



# The Cane

By Maryrose Cuskelly

First published in 2022

## Genre and Subject

Thriller

Australian Fiction

## Synopsis

One missing girl. No suspects. A town about to ignite. Quala, a north Queensland sugar town, the 1970s. Barbara McClymont walks the cane fields searching for Janet, her sixteen-year-old daughter, who has been missing for weeks. The Police have no leads. The people of Quala are divided by dread and distrust. But the sugar crush is underway and the cane must be burned. Meanwhile, children dream of a malevolent presence in the cane, a schoolteacher yearns to escape, and history keeps returning to remind Quala that the past is always present. As the smoke rises and tensions come to a head, the dark heart of Quala will be revealed, affecting the lives all those who dwell beyond the cane.

## Author Biography

Maryrose Cuskelly is a writer of fiction and non-fiction. She has lived in Melbourne for many years, but she was born in Queensland, where, in the early 1970s, there were several high-profile child abductions and murders. The disappearance of Mackay schoolgirl Marilyn Wallman, in particular, made a lasting impression on her. In 2016, Maryrose was awarded the New England Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing (non-fiction) for her essay 'Well Before Dark' about Marilyn's disappearance and the way it percolated through her own childhood and later life. The Cane returns to some of the themes and preoccupations of that essay.

In 2019, Maryrose's book *Wedderburn: A true tale of blood and dust* (Allen & Unwin, 2018) was longlisted for Best Debut and Best True Crime in the 2019 Davitt Awards. She is also the author of *Original Skin: Exploring the marvels of the human hide* (Scribe, 2010) and *The End of Charity: Time for social enterprise* (with Nic Frances, Allen & Unwin, 2008), which was the winner of the Iremonger Award.

## If you liked this book, you may also like...

- *The torrent* by Dinuka McKenzie
- *Southern Aurora* by Mark Brandi
- *Cutter's End* by Margaret Hickey

## Discussion Starters

1. What was your favourite part of the book?
2. What was your least favourite?
3. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
4. What did you think of the writing? What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?
5. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?
6. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.
  - Why do characters do what they do?
  - Are their actions justified?
  - Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
  - How has the past shaped their lives?
  - Do you admire or disapprove of them?
  - Do they remind you of people you know?
7. Are the main characters dynamic—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works and their role in it?
8. What surprised you most about the book?
9. How did your opinion of the book change as you read it?
10. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
11. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others? How does the book's title work in relation to the book's contents? If you could give the book a new title, what would it be?
12. Is this book overrated or underrated?
13. Did this book remind you of any other books?
14. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
15. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?
16. Did the book strike you as original?
17. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?

*Author biography from—<https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/book/Maryrose-Cuskelly-Cane-9781761069574/>*