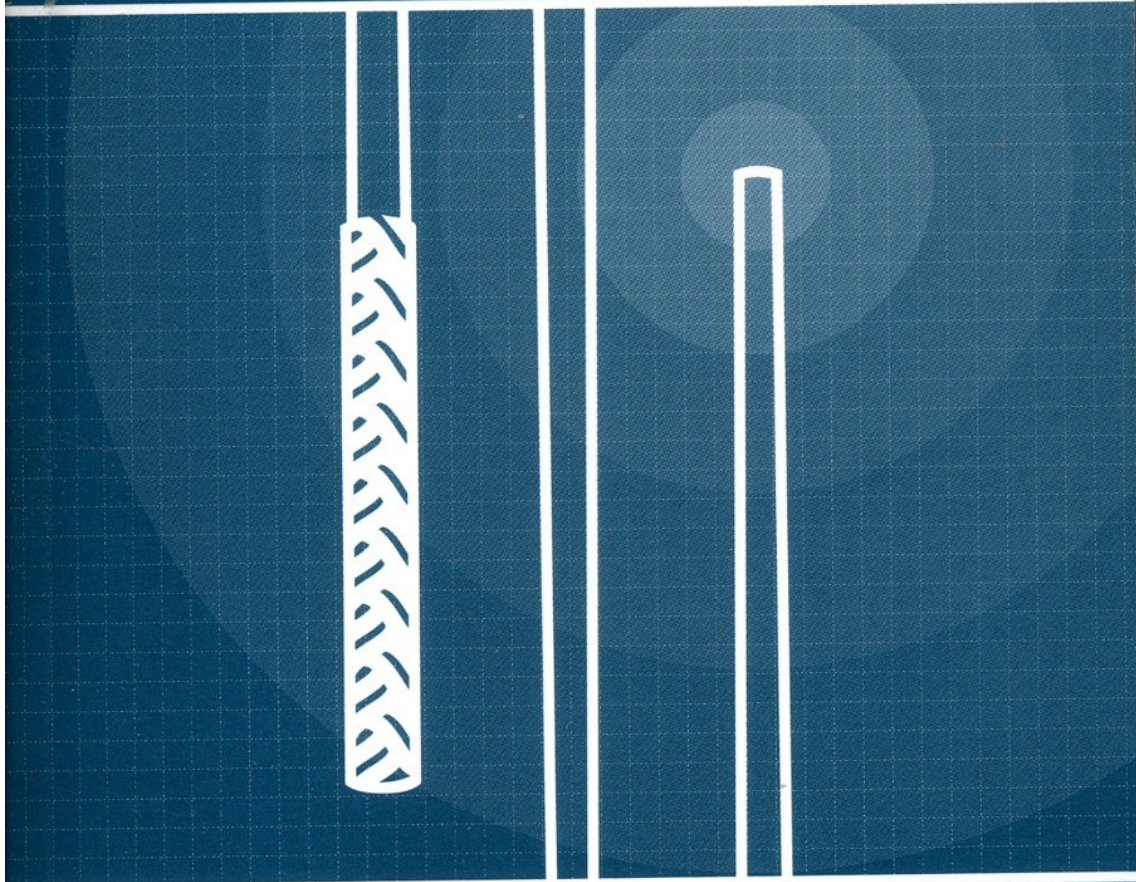


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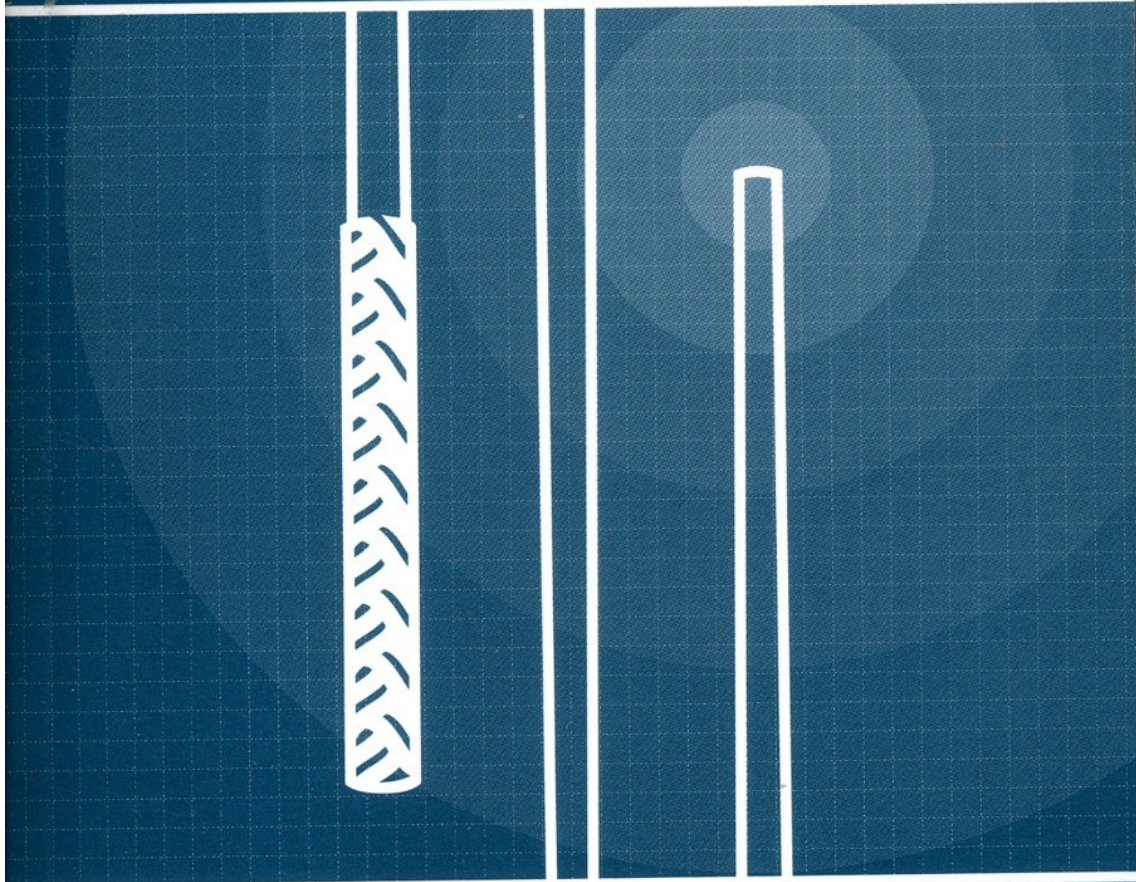


**Janet W. Hardy**



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**Janet W. Hardy**

**THE TOYBAG GUIDE TO**

**CANES AND CANING**

**BY JANET HARDY**



**greenery press**

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# **CONTENTS**

[1. Introduction](#)

[2. The Glamor of the Cane](#)

[3. A Brief Commentary On Suffering](#)

[4. The Craft of Caning](#)

[5. Types of Canes](#)

[6. Receiving the Cane](#)

[7. Some Special Caning Techniques](#)

[8. Making and Maintaining Canes](#)

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Thanks to all those who have taught me my caning, cane-receiving and canemaking techniques, with special thanks to Dossie, Lynn, Barbara, Jay, Pieter, Nan, Andrew (both of 'em), and all the lovely caners and canees past and future.

Special hugs to Deja Black for her patient and toothsome modeling, and to Si's thigh for holding still.



## **DEDICATION**

To The Girlfriend, with loving hopes for many enjoyable canings in the future...

Readers should understand that all BDSM carries an inherent risk of physical injury, emotional injury, injury to relationships, and other types of harm. While we believe that following the guidelines set forth in this book will help you reduce that risk to a reasonable level, the writer and publisher encourage you to understand that you are choosing to take some risk when you decide to engage in these activities, and to accept personal responsibility for that risk.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

My earliest interests in kink lay in the general area of spanking. Growing up as I did in the white-bread northeastern American suburbs of the '50s and '60s, the furthest my spanking imagination extended was to the implements I'd heard described by my friends: hairbrushes, paddles, belts. I'd read about kids whose folks cut switches from trees, but that was in the South – although I was certainly titillated by the idea. Whips and their ilk fascinated me but were far beyond my capacity to imagine. I'd never heard of a cane.

