

In the uptown neighborhood of Chicago sits a small coffee shop on Wilson Avenue. In this coffee shop, one buys coffee and breakfast tacos. In this coffee shop stands a man in front of the counter. This man is me. I have ordered a large light roast with light cream and sugar, as well as two breakfast tacos, one potato egg and cheese and once bacon egg and cheese. The barista enthusiastically poured me my coffee and handed it to me with a large smile. He wished me a good day and immediately turned to his coworker to recount Larry David recounting how he quit SNL. Larry put his foot down to a producer and loudly quit, telling him he was through. But then he realized he'd walked out on a lot of money, so he showed up the next Monday like nothing had happened... and it worked. Well, I'm stood there... holding my coffee... glancing between the two and attempting to be a part of this conversation from the other side of the counter... hoping that this young barista will glance back at me and realize that he has forgotten to hand me my breakfast tacos. The ones he verbally repeated after me to make sure he got my order correct. Only a few seconds had passed but it felt like a significant amount of time. My body grew hot. I somehow knew that everyone else in the shop was staring at my back, waiting for me to ask for my forgotten tacos. Judging me for standing there saying nothing. I was frozen in place, unable to muster the courage to even politely say a word. That would have been too much of a confrontation. I had been standing there staring at them having a Larry David conversation for too long. Without prompt, I left the shop with my coffee and sank down into the driver's seat of my car. I was disappointed in myself. I felt small and sad. Like middle-school-small and sad. A seemingly normal misunderstanding that could have been solved with a smile and a friendly reminder that I had also ordered tacos became a reminder of how fucking stupid and anxious I can be. A reminder that I haven't made progress on myself, I haven't overcome my anxieties, and I will always be this way. I snapped myself out of it. These thoughts come hurdling in so fast sometimes, it's a knee jerk reaction, an artifact leftover from a former self. I reminded myself to be kind to myself and allow myself to have these moments from time to time. It wasn't even that much extra money I'd spent. I'd basically just ordered a \$14 coffee and tipped the barista to forget about me. It was no big deal.

So I drove to work, a small man in his small car. I stopped at red lights and yielded to traffic like a little bitch. I drove the speed limit and stopped for pedestrians like someone who deserved to get spit on and forgotten about. On the way to work, besides the tennis courts by the lake, sits a small taco stand run by a multi-generational family. At this taco stand, one buys tacos but not coffee. I stopped my car and figured I might as well roll the dice again. So I walked up to the window to order. The owner recognized me, asked how I was doing, told me to have a great day. I took my ticket around to their outdoor waiting area and sat under an umbrella. The mom of the owner, one of the cooks, walked from behind the griddle and gave me a plate of chips and salsa - on the house. Miraculously, against all odds, they remembered my tacos. My number was called and she handed me my order without the slightest mention of Larry David. Every time I see this woman she wears a facemask, but the brightness of her smile comes through so strongly in her eyes. She invited me to come back again before they closed up for the winter. I promised I would. It was great. I'd almost forgotten what it was like to not be forgotten.

How quick I was to slip into that dark, cyclical spiral of negative affirmations. How quick was the cook to go out of her way to perform a kind gesture and give me free chips and salsa. And how

quick was Larry David to go back to work that next Monday like nothing had happened. My negative thoughts are some of the locals in my brain, the older generation we keep waiting to die off so things can start to get better. Until then I work on feeling a little less small, a little more normal. It's just a matter of time, self love, and a barista with short term memory longer than a carnival goldfish in a plastic bag.