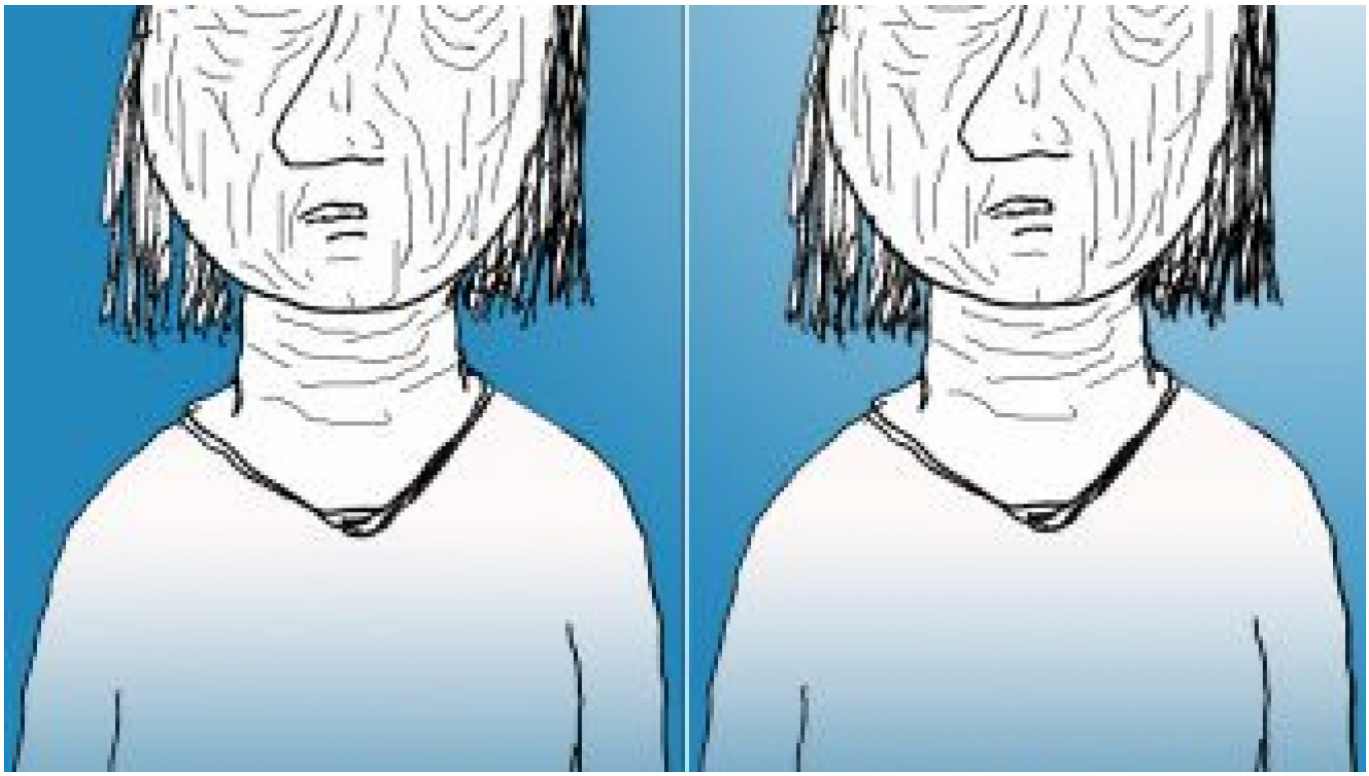
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30 YEARS
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Wanted: Plant Stem Cell

By Kevin O'Flynn

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The nicely wrapped baskets were perched on the reception desk as you enter the building where this newspaper is located. It's a desk of bounty, where the companies who want to pay succor to the beauty and style magazines on the floors above send gifts and samples in the hope of winning coverage, or because they are such generous souls. I was once sent a calendar of Belarussian tractors, and, see, they get a mention in a column.

Mooning around the desk in the early afternoon, four baskets were still there waiting to be picked up by an editor's minion and the eye was drawn to a little description inside one of the boxes. It was for a natural fruit product with a "collagen base and stem cells of tomatoes." A one-off drink for 690 rubles ($23), or free if you are the editor of a glossy magazine.

The presents are linked to a promotion campaign by a Korean company — whose name, as I have not received any of their goods, will not be placed in this column — whose products reduce your wrinkles like an iron reduces creases on your shirt (not their real slogan but available if anyone wants it), turns back the clock of time, makes you physically active and probably ensures you always go regularly. Part of this is apparently due to the stem-cell technology, which they say is unique to them and is trademarked with a silly name like

DoobedoobedioTM.

The company website, where they were looking for salespeople, has a long list of the usual testaments provided along the lines of "I drank the fruit and vegetable mix and felt energized all day."

A similar survey conducted among women nearby brought different results: "I'm suspicious," "hmmm," "give me monkey stem cells not a bloody tomato's" and "never trust a product with a trademarked ingredient, sounds like a bloody Harry Potter spell." None of them actually used the word "bloody."

The company boasts of a recent article in Nature magazine to back up their claims "Cultured Cambial Meristematic Cells as a Source of Plant Natural Products." It is impressively titled, although, calling it "New Thingy Gives People Immortal Youth" would have impressed me more. Still, well done to the chaps who work at the Korean company to also find time to write for Nature, as is noted at the end of the article.

Of course, perhaps it is the miracle cure, the wonder that will return the skin of youth. And what better way than if the company provides The Moscow Times with a month's test supply of fruits and vegetables in one swallow. Not that it will guarantee you love or more articles.

Even today, I still prefer the British to the Belarussian tractor.

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