in Madrid, Manchester, Munich and Marseilles should take note.

Personally I’d get wrinkles just worrying about it.