I can't remember now when I first did, or what I imagined at the time: probably, like many with no exposure to caning-rich British culture, the thick clumsy implements used for walking (or strutting) in the U.S. How graceless! How horrifying! I certainly wanted no part of striking anybody with anything as likely to break a bone as to impel a wail of pain/pleasure.

So it was many years later, when I was well into adulthood and over the threshold of the kink world, that I saw a photograph of a slim, graceful, lovely rattan cane (I believe it was in an extraordinarily informative overview of flagellation implements by the late Tony DeBlase in the gone but not forgotten Sandmutopia Guardian magazine – not coincidentally, the same issue that led indirectly to my attending my first Society of Janus meeting.) The moment I saw it, I experienced a thrill of desire and I knew, raw novice that I was, that I knew I had to have one of those.

It wasn't that easy. I was living at the time (it was the late 1980s) in a small California city with no SM community and no stores. I prowled antique stores looking for something comparable, but no dice. The Internet, where today a search on the words "cane" and "flagellation" would catapult me to a bewildering selection of resources, was the province of a few intellects far

beyond my own. A few books did exist which could have helped me\*, but they were targeted to gay and lesbian players and I did not know of their existence. Furthermore, I was married at the time, to a loving but bewildered man who did not understand my growing desires, and I wasn't even sure what I would do with my prize once I attained it.

Fast forward a year or two. The marriage had ended. I'd attended that first Society of Janus meeting, and met there the man who was to become my partner of 13 years. We'd entered into a switch relationship. He, wonder of wonders, owned a rattan cane – a shortish, thickish one (still my personal preference – more on this later), a gift from the redoubtable Mistress Nan, an unquestionable elder of the caning world. While I'd tried it on him a time or two, impact play was not a bottoming activity he enjoyed much, although just the feeling of the rattan in my hand thrilled me. He'd tried it on me in what I've heard called the “California style” of caning – brisk moderate taps rained down quickly over a broad area of my butt – and the fast-building sting was exciting to me but hard for me to process as anything but pure pain.

But one night, as we played, he was finishing exactly this activity. I, never the stoic, had been happily thrashing and shrieking all over the bed as the fiery rain built its sensation over my reddening buttocks. He turned to return the cane to its pile and I raised my head.

“Hon?” I queried. “Can I ask for something?” (No, I'm not terribly submissive, why do you ask?)

“Sure,” he replied. “What?”

“Could you try hitting me with that one time, as hard as you can?”

He looked at me as though I'd gone insane (a look I was to see many times in the years to come). "Um, I guess. Are you sure?"

I gave an answer that was also to recur many times in the years to come: "As sure as I'll ever be."

He came back to the bed and took his stance: standing over me, legs spread, with the cane in both hands raised high over and behind his head. After a test swing or two to get his range, he brought it down with that unmistakable whir, with his full (not inconsiderable) weight behind it. I felt a searing line of white heat across my ass that blossomed immediately, then ebbed for a moment, then whooshed from its central line like the breath of a dragon expanding outward from its core to every centimeter of my body – including, but not exclusively, my cunt. The yell I let out came from the deepest place in my solar plexus and vibrated every cell in my body and didn't stop until I had exhaled every molecule of oxygen I had. I inhaled, and the next breath that came out was a gale of laughter.

"Oh my god, that was amazing," I howled. "Do that again."

So if I kept a diary – I don't – I'd be able to tell you the exact hour of the exact day I turned into a masochist, and it was a cane that did it.

Ever since then, I've caned and been caned every chance I've gotten. If I could only pack one toy, it would be a shortish, thickish, medium-rigid rattan cane. (If I got a few more, they'd be two 12' lengths of rope, two wooden clothespins, a hairbrush and a heavy flogger, but that's another book.)



In this small volume, I hope to share with you my love of canes as well as the craft and art of canes, caning and canemaking as I understand them. You will undoubtedly find other cane-lovers who will differ with my opinions about many of the practices described herein, and I encourage you to listen to them and take their opinions as seriously as you do mine. Every cane-lover has their own style, and as you journey through a forest of canes you will choose your own path: may it be a gorgeous, thrilling and very very sexy one.

\* Coming to Power by Samois and Larry Townsend's The Leatherman's Handbook.

## CHAPTER 2. THE GLAMOR OF THE CANE

Most of us who are over 30 or so, and who grew up in the U.S., knew little or nothing of canes until we reached an age to read a certain type of British schoolboy fiction and/or British porn: canes simply are not part of American flagellatory practice. Younger Americans, however, may have been titillated by lurid reportage of the Michael Fay judicial caning in Singapore in 1994, or in veiled references to schoolboy caning in the later Harry Potter volumes.

In general, those Americans whose good fortune is to be erotically aroused by thoughts of butt-whacking start off with fond thoughts of hairbrushes, belts, paddles, and/or switches, and come later in life to the European refinements of canes and birches as our education expands. The influence of the cane comes to us from two parts of the globe: the United Kingdom, where its origin is the classroom, and the Orient, where its origin is the courtroom. The two are quite different.

While both canes are these days made of rattan (I am told that canes of a Middle Eastern reed called neigelerry were preferred in a gentler era, but that export prohibitions have made neigelerry essentially impossible to find today), the British whipping cane is typically less than three feet long, less than one-third of an inch in diameter, and designed to raise welts or occasionally to lightly graze skin – essentially, to be used on children as a correctional implement.

The judicial cane, of the type used on Michael Fay in Singapore, is four feet long, one-half inch in diameter, and most definitely intended to break the skin. The man who wields such a cane must be specially trained to do so accurately. (I have owned such a cane and eventually cut it down by a foot; it wavered too much as I swung it for me to feel OK about using it, even relatively lightly.) It is

expected that the adult who receives such a judicial caning will be permanently physically scarred by the experience.

The British schoolchild is typically bent over a desk, without restraint, and required to maintain that position for a set number of strokes, depending on the severity of the offense – typically three to six. The caning is typically administered with a snap of the forearm and wrist, by a teacher or headmaster.

The Singaporean criminal is strapped into a frame that bends him over into a much harsher position (we will learn later that the more strictly bent-over the recipient, the more painful and potentially damaging the caning). The number of strokes is similar to that of the British caning, also depending on the nature of the offense. The caning is administered by a full-body stroke from a trained martial artist.

Fantasize about either type of caning, as you prefer (my own fantasies can certainly be pretty bloody-minded at times!); but understand that they are very different.

Canes are used in a variety of ways in actual play, and offer a far broader range of sensation than many novices believe – I know one “sensuous caning” specialist who claims, and I believe him, that bottoms have fallen into blissful sleep under his cane. However, the romance and glamour of the cane generally stems from its association with the strict British schoolmistresses and schoolmasters of the Victorian era, as immortalized in “Victorian” classics such as *Harriet Marwood, Governess* and *Frank and I*. (These books were generally actually published in the early 20th century, although set in the Victorian era.)

Hence, the accoutrements that we associate with caning most often have a Victorian or Edwardian flavor: for the top, the long skirt and high-necked blouse

for a woman or tweedy suit for a man; for the bottom, the schoolgirl or schoolboy uniform; for setting, the schoolroom or dormitory or nursery; for language, a formally worded reproach from the top, and humble words of penitence from the bottom.

And the implements themselves: the whippy rattan (for the purist, with the classically crooked handle) with its imposing “whir” as it moves through the dusty air, the imposing oak desk.

This is the stuff of fantasy, and its glamour is undeniable to those of us who love canes. As we move it into reality, accommodations must usually be made. Not only can few of us afford full costumes and sets – that is the least of our problems; humans are imaginative creatures.

More to the point, only the rarest of bottoms can find pleasure in the searing cut of rattan against flesh without the grace of warmup or the tenderness of aftercare. This sensation is not intended to carry any kind of pleasure – it is meant to punish, and to punish only, with no love or joy implied or meant. When those of us who are new to caning try to enact such fantasies, we may find the harsh brakes of reality applied to our personal asphalt in an extremely jarring manner, with subsequent real-world harm: such Monday mornings are no fun at all (and may last for much longer than Monday).

I urge you to cherish your fantasies – they are the stuff from which you will build your scenes – but to understand that they are conceptual drawings and not blueprints. As you read on in this book, I will explain the nuances of pacing and technique that turn caning from craft to art and keep canes coming back for more.

## CHAPTER 3. A BRIEF COMMENTARY

### ON SUFFERING

Many, perhaps most, of you who read this are erotically attuned to suffering – either to your own suffering or to that of your partner, perhaps both. This affinity is a large part of the panoply of desires that we shorthand as “sodomasochism.”

