



**JULY 31, 2018 BY SUSAN HODARA**

# Bamboo

I spent an entire therapy session on the bamboo. Not about how crazy it is—how wrong it is—that my husband, Paul, planted it in the first place, but about my reaction to it. The waves of anxiety that overcome me whenever I think about it.

It's only four stalks. Our friend J. plucked them from his own garden, which is bordered by a massive wall of bamboo, after Paul was told by our local nursery that they were no longer permitted to sell the plant. Bamboo, they explained, had been ruled a prohibited (read:

illegal) invasive species. I thought that would be enough to rid Paul of his notion to add it to our garden. As for me, just the word “invasive” makes me nervous.

But no. Paul accepted the stalks and enthusiastically inserted them into the soil at the corner of our patio abutting the house. His vision is that they will grow tall enough to disguise the rickety metal drainpipe that runs up to the roof. “You’ll see,” he says, “it’s going to look great.”

My vision is an underground nightmare, where a hungry throng of tangled rhizomes pushes horizontally through the earth, intent on surviving, on multiplying, on spewing its growth upward, upward, through whatever stands in its way. Our patio slabs crumble. The foundation of our house buckles. If bamboo made sound, it would be a relentless roar.

I do not believe I am overreacting. After all, we have been warned by numerous sources, all of whom, even J.’s wife, R., have confirmed that Paul’s plan is a bad idea. One friend reported bamboo busting through the sides of its wooden container. Another, a botanist, informed us of the difficulty, once the roots take hold, of ever fully ridding our garden of them. “It will lower the value of your home,” someone told Paul. “Why would you do that?” someone else wanted to know.

R. said we have five years before it’s too late, and Paul and I have agreed that I can pull the bamboo after a year, unless it starts to cause problems before then. “The minute it breaks through the patio, I’ll take it out,” Paul assures me.

But I am not assured. Occasionally, when Paul isn’t home, I’ll go outside and tug at the shortest stalk, hoping it will have died but feeling instead its resistance. I could overcome it easily with a yank, but my loyalty to Paul wins out. It also wins out when I research ways to poison bamboo. I picture myself injecting some deadly chemical into the soil and waiting for Paul to discover that, sadly, his plants didn’t make it. Then I feel guilt, and betrayal, and I settle for a year.

I’d gone to my therapist to address my obsessive panic. But she didn’t help. In fact, her response made me feel worse. “What?” she exclaimed. “Why would he do that?”

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5



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Jill Birdsall was last year's first-place recipient of the Gertrude Stein Award in Fiction.

Submissions to this year's contest are due midnight, New December 3, 2013

In "Awards & Contests"

### Knockers

The sun melted into my arms and back as I walked into the darkness of The Rose. I sensed the place never closed and the stink of liquor and cigarettes hit

August 19, 2014

In "Essays"



### The Polygraph Examiner Goes on Holiday

July 22, 2013

In "Fiction"

## Susan Hodara



Susan Hodara is a memoirist, journalist and teacher. Her articles have appeared in publications including The New York Times and Communication Arts. Her short memoirs are published in a variety of anthologies and literary journals. She has taught a memoir writing workshop at the Hudson Valley Writers Center in New York for nearly a decade. Hodara is a co-author of "Still Here

Thinking of You: A Second Chance With Our Mothers" (Big Table Publishing, 2013).

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