

(RAISINS)

Essay by Susan Hodara



For years, I didn't buy raisins. I couldn't have them in the cupboard without eating them incessantly. I tried storing them in the refrigerator, and fastening the waxy bag they're in inside their box with a rubber band, but I could not outwit my urge. Once I knew they were there, neither they nor I were safe.

“...I couldn’t control my intake”

I consider raisins a healthy alternative to M&Ms. I consider them a fruit, a source of iron, a digestive aid. I consider them a viable means of satisfying an oral craving by eating them, like kernels of popcorn, one at a time. I have looked numerous times at the calorie count per serving size (130 for 1/4 cup) and then deceived myself that 1/4 cup is much larger than it is, and that this kind of calories is surely processed more rapidly than others as fuel.

Rather than eating them one at a time, however, I grab wads of them, pushing them together with the tips of my fingers until they rise from the container attached to one another in a group large enough to be called a mouthful. I do this over and over, standing in front of the open cabinet door, my hand dug deep into the box even as I'm still chewing the previous wad.

I've tried the little boxes to regulate my serving size. I've even tried the mini boxes, which I've estimated contain no more than 30 raisins total. But raisins packaged as such are a nearly different food, unable to fill the needs served by their cousins in the full-size boxes. It is their numerosness that draws me, the endlessness of those sweet and wrinkly units, one, then another, and always more.

I never sicken of raisins, no matter how many I eat. But they hold a power over me; I stopped buying them so I wouldn't eat them. Even then, when I visited my brother and his family, I made straight for their raisins, which they

kept in plain sight on their kitchen counter in a glass jar. There the raisins sang to me, an incessant urging that threaded through whatever else was occurring in the room: “Eat us. Eat us. Here we are.”

Several months ago, I reverted and purchased a box. There was no reason I couldn't control my intake, I told myself. They are a worthy addition to a well-stocked kitchen. Why shouldn't I be able to have them in mine? For several days, I continued to act as if they weren't there. When I decided to eat some, I took a limited quantity, put them on a plate, and placed them one by one on my tongue, then chewed well until they were gone. But within a week, my will had eroded, and I was back to wads.

By now, I have taken to buying my raisins in bulk, refilling the box as necessary. I sent away for a translucent plastic cover that fits perfectly over the top to keep them fresher. The letters R-A-I-S-I-N-S are raised in boxy capitals along its rectangular surface. I hit that box after lunch and after dinner, and in the middle of some entirely unrelated activity in the kitchen. Sometimes while I'm talking on the telephone, I'll find myself with my hand inserted, pressing the sticky pieces together, without even realizing it. cs