Yet our attunement is a delicate one. Too little suffering and our encounter is bland and wearisome, reminiscent of the vanilla spouse we left behind or the girlfriend who recoiled in horror at the first tentative revelation of our nascent desires: if this were the sort of sex we wanted, we think, life would be so simple. (This is not so, of course, as our vanilla brethren can tell us, but in times of frustration it often feels this way.)

But at the opposite end of the spectrum, so many more things can go awry. Suffering inflicted by the wrong partner, one that we find graceless or unattractive or out of synch. Suffering inflicted by the partner who seems to enjoy it too much (“why does she hate me so?”) or too little (“is he only doing this for my sake?”). Hamhanded suffering brought to bear by a partner with no sense of the delicate feedback mechanisms that say “take it up slowly... slowly... OK, now pick up the pace... now it’s time to get sneaky and let ’em think they’re getting a break... now the crescendo!”

But most important of all, I think, is the question of “realness.” Every erotic sufferer, or inflicter of suffering, occasionally feels the spearthrust of desire for “reality,” the quest to turn the delicate interplay of BDSM symbol into something more poignant and immediate. It is at this time that partners begin talk of disposing of safewords, of consensual nonconsent, of “no way out” scenes.



A certain amount of sorting naturally takes place during the partner-finding process (assuming that couples are not already in rock-solid, established relationships). People who enjoy scenes with lots of role-play and not too much actual suffering will find each other, and naturally reject those who aren't happy unless they're playing close enough to the edge to dislodge small rocks and plants – and vice versa. The sorting process will inevitably produce more than its share of small (and not-so-small) dramas; minimizing such dramas is a good reason to evolve the best possible negotiation skills early in your BDSM experience.

If you are one who craves the edge, allow me to share two points from my own experience. Point one: it is essentially impossible for ethical players to dispose of safewords or do consensual nonconsent. There is always a way for a bottom who is truly in trouble to communicate withdrawal of consent, and an ethical top will act on that communication. Impasse.

Point two: the passage of time will naturally and effortlessly resolve the impasse. As partners play together, and trust evolves, the top's ability to read signals will evolve, as will the bottom's ability to relinquish control and to go into the realms that formerly seemed unattainable, the red-misted territory that lies beyond "I can't stand this any more."

I have never bottomed without a safeword. Regardless, I have done scenes in which I was shrieking for mercy at the top of my lungs, and meaning every word of it. I was literally willing to do anything I could to stop the scene – except safeword. And my top, who I trusted completely, knew it. This is the kind of play that becomes possible only between players who are highly experienced and who trust each other a lot. (Important note: Yes, I trusted my top a lot. Imagine how much he trusted me: what if I'd awakened the next morning and decided I'd been assaulted? What chance would he have had if I'd gone to the police and shown my marks? Trust works both ways in edgeplay of this kind.)

The reason I choose to include this essay in a book on caning is because caning, by its nature, is often extreme in sensation and punitive in nature, which means it often encompasses both physical and emotional suffering. If you intend to engage in intense caning, please consider these issues carefully before proceeding.

## CHAPTER 4. THE CRAFT OF CANING

To the uninitiated, a cane looks like, well, a stick. And to be sure, there is something to be said for their point of view: it is a stick.

While canes may be made of a variety of different materials, which I will discuss in a later chapter, they all have in common their basic stick-ness. They range from being whippy enough to be able to be bent tip-to-tip, to being almost entirely rigid; most are somewhere in between. For the purposes of this discussion, I'll assume moderate rigidity, but you can extrapolate greater or lesser rigidity depending on the cane you're using. (I suggest that before using any cane, you test its rigidity by bending it slightly between your hands. Actually, I suggest that before using any cane, you try at least a few test whacks on your own body – I usually use the outside of my right calf and/or the front of my right thigh, depending on the length of the cane – and/or have a knowledgeable friend give you a few test whacks on your butt. But I'm not your mommy; I just think that this is what responsible tops do. Let your conscience be your guide. Anyway.)

AIM. Before you read onward, please go get a cane. If you don't have one handy, go get something else longish and slimmish – a yardstick, a feather duster, a spare car antenna, a riding crop, whatnot, just so you can see what I'm talking about. Now, take it in your right hand, hold your hand out to your side, and move it in a wide arc in front of you from your right to your left.

What part of it was traveling the fastest? The tip, right? (It goes the farthest in the same amount of time: hence, it's traveling the fastest.) That's very important. This is true of any flagellation implement, but here we're talking about canes: the tip of the cane is traveling fastest, and thus is going to hurt the most. Furthermore, even a very rigid cane is not entirely rigid: canes wrap.

A beginner's mistake is to aim the center of the cane at the target. You're standing there, looking at a beautiful butt, with a cane in your hand. "Aha," you say. "That right butt cheek looks just wonderful. I know – I will hit it with this cane." (I like the way you think.) So you aim the center of the cane at the center of the butt cheek, and let fly. Where is the tip of the cane, the part that's traveling the fastest, going to land?

If the cane is very rigid, and you're not striking too hard, it'll land harmlessly in the air. If the cane is brittle, it will snap off and you'll have killed your cane. If the cane is whippy, it will snap around and score a nice hard welt, possibly even a blood blister, somewhere on your bottom's right hip, and your bottom will not like you one little bit.

Complicating this point is the fact that many people naturally tend to lean forward when they hit harder in order to put greater force of their bodies into the blow – even relatively experienced tops sometimes wrap unintentionally this way: they've gotten their range with softer blows, then they go to land a hard one, lean forward and zing! right onto the hipbone.

Got the picture? Aim the tip of your cane at the area you want to hit, possibly even slightly a bit short of the area you want to hit to allow for overkill. Point 1 about aim.

A secondary point about aim: If you look at a butt that's been thrashed by someone who's never taken a thrashing themselves (or who hasn't been taught by a knowledgeable top), you'll see marks from about the top of the buttock crack to about the bottom of the crease of the butt. What I have to say about that: Ow. Shit. Goddamn. Ow.

About 90% of the bottoms I've played with have a strong preference for blows that land on the bottom half of the butt and – often but not always – the top few inches of the thighs. The exceptions are almost always those who like their thrashings to have a genuine flavor of punishment. I have met vanishingly few bottoms who find anything erotic at all about blows to the top half of the butt. And I have never met a bottom who can tolerate blows anywhere in the area of the tailbone. (I'm sure such a bottom exists somewhere, because somewhere there's a bottom who likes anything in the world, but there are very goddamn few of them.)

So: unless your bottom tells you differently, I strongly suggest you concentrate your blows on the bottom half of the butt, and probably on the inner portion of each cheek. Ask about strokes to the thighs: some bottoms love them, some bottoms hate them, essentially all bottoms find them harder to take than strokes to the ass.

**SYMMETRY.** Unless you're trying to achieve a special effect, it is gracious and artistic to achieve symmetry in your caning. Thus, unless you're fortunate enough to be ambidextrous, you will have to learn some way to reach the cheek that is not reachable with your dominant hand.

The easy way is to put your bottom face-down on a table or bed and simply walk back and forth. Nothing wrong with this option: a great many bottoms can accept a more intense caning in this position anyway (more about this later).

But if you want your bottom in a standing or bent-over position, you will need to learn one of three options: you can learn to cane with your "off" hand, you can learn to cane with your dominant hand while crouching, or you can learn to cane backhanded.



I am hopeless with my left hand, so I've discarded that option, but I've watched other caners who are very good – as with all caning, I suggest you practice on inanimate objects before trying it on a human being.

The crouching option is hard to describe, but can be done well if your balance is good. Assuming you're right-handed, you crouch to your bottom's right, facing them. Raise the cane to your left shoulder, parallel to the ground, with your palm facing their body, and swing it smoothly at their butt, aiming slightly upward.

In general, though, I prefer the backhand. Through the years, I've come to the point where my backhand stroke is actually slightly stronger and more accurate than my forehand (I have a weak shoulder and the backhand is less affected by it). If you don't know how to do a backhand swing, have a tennis-playing friend show you; not just your caning, but all your flagellatory activities, will be improved by this important stroke. Big Hint: I like to start the stroke by grasping the striking end of the cane in my left hand, thus adding "snap" to its stroke as it swings.



