

# Buy an Orange

MARCH 25, 2020: PARIS, FRANCE

After five years of working from home, I know unequivocally that the longer I stay inside, the harder it is to go out. Even when the streets of Paris—my home for over a decade—beckon; even when I've been staring at my screen for ten hours straight; even when I *know* that the best way to stave off cabin fever (and an ensuing migraine) is to step outside ... the longer I wait, the more the prospect seems insurmountable. Luckily, I've developed a way of short-circuiting my own inertia: I tell myself to go buy an orange.

It's not that I'm a huge fan of oranges, per se. I like them fine. The point isn't the orange; it's the low-impact mission. Going to buy an orange is easy in a way that going "for a walk" is not—an errand made up of a series of steps that never change:

Put on shoes.

Step outside.

Walk around the corner.

Exchange sixty cents for an orange.

When, I tell myself, these tasks have been carried out, I can come home, if I want to. I never do. Buying an orange is enough to remind me (for the thousandth time) that the cure for my aversion to going outside is, indeed, to go outside.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and ensuing confinement in Paris, I cannot "go buy an orange."

I can, of course, purchase oranges, but to do so is no longer low-impact. I need to print a form saying I'm buying essential groceries, to sign and date it. I need to inscribe it with the time, and then I need to actually leave at that time, instead of dilly-dallying for thirty minutes, thus requiring a new form, starting the process again.

I need to navigate people obeying the one-customer-at-a-time policy, spilling into the street in front of the Tabac. I need to avoid contact with supermarket employees, who have begun to notice that I do not like to stand in the same aisle as any living, breathing person (even if said person is wearing gloves and a mask).

"None of us is sick, Madame," one told me, as I fled him in the produce aisle. *That's not how this works*, I wanted to answer.

I say nothing. Instead, I pay and go home to remove my shoes, to sanitize my hands, to sanitize the oranges I now buy by the kilo and devour like an animal, standing over the kitchen sink.

Buying an orange is no longer a low-impact scenario.

Instead, I have begun patronizing local artisans delivering wine and bread and coffee by bike. They leave my packages on the sidewalk and watch from the empty street as I collect them. The lack of physical contact, especially in France, where handshakes and bises are the norm, is jarring. Instead, we smile; we say courage to one another. I take a breath of fresh air before going back inside, to the pile of oranges soaking in vinegared water in my sink. 🍊