

A hand holding a thick rope against a dark background. The rope is coiled and held taut, with the hand visible on the right side. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric. The overall tone is somber and dramatic.

PAIN: TYPE, SHAPE AND REACTION NUDGES

How to Write about Physical
Pain in Fiction

Louise Harnby

PROOFREADER & COPYEDITOR

Category	Descriptors of pain	Possible nudges to character's reaction
Physical damage via insertion of pointed object	Stinging, pricking, boring, drilling, penetrating	Gnashes teeth; gurgles; holds breath; pupils dilate; fidgets with hands
Physical damage via the application of sharp objects	Sharp, cutting, lacerating, stabbing, lancinating, piercing	Hisses; breathing becomes shallow; mouth becomes dry; spits or drools; eyes widen; crosses legs or ankles
Physical damage via pulling/tearing	Tugging, pulling, wrenching, drawing, squeezing, tearing	Bites tongue; makes guttural sound; becomes rigid; hugs themselves
Physical damage via the application of pressure/weight	Pinching, pressing, crushing, tight, heavy	Clutches chest; doubles over; loses balance; yelps or barks
Malevolent animate agent whose actions may cause physical damage	Punishing, cruel, vicious, torturing, gnawing, killing	Chokes; has difficulty swallowing; curls toes; whites out; doubles over; clasps belly; evacuates bowels or bladder; gags; rambles incoherently
High and low temperatures	Hot, burning, scalding, searing; cool, cold, freezing	Shudders, shivers, gets goosebumps; sweats; hairs on arms or neck stand up; yowls
Meanings to do with movement	Beating, pounding, jumping, shooting	Curls up into foetal position; rubs temples; clenches fingers; bangs fists on ground or other object
Emotional or affective dimensions	Wretched and annoying	Grimaces; becomes angry; lashes out verbally