*If your backhand is really  
hopeless, try this stance instead.*

STING/THUD. The gospel of sting and thud is taught in all classes on flagellation. Stingy things are light in weight in relation to their width, and thus hurt up at skin level; thuddy things are heavy in weight, and thus hurt deeper down at muscle or even bone level.

All canes are stingy to some degree, because they're all narrow and relatively lightweight. I have a rattan cane that's really more of a club – about 27" long and 1" across (see p. 50-51) – and even it packs a significant edge of sting along with its clublike thud. And the slenderest of canes is nearly pure sting.

But heavier and more rigid canes can definitely have thud along with sting, and some achieve a lovely thud/ sting balance that I like to call "bite" – sinking deep down through every layer of tissue with an intensity achieved by no other pain toy. It's this kind of bite, in my opinion, that makes the cane truly the queen of flagellation implements.

It is possible to control thud and sting levels with your caning technique. If you are using a heavy, thuddy cane and want it to feel stingier, swing it nearly parallel to the skin so that it strikes a glancing blow that skims along the surface of the skin – it will sting like a bee. Similarly, snapping the cane onto the skin as though it were going to go only an inch or two beneath the surface and then snatching it back will give a stingier stroke. Contrariwise, sending a cane firmly and perpendicularly directly down onto the skin, with no snap and lots of follow-through, will maximize whatever thud it may have. (If it's a slender, whippy cane, nothing on earth will make it feel thuddy, except maybe wrapping it in duct tape. Sorry.)

If your bottom has a hard time processing sting, you can help by “rubbing away the sting” – see p. 80 for details.

PACING. To explain the pacing of caning, first I have to explain a bit about what happens when a cane strikes skin; it’s not exactly like any other implement. Oddly enough, canes have more in common in at least one way with clamps than they do with other flagellation implements like floggers, paddles and straps.

Please refer back to page 7 where I described the sensations of my first hard cane stroke – the immediate jolt of pain, the momentary ebbing, then the slow secondary blossoming. This is very typical. Now look at the photograph of the classic “two track” cane welt on page 37.

So here we have two cane-related phenomena that are not like other flagellation implements: a two-phase sensation, and a two-track welt. On the other hand, we sadomasochists do have one other pain implement in our toybag that does have a two-phase sensation: the lowly clamp, that notoriously “hurts for a moment going on, then calms down, and then hurts worse coming off.”

Obviously, I have no scientific data to back me up on this. (If any reader is willing to fund a study, write to me care of Greenery Press.) But it seems clear to me that what happens when cane strikes skin is essentially the same as what happens when clamp meets skin, compressed into a much smaller time frame, as follows:

The cane descends rapidly and forcefully onto the skin. (Look closely and you can see a momentary flash of pure white, like a lightning strike, as the skin is compressed and the blood forced out of it.) The pain is instantaneous. The skin

on either side of the cane stroke is suddenly and dramatically stretched, hence creating the “two tracks” of the classic cane welt. This phase of the sensation is comparable to the sensation of the clamp going on, and fades almost instantaneously.





*This classic two-track cane welt tells an  
important story about the physics of the cane.*

One to ten seconds later, depending on the force of the strike, the blood flows back into the compressed tissue – comparable to the sensation of the clamp coming off. A second, slower, more intense wave of pain washes over the recipient, often followed by a flood of endorphins (and, sometimes, by a corresponding flood of giggles).

What this means to you, the caner, is that pacing is essential to creating a symphonic caning. If you want your caning to go on for a long time, at a majestic pace, you wait until the second wave has subsided before you start your next stroke. If you want to build to a crescendo, you challenge your bottom by building wave on top of wave. This is your composition to create: but you must create consciously, mindfully, and with knowledge. Learn to watch your bottom with the utmost of care; you will see these waves travel over the skin like ripples on a lake, and they will become as lovely to you as any beauty that ever inspired an artist.

## **CHAPTER 5. TYPES OF CANES**

Most of us, when we think of canes, think immediately of rattan. And for good reason, in my opinion: I believe rattan offers overall the liveliest action and most vibrant (I hesitated for a long time before typing that adjective – how do you describe something as evanescent as the erotic interplay of intense pain and pleasure?) sensation of all cane materials.

But when I lay out all the canes and cane-type toys in my toy box, rattan proliferates but is far from alone – my canes range from a delicate conductor’s baton of fiberglass to a heavy club of Teflon. And I’ve seen and coveted canes of many other shapes and materials. So, herewith, a highly idiosyncratic and opinionated guide to cane shapes, sizes and materials.

### **NATURAL MATERIALS**

Rattan. Rattan is to canes as wood is to chairs: it’s possible to make perfectly nice ones out of other materials, but it just seems somehow right. Rattan is a flexible natural reed that grows in marshy areas in Indonesia and similar climates, and is available cheaply all over the U.S. While it is easy to make your own canes of rattan – basic canemaking instructions start on p. 89 of this book – I strongly recommend that your first few rattan canes be purchased from a professional, so you can learn your preferences regarding length, thickness, springiness, balance, varnish and handle finish before you go to the trouble of making canes.

Many who do not know much about canes refer to the material of which they are made as “bamboo.” Rattan and bamboo are different materials. While they are

both reeds, you can tell which is which by looking at the joints. The joint in a piece of rattan looks like a telescope, with one piece fitting slightly inside the next. The joint in a piece of bamboo looks more as if you'd taken a tube of cloth in your hands and moved your hands closer together so that the cloth formed a ridge, with neither piece "inside" the other.

The reason this is an important difference is that the two reeds break differently. If rattan breaks, it is likely to break cleanly across – your cane will be broken but your bottom will be intact. Bamboo, on the other hand, can break lengthwise, leaving an edge of knifelike sharpness. If you don't notice the break before striking your bottom, you can cut the bottom's flesh badly. Thus, I don't recommend bamboo for caning, except perhaps for very light taps. This includes the cheap bamboo garden stakes that are many people's first experiment with caning – if you must buy these, please use them very lightly as an experiment, and if you like the way they feel, invest in rattan or one of the other materials described here before going further.

Some people prefer their rattan canes varnished, some unvarnished. The advantage to varnish is that it looks cooler and that very minor amounts of body fluids can be cleaned off it with nonoxynol-9 toy cleanser or hydrogen peroxide. However, if you want to soak or steam your cane to keep it supple (see p. 102), you will have to either leave an end unvarnished or sand a bit of the varnish away. The advantage to unvarnished rattan is that maintenance is easier, but if you get fluids on an unvarnished cane it's best to give it to the person whose fluids are on it. Your choice. (I prefer varnished, for whatever that's worth.)

I owned one rattan cane that had been entirely dipped in tool dip, which was great insofar as it was terrifically easy to keep clean. However, it was impossible to keep supple and eventually broke under hard use. Life is full of tradeoffs.

When buying a rattan cane, look for:

joints and a tip that have been sanded nice and smooth

a nice straight shaft – however, rattan is a natural material, and no rattan cane is going to be perfectly straight

a good sensation – try it on yourself, or have a friend try it on you, so you can see how it feels

a handle that feels comfortable in your hand

a length and width that seem well suited to your body and the way you swing (generally, the shorter you are, the shorter your canes should be – I’m 5’4” and I like my canes about 2-1/2’ long)

a nice balance that doesn’t make you want to choke up on the handle

your preferred type of finish – if varnish, no blobs, sags or drips

***Wrapped rattan. I’ve seen a couple of very nice canes that are standard rattan canes with smooth, tight leather coverings – the leather mitigates a bit of the sting and imparts the “bite” quality that cane-lovers adore, besides giving the cane a fabulously Erich Von Stroheim fetish look. These are more of an investment than a standard rattan cane, but they impress me quite a bit.***

Reed. Reed is a bit like rattan, but it’s the core of a generic reed and has no joints. Its outside sometimes has a slightly serrated or “toothed” appearance, a bit like the spline that is used to keep window screens in their frames but not nearly so extreme. It tends to be very flexible and to make very light, whippy canes. It is not typically varnished. I’m not a huge fan of reed canes, but for sting fans they’re a dream come true, and reed is very inexpensive so you can buy or make plenty of them for your collection. The end of a reed cane should be sanded nice and round, just like a rattan one. Check the shaft to make sure there are no splintery parts.

