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So here's what I love about New York City: if someone acts like a dumb asshole and you call them on acting like a dumb asshole, the bystanders are happy about it.

Anywhere else I've ever lived they just think I'm a bitch.

Also, in Manhattan the Chinese food is excellent and they deliver, which to me counts as pretty much the acme of human achievement, to date. Especially with free cold sesame noodles.

I'm sorry, but if you pick up your phone and all you can get them to bring you for sustenance is crappy lukewarm national-chain pizza, you do not live in civilization.

Having just spent four years out in what is euphemistically known as "the heartland," I was overjoyed to be back in the city of my birth.

It was an early fall day and totally gorgeous out, and my mother and I were walking down lower Sixth Avenue. We were supposed to be picking up a cake for a party that night, and I was in a most excellent mood.

Mom looked like she'd rather be weeding something or moving piles of rocks around or one of those other kinds of strenuous activities one gets up to out in the country.

"Must be this one," she said, pointing toward a slightly ratty bak-

ery on the opposite side of the street from us, just above Waverly Place.

We sprinted across Sixth against the light, Mom leading the way. She hadn't actually lived in Manhattan since 1965, but some habits die hard.

There was this brittle-looking skinny faux-blonde chick standing next to the bakery's door. Her makeup was kabuki/stewardess, and she teetered atop painfully chic Bergdorf-bitch slingbacks.

I wondered anew why some women were so desperate to wear "fuck-me" shoes. I have long preferred "fuck-*you* shoes."

Faux-blonde chick pulled the door open but then just stood there, like she was appalled to realize she might for once actually *ingest* something besides diuretics and a half-stalk of celery.

Mom, meanwhile, ran a hand through her own short, dark hair and breezed in past her.

Stunned at this effrontery, the woman sniped, "So what am I *now*, a doorman?"

Oh for chrissake, lady, get the hell over yourself.

As she was still just standing there, I muttered, "What, you got some problem with doormen?" and strode on inside myself.

The bakery's interior was dark compared to the sidewalk's mellow late-summer bloom of light. It took a few seconds for my eyes to adjust, so I just sucked in the scents of butter and vanilla perfuming the small establishment.

Mom asked about our party cake up at the display counter while a gang of confectionary aficionados sampled tortes and bombes and éclairs at a dozen tiny tables crowded together along the black-and-white-tiled floor.

Just as the proprietress set a pink box on the countertop in front of my mother, I felt a set of Flintstones-pterodactyl claws latch on to my shoulder.

The now-even-more-pissed-off door-lady yanked me around to

shriek, “You *bitch!*” right in my face—so close I got nailed with a constellation of spit flecks.

“Um,” I said, trying to back off a little, “I beg your pardon?”

She gripped my shoulder harder and started jabbing me in the chest with a bony finger. “Who. The. Hell.” *Poke. Poke. Poke.* “Do you think you *are?*”

The final poke practically broke her french-manicured nail off, right in the middle of the LEFTY’S TATTOO AND PIERCING, CHULA VISTA logo on my best secondhand black T-shirt.

“I think I’m Madeline Ludlam Fabyan Dare,” I said, raising my chin to look down my nose at her. “Why?”

“*Bitch!*” spat my scrawny nemesis, redundantly.

All the people at the little tables were watching now, pastry-loaded forks paused in midair.

Aware of our audience, psycho-babe dropped her hands from my person and just stood there, fists clenched, vibrating like an irate tuning fork.

“Oh, please,” I said. “Like it’s the end of the fucking world if you held the door for someone?”

Her right hand came back up, finger extended. “You!” *Poke.* “Need!” *Poke.* “To change!” *Poke-poke.* “Your goddamn attitude!” *PokepokePOKEpoke.*

She drove me backwards toward the counter’s plate-glass front, behind which rested a stage-lit panorama of buttercream whimsy.

I snapped my hand around her wimpy little calcium-deprived wrist before she could finger-stab me again.

“And *you,*” I said, tightening my grip, “need to change your goddamn *medication.*”

A couple of onlookers started laughing.

I let go of her wrist. The witch teetered once on those nasty stilettos before dropping her head and scuttling away.

The door banged open, then whooshed closed.

A big rough-looking guy at a tiny corner table raised his foam cup

of espresso toward me in appreciation, and the rest of the patrons dropped their forks for a round of applause.

Mom stepped up beside me bearing the pink cake box, now tied shut with red-and-white baker's twine.

"Dude," I said, grinning at her, "I fucking *love* New York."