Wood. I've had wooden dowels used on me as canes, and while they're not the equal of rattan, they haven't been half bad. Wood doesn't have the spring or bite of rattan; it's rigid and a bit unforgiving. But in many parts of the country, rattan canes can be hard to find, particularly for beginners who are just beginning to experiment with caning. And I'd certainly rather see someone experiment with a dowel than with a bamboo garden stake – it's safer (less likelihood of lateral splitting) and more controllable.

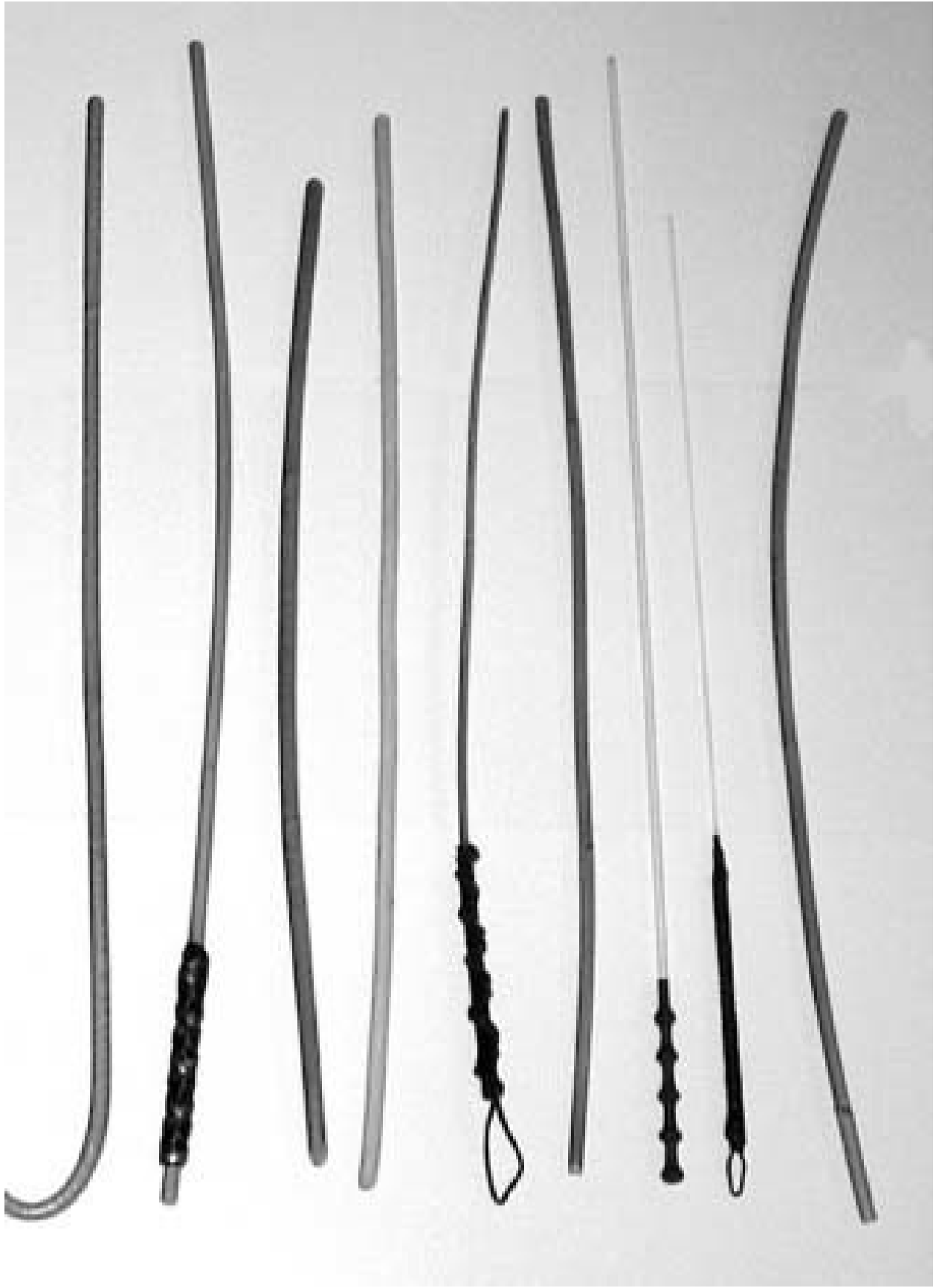
On the other hand, it's tough to achieve that fabulous "bite" with a dowel, and I'd hate to see someone decide that they just weren't into caning on the basis of their experience with a hunk of wood.

Still, if you promise to keep an open mind, you might give it a try if a dowel is the best you can do for now. I'd start with something about three-eighths of an inch thick and 30" long, at least to start – you can try something thinner, thicker, longer or shorter later.



*From left: two Lucite canes; a Delrin; a very thick rattan; a start  
a Teflon club; a crook-handled rattan; a rattan with a beautiful  
thin rattan with a macrame handle; another plain rattan (can't  
the reason why I tell you to store your rattan ha*





*a standard rattan (this one's my favorite); a conductor's baton;  
beautifully braided handle; a plain rattan; a wooden dowel; a very  
an't have too many), a couple of fiberglass – and, at far right,  
hanging from a loop or flat on a shelf or floor.*

Switches. If you have a tree in your back yard with relatively long, straight branches – willows are great, and many fruit trees as well – you have a very intense caning implement as near as your penknife. Start gently with switches – I'd try them on your own hide before you use one on your partner; they can be both extremely painful and more damaging to skin than you might think. Be especially careful about small buds, twigs and bits of bark, which can leave small wounds, welts and scrapes. Not a lightweight toy, but intense, fun, and well suited to various role-plays.

## **MANMADE MATERIALS**

Almost all canes of manmade material are nonporous, which gives them one huge benefit: if they get body fluids on them, they're a cinch to clean. If they fit, you can wash many manmade canes in the top rack of your dishwasher. If not, drop them into a bucket of one part household chlorine bleach to nine parts cool water, or wipe them down with hydrogen peroxide or nonoxynol-9 toy cleanser, and they're ready to go again.

It's probably impossible to describe every manmade material anyone's ever crafted a cane from, but here are a few of the most common:

Fiberglass. The commonest type of manmade cane I see is fiberglass. Fiberglass is usually white in color, opaque, and lightweight; it tends to be fairly flexible and whippy.

My big concern about fiberglass is that some less expensive fiberglass canes can shed fibers which can embed themselves in skin – this may or may not be dangerous, but it worries me. Given that I consider my hide more disposable than that of my bottoms, I always run a fiberglass cane through my fingers in each direction before applying it to anyone else. If I feel any rough edges or if a sliver comes off in my hand, I discard the cane for good. (Fortunately, fiberglass canes are usually quite inexpensive.)

One significant exception that's worth mentioning here is one of my favorite toys – a conductor's baton from a music store, a small, light cane with a bulb-shaped cork handle. I've carried the baton loose in my toybag for years and it's never shed a single sliver, so I know that high-quality fiberglass is not necessarily prone to the same problems as its less expensive counterparts.

Delrin. Delrin is a black substance that feels like hard rubber and is quite heavy in weight; I'm told its real-world use is for bumpers on boats and such items. Canes of Delrin are extremely thuddy – I'm a bit choosy about who I'll let use a Delrin cane on me, as a missed stroke could potentially break a tailbone. Still, Delrin delivers a deep-down jolt that it's hard to get with any other cane material, and any thud slut is likely to want a Delrin cane or two.

Lucite. Lucite canes' crystal-clear gleam makes them exceptionally pretty to look at, and they are available in a variety of colors. They are quite rigid and have some tendency to break (careful how you store them if your toybag is subject to rough handling). I've seen canes of twisted Lucite whose sharp edges give me pause; I'd be careful who I'd let use such an item on me.

***Other materials. I own a cane of Teflon, but its dimensions and weight really place it more genuinely in the “club” class – it’s about 3/4” across, 20” long and weighs almost a pound, and its sensation has almost none of the characteristic sting of a cane, so I mention it here only for the sake of completeness. I’ve also seen canes of burnished aluminum, which are as completely rigid as it’s possible for a cane to be.***

And there’s always the Joan Crawford special: the simple wire coat hanger. While these merit significant special negotiation – they are often tools of abuse, and you definitely want to make sure that your partner has no issues in this regard before you whip one out and start using it – coat hangers actually make rather effective canes. Simply grab the hook part with one hand and the center of the crossbar with the other and pull until the hanger is one long loop, basically a two-part wire cane. (A sweetie and I once whiled away a four-day cruise quite happily with one of these.)

## **CHAPTER 6. RECEIVING THE CANE**

Like any consensual BDSM activity, caning is always, at its heart, collaborative: while one partner may exert some forms of control, the other must be actively supporting that control, or the scene explodes or founders or collapses.

BDSM convention would have it that many of the topics I will discuss in this chapter would ordinarily be addressed to the top: “Place your bottom in this position...” “Instruct your bottom to exhale....”

I am going to break with that convention here. I think bottoms need to know how to receive a caning – in my experience, the best tops know that there’s a time to tell a bottom what to do, and a time to back off and let a bottom do what a bottom knows how to do. (And besides, I think that even if you never switch, all tops should know the basic principles of bottoming and vice versa.) So the following section, on basic caning positions, pain processing techniques, and pre- and post-scene skin care, will be addressed primarily to bottoms; tops can learn these techniques in order to direct bottoms in them as desired.

### **CANING POSITIONS**

To start with, let me specify that we’re going to talk here about caning on the buttocks and, perhaps, the backs of the thighs. While there are certainly other parts of the body that can accept a caning – notably the fronts of the thighs, the well-muscled parts of the back, and the chest; medical opinions vary as to the appropriateness of caning the female breasts, and the palms of the hands and soles of the feet must be caned only with light stingy canes and with extreme care – it’s obviously beyond the purview of this book to list all the possible

positions for all those body parts. Here, we will keep our focus on the buttocks (gee, how I hate focusing on the buttocks).

The ass is really an ideal flagellation target, virtually all muscle and fat, with no vital organs anywhere nearby. The main thing to keep in mind when you think about what position to take for your caning is this: the more bent-over you are, the more your caning will hurt.

There are a couple of reasons for this phenomenon. First, bending over stretches out your muscles and skin, and since the stretched skin is tighter, impact on it hurts more. Second, if you're concentrating on being bent over, you probably can't relax as much, and the more tense you are, the more it's going to hurt. (I'll tell you some ways to help relax later on in this section.)

This doesn't necessarily mean you have to take all your canings stretched out on your bed like Cleopatra – sometimes you want it to hurt, and sometimes your partner wants it to hurt. But it does mean that you and your partner both need to understand that a caning that felt fine when you were face-down in the pillows might be way too much when you're bent over grabbing your ankles.

That said, here are the positions in which you'll most often find yourself accepting your canings:

***Lying down. For most people, this is the most relaxed position, and the one in which they can accept the most intense caning. This position combines well with bondage, should you be so inclined. If you or your partner is turned on to having your ass up in the air – and who can blame you? – a few pillows under your hips may be a welcome addition. (A wonderful “stealth sex toy” is one of those back rests that goes in your bed, shaped like the back and arms of an easy chair: tip it face down so that it's triangle-shaped and it's perfect for***

*putting your butt right up at that oh-so-caneable angle.) If your neck is strained, a pillow under your chest will take the stress off.*





*If you don't have a backrest, a couple of firm bed pillows or sofa pillows will work almost as well.*

***Bent over. This is the classic position for caning, the one most evocative of strict governesses and naughty schoolgirls and all the imagery that gets our blood racing. It also has many other advantages: it can be done most anywhere – a bedroom, an office, a motel, or a dungeon; it combines well with bondage; and, assuming that the top is wearing a built-in or add-on dick, it can segue nicely into penetrative sex should the mood be right (and it's certainly easy to understand how the mood could be right).***



*Bent over a straight chair – a classic that  
can be done anywhere.*

If a stroke lands hard, it will be instinctive for you to jerk upright for a moment. If you don't want to, or if your top doesn't want you to, but you can't make yourself stop, you can either try some bondage, or try the relaxation techniques I'll talk about in a moment.



*This spanking horse was adapted from a  
standard sawhorse.*

If you really like bent-over positions and have room for it, you can invest in a “spanking horse” or similar piece of furniture. A good compromise for the Home Improvement set is a Black & Decker Workmate – with a couple of bed pillows on top, it’s one of the most comfortable spanking benches I’ve ever occupied, and has plenty of built-in bondage points.

Fully bent-over positions, such as grabbing the ankles, are for the very flexible and very masochistic – I’d classify them as specialty acts rather than actual play; they’re not something that fits well into most people’s actual repertoire. If you’re male and want to try this position, I’m guessing that your legs are going to be spread fairly wide and thus I’d be extra-careful about some protection for your testicles.

Standing. Standing positions are like lying-down positions in that they don’t stretch the skin or muscles of the butt, and thus can hurt less than bent-over positions. On the other hand, they don’t typically permit as much relaxation as lying-down positions, so they’re sort of a halfway point, pain-wise, between the two.

If you’re going to take your caning standing up, it’s a good idea to at least have something to brace yourself against or grab – a wall, post, chain, piece of bondage furniture or cooperative friend. Otherwise, the impact and pain of the cane stroke is likely to send you skittering forward, and your top will wind up chasing you around the room, which is not a graceful way to accept or deliver a caning.

You may find that the part of your butt where the caning feels good is a bit lower when you stand up than it is in other positions. Gravity pulls your butt a bit lower, and your “sweet spot” goes with it.



*A bottom  
whose hands  
are overhead, in  
a position like  
this one, may be  
especially likely  
to feel dizzy or  
faint – check in  
often to make  
sure everything  
is OK.*

## **BASIC PAIN PROCESSING**

By virtue of the length of this book, I can't go into a great deal of detail here about pain processing techniques – there's really another whole book to be written about that. But the basic thing you need to know is that the more relaxed you can stay, the more you'll be able to accept and enjoy your caning.





*I didn't even  
have to remind  
this young lady  
not to lock her  
knees, but you  
might have to  
remind your  
bottom, with  
appropriate  
penalties if they  
forget (knee-  
locking is a  
common cause  
of fainting).*

“Sure,” you’re thinking, “that’s easy for her to say, sitting at her keyboard typing.” Well, you have a point. But, honestly, I’ve taken some pretty spectacular canings in my day, and, truly, the trick is to stay as loose as you can, and there are ways to do it, and I can help you learn some of them.

Most of us react to pain with immediate, instinctive panic – and with good reason: most of the pain we experience in our lives is a red-light-and-siren signal

that something's seriously wrong: we're sick, we're injured, someone is violently angry at us.

But when our wayward libidos drive us to experience erotic caning, we've just turned all the rules upside down, and all of a sudden we're experiencing pain when there's nothing seriously wrong, and in fact a lot of things are quite seriously right. And yet the habit of panic often persists.

So the first thing I want you to learn to do is to run a "panic scan" through your body. From time to time during your caning, when you have a moment that isn't too overwhelmingly intense, just run a quick laser beam of attention from your toes all the way up your body, paying special attention to the places where you know tension likes to hide (in many people these are the asshole, belly, chest, shoulders, throat, neck, hands and face). Anyplace you find a pocket of tension, take a deep breath into it, and then blow it back out – sometimes shaking the body part will help.

Next, start paying attention to your breathing. Panicky people tend to breathe high up in their chests, with tight little panicky breaths – you can hear it in their high squeaky voices, if they're making noise. I want you to try to keep your breath low and slow and deep down in your belly, so that your noises come out moaning, or growling like a tiger.

Finally, I want you to try playing with the pain in your mind. Take that cane stroke that's just lit up your butt with pain – but is it really pain you're feeling? Could it be... heat? Hmm... maybe that's it, the nice glowing heat of the August sun as you bake yourself on the beach. Or is it color, the searing orange of the fireworks you saw last Fourth of July? Or the pure high note of a single perfect trumpet? Hey, it's your pain, yours to play with, and you can ride it anywhere your mind can take you.

Important note: These pain processing tips will probably help you process some sensations that you couldn't handle before. They won't help you with all sensations. There will be times that you don't want to ride on top of the sensation, and there will probably be tops who don't want you to, and there will be plenty of times that you won't be able to anyway. Nonetheless, my experience has been that knowing how to do this stuff means that you can have more fun for a longer time doing more kinds of canings (and other scenes) than not knowing it – so I'd get in some practice if I were you.

## **TAKING CARE OF YOUR HIDE**

As a general rule, the more canings you accept, the better your skin will hold up to them – most experienced canees I know mark very little if at all. But if you're new to caning, you may find your butt the day after a caning looking something like a gulley the day after a particularly chaotic dirt bike rally.

Generally, this kind of mayhem is harmless – it's what doctors call a “self-limiting condition,” meaning if you just leave it alone it gets better by itself. But it can be a nuisance, icky to look at and uncomfortable to sit on.

To minimize marking from a caning, follow these guidelines:

Every day:

Take a good quality multivitamin.

Moisturize the skin on your butt with a deep-acting moisturizer.

Drink plenty of water.

24 hours before and after play:

Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen and other blood-thinning drugs.

Immediately after play:

Place an icepack on the affected area for 20 minutes. Repeat every two hours for 24 hours (or until you get bored with the whole thing).

If welts are present, they may be minimized by taking 50 mg of diphenhydramine (Benadryl). However, Benadryl makes many people very drowsy, and welts tend to go away fairly quickly on their own, so unless they're really bugging you, I probably wouldn't bother.

Some people find that their marks seem to go away faster if they take arnica, an herbal remedy from the health food store (it comes in small tablets you place under your tongue)

24+ hours after play:

If your skin isn't broken, commercial heat wraps, available in drugstores, may help speed healing of bruises.

Be careful about public showers, hot tubs and steam baths – the heat may reawaken marks you thought had faded (embarrassing!).

## CHAPTER 7. SOME SPECIAL

### CANING TECHNIQUES

There's a lot more to caning than simply winding up and letting fly: a cane can be one of the most versatile toys in your toybag, offering anything from a sensuous massage to a tantric journey to a Herculean ordeal. Here are a few of my favorite caning tricks, some sweet and some sneaky.

*The scary swish. The sound of a cane whirring through the air is a terrifying, yet very erotic, stimulus for a lot of bottoms. Let them thrill to the sound effects a time or two before you actually land a stroke. (Of course, unless you're doing a punishment caning, your actual stroke will be nowhere near that hard – but the swish plants the fantasy in their brain before you begin, and builds a nice sense of dread.)*

*Rubbing away the sting. I was taught this technique by my dear coauthor Dossie Easton, who learned it in turn many years ago from the esteemed Patrick Califa. It is especially helpful with bottoms who have a hard time processing canes in specific or sting in general. Land your cane stroke, and then as quickly as possible – a fraction of a second later – place the heel of your hand on the canestroke and rub the area quite firmly, as though you were erasing the memory of the stroke from the skin. It feels wonderful and literally does seem to “erase” the sting.*

*Sting and thud. One of the mindsets that can cause a bottom to panic and safeword is getting stuck in the future – worrying about what's going to happen next, and whether they're going to be able to deal with it, instead of staying in the moment. Sometimes, I like to prevent a bottom from freaking out about the future by using two different implements, one stinging, one thuddy (if you look at the photo on pp. 50-51, I might choose the conductor's baton and the Teflon club for this scene). I keep one toy tucked under my arm while I use the other. Typically, I give the bottom just enough strokes that I notice them starting to struggle with the sensation – then switch to the other one to give them a break.*

*They can't get freaked out about what's going to happen next, because the minute they start to anticipate what's coming, you switch and give them what they're not expecting. Bottoms can get very tranced out with this steady but unpredictable rain of sensation.*

*Tap tap tap whack. This is a particularly useful technique if you're relying primarily on the cane in your scene, without any other warmup implements... or if you're trying to ramp up a scene fairly quickly without spending as much time as usual on warmup (not recommended unless you and your bottom are both experienced players).*

Start with quick, rhythmic taps covering the whole caning area, using only your wrist, without letup. These should feel about like being out in a brisk rainstorm, just barely stinging the skin, not enough to build any resistance in the bottom at first. Keep that up as you watch carefully to see them relax and settle into the sensation. Gradually, start tapping just a tiny bit harder, so it stings just a little bit more and they start to tense up a bit, then relax again as they get used to it... then a little bit more. When they're handling a reasonable, consistent level of sting, surprise them with a quick moderate "whack" that doesn't break the rhythm at all, and go back to the quick taps at the previous level. Let them relax from the surprise. Then another whack, then back. Relax again. Next time, maybe two whacks – but don't break the rhythm. Next time, one really hard whack, and back to the rhythm. Then two hard whacks, and back. You can probably figure this out from here.

When you have them up to being able to take three or four fairly hard whacks, they are Officially Warmed Up, and you can keep that up indefinitely, go on to a more intense stroke-by-stroke caning, or, if this was a quickie scene, go on to...

*The graceful departure. When a caning (or any other scene) is going well, the bottom is likely to lose track of the whole idea that the scene is sooner or later, like it or not, going to have to come to an end. (My co-author Dossie Easton has memorably dubbed this state of mind the "Forever Place.")*

Simply stopping, tossing the cane aside, and moving on to other things – sex or a cigarette or a pizza – is tantamount to throwing a bucket of cold water over the

hapless bottom. Wise and kind tops find ways of letting the bottom know that the caning is reaching its end, so that the bottom can begin to find a way back out of caning-reality and into a more mundane reality.

Often, these strategies involve counting. Some tops like to ask the bottom to pick a number: “You can have anywhere up to twenty more strokes with this cane. How many do you want?” Others will simply tell the bottom what to expect: “I’m going to give you twelve more hard ones, six from each side, and then it will be over. Are you ready?” (It’s worth remembering that almost all bottoms can better handle very challenging sensations if they know there’s an end in sight.)

It is also possible to give the bottom a signal to use to control when the caning is to end – “hold this glove in your mouth; when you drop it, the caning will be over” – but don’t be surprised if you wind up with a sore arm the next day.

After the caning is over, of course, there will be plenty of time for compliments (“you took that so well,” “I’m so proud of you,” “that turned me on so much,” et al), cuddling, warm blankets, snacks, lots of drinks of water for both of you, and so on. Caning, like all BDSM, is an act of profound intimacy – use this time of lowered barriers to show your affection and trust for one another and to bask in that endorphin-y glow.

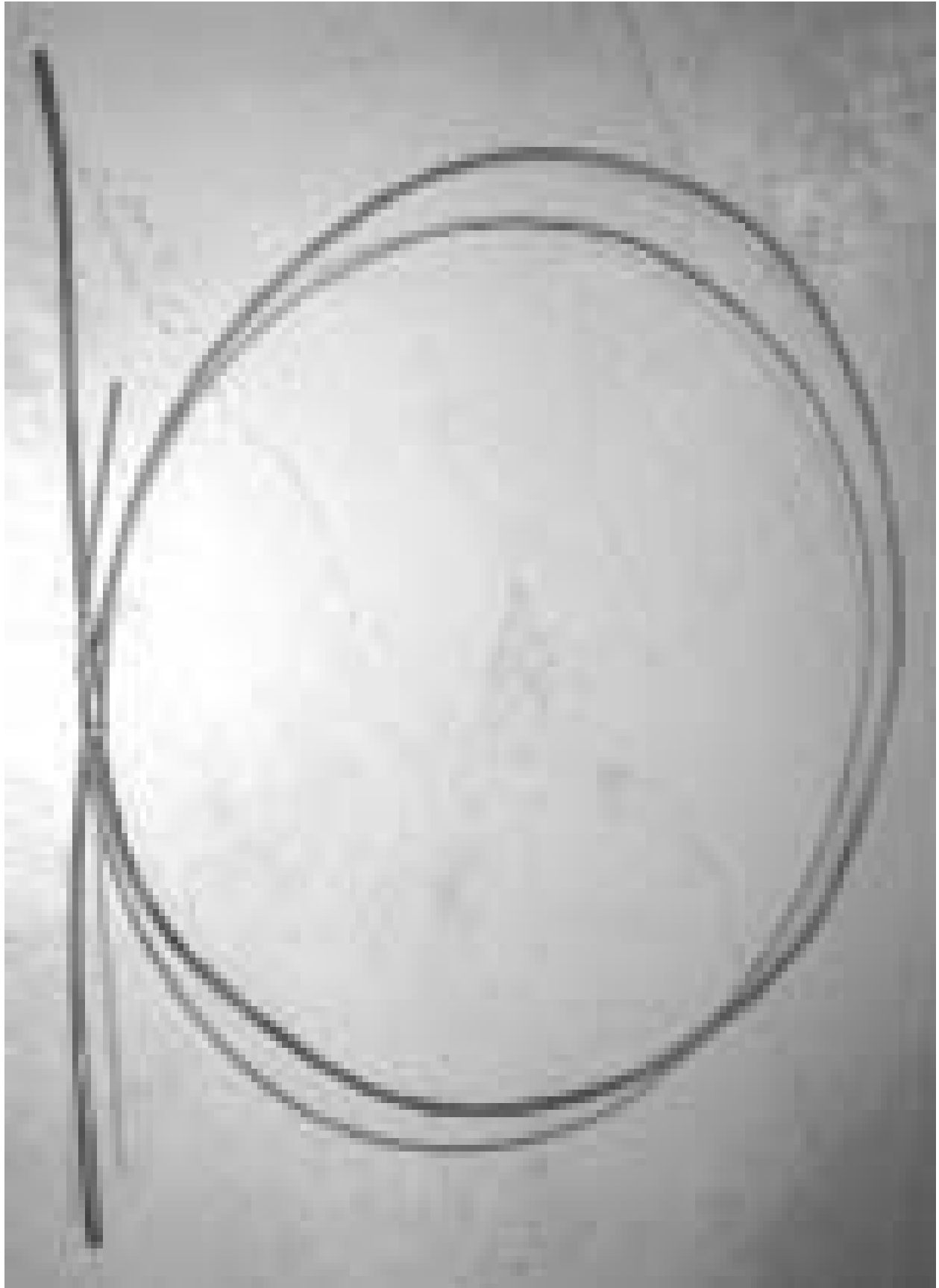


## CHAPTER 8. MAKING AND MAINTAINING CANES

Once you've spent quite a bit of time at one or both ends of rattan canes made by experts, and gotten a good idea of your likes and dislikes in terms of length, breadth, balance, flexibility, finish and handle design, you may decide it's time to try your hand at a few of your own.

There's nothing too complex about cane-making – it's more a matter of patience and care than complexity. My usual strategy is to make six or eight canes at a time: I throw away the worst one, keep the best one for myself, and give the others away as gifts. This way, I've built up a lovely collection of good rattan canes for myself through the years, and made sure that my friends are well-stocked with just the kind of canes I like, selfless thing that I am.

The first step in canemaking is to find a source of good quality rattan. This isn't too difficult; you get rattan at the places that sell supplies for restoring furniture. However, these places are often not enthusiastic to selling to perverts like you, so don't tell them what you want it for. Historical re-enactment people use rattan swords for practicing stage combat, and these swords look enough like canes that the rattan they want and the rattan we want is pretty much the same stuff – so if anybody asks you what you're buying it for, tell them it's a stage prop and let them figure the rest out for themselves.



*A couple of lengths of raw  
rattan – one fairly thin, one  
medium-width.*

Rattan bought in these places is generally very cheap. I bought an enormous roll of it a decade ago for \$35 and am still using it up; the two long pieces you see here are two pieces from about 25 that were in that original roll.

The next step is to cut it up into blanks of the longest length you can imagine possibly using for a cane – for me, as I tend to like my canes on the short side, this is about three feet. Use a fine-toothed saw: it's such a quick job that just about any saw will do, including the one on a Swiss army knife. You could probably even do it with a box cutter or Exacto knife if that's all you have around, although it might be a slightly tedious job.

Next, you have to soak the blanks. If you can spare your bathtub for a day or two, just run a couple of inches of water into the tub and dump the blanks in there. (It won't do them any harm to take them out while you shower or bathe.) If not, go to the hardware store and in the wallpaper department you'll find a wallpaper soaking trough, a very inexpensive (\$3-\$5) shallow plastic bin used to moisten rolls of wallpaper for hanging. Dump your blanks in there instead. If your rattan is fairly new and supple, you can soak it for a day, but if it's old and brittle, I'd give it several days.

The next job is, in my opinion, the trickiest: you need to straighten your canes. I've heard a lot of different ways to do this: usually, I place them on the floor with weights on them. It takes quite a bit of fussing to get the canes laid out straight under the weight – they always want to flip sideways under there so that

they aren't getting straightened, and I'm usually pretty exasperated by the time they're all laid out. I recheck them a couple of times a day, because sometimes there isn't just one curve that needs to be worked out so I sometimes have to turn them this way and that to get them nice and straight. It takes about four or five days for them to dry and straighten fully.



*Canes soaking in a wallpaper trough.*



*Straightening the canes. I'm using book boxes –  
two each for the thin canes and the medium ones.*

(Note 1: The cane that I throw out from each batch almost always winds up getting thrown out because it's too crooked. Note 2: Rattan canes are always going to be at least a little bit crooked; that's the nature of the beast.)

Once the cane is as straight as it's going to get, your judgment comes into play – you need to decide how long the cane will be, and, sometimes, which end the handle will go on. Pick up the cane and swing it. See how it feels in your hand. Where does your hand want to go on it? Where is its natural balance point? The end that looks slightly larger (the one whose joints appear to be slightly on the “outside”) will be the natural handle end on almost all canes, but make no assumptions – very occasionally, you'll encounter a cane that wants to have its handle on the other end. So try it both ways. Mark with a pencil or pen where each end of the cane belongs, and cut it there. Swing it again to make sure you were right, and adjust if necessary. (See why I encouraged you to play with other people's canes for a while before making your own?)

Your cane is starting to take shape now, but it's still rough and harsh. Get out your sandpaper – one rough grade, one fine one, plus a damp cloth. With the roughest grade, sand the business end to a nice round shape, and sand away all the joints – you'll find that they tend to break away in flakes for a while, but eventually they just sand down to near-nothingness. Then, make a tube shape out of the fine grade and just run it up and down the whole length of the cane several times, until the surface is generally satiny and pleasing. Wipe with the damp cloth, check for any unevennesses, and repeat as needed until your cane is as beautiful as you want it to be.



If you prefer your canes unvarnished, you can skip now to making a handle. But if you like varnish, hang your canes up in a well-ventilated place, using a loop of cord around the handle end. Protect the floor underneath with several layers of newspaper. With a small, soft, inexpensive paintbrush, paint the canes with a thin layer of marine spar varnish. Periodically remove the drip of varnish that will form at the tip of the cane (I simply touch the tip of the cane with a Kleenex); if the drip of varnish dries there, you'll have to sand it away and revarnish the tip later, which is a pain. Repeat for three coats, with about a day between, and let dry thoroughly.



*I hung these canes from a shower curtain*

*rod using Christmas ribbons; how festive!*

Handles are where you can let your creativity shine. Many caning folks prefer no handle at all, but I think handles give me a firmer grip on the cane. You can macrame a handle, or, if you have braiding skills (or have a flogger-making friend who can teach you), braid one. You can twist wire around the cane handle and dip it in tool dip. Scrap leather from a leather store can be glued around a cane handle, either in a solid rectangle or in a twist. And I'm sure there are dozens of other possibilities that you can think of to make your canes uniquely your own.



*Two of the finished canes. Both handle treatments were quick and easy (I was on deadline; so sue me) – a quick wrap with plastic tape on the left, and a layer of soft lambskin, left with its natural edge, on the right.*

One refinement I do recommend is that your handle include at least some sort of hanging loop. Rattan canes should never be stored leaning against a wall, or they will develop bends and crooks that are nearly impossible to remove. Thus, a hanging loop enables you to hang them from a hook or closet rod and greatly simplifies storage.

## **CANE MAINTENANCE**

Rattan canes do require more routine maintenance than most other SM gear. Rattan is an organic material, and if it isn't kept moist, it will become dry and brittle, and your cane will break upon impact. (Important note: Occasionally, a perfectly sound-looking cane will break within the first use or two – some rattan just has hidden flaws in it. I've never learned a way of telling which pieces are flawed. Toss the cane and chalk it up to experience. If you were sold a rattan cane that breaks within the first half dozen or so uses, the craftsperson should replace it, no questions asked.)

A cane that's drying out makes a sound when it strikes, a sound that's difficult to describe but unmistakable when you hear it – sort of a rattle. When you hear your cane make this noise, it's time to soak it or steam it.

Different caners have different preferences in the steam-vs.-soak controversy, and your solution may depend somewhat on what kind of handle your cane has. There's a discreet hook at one end of my shower stall, where very little water actually strikes, and every month or two I hang up my canes for a few days to soak up the steam from my showers. However, another caner I know swears by soaking her canes in salt water, and I've been on both ends of her canes and they seem to work fine too.

What matters most is that your canes stay lively and supple – and that the mind and wrist behind them stay lively and supple too, backed with lots of love, ingenuity and connection. With a combination like that, a simple stick becomes truly the magic wand of BDSM.

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