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 stickler's digest

## Swallowed A Walking Stick

My uncle Bill, Bill Boler, he just died. I was telling the other girls on the playground. I had run here from the hospital. As soon as the doctors had left the room they were in with my parents, and I could see my mum break into tears through the open door, it was clear he had died. We had cried together for a while, but now it felt fine. It was a sunny day, in fact, the whole week had been to my utmost pleasure. The air was full of summer smells, the purest clarity I knew, and I had spent every minute of my days outside. Uncle Bill had been in the hospital for a whole week, because something very curious had happened to him, something out of the ordinary, something we had all grasped and gawked at when we had heard. My older brother Fredrick and his friend Pam had found him and then told us how it went. They enjoyed shocking us, but their faces were just as green as ours.

As the news went around, especially because Old Lady Sue had heard right away,

of course, the old hag, full of nieuuuuws, we had quickly found ourselves surrounded by the meanest ideas regarding poor uncle Bill's accident. At that moment there were Clara, Fiona, Laura, Cranky (her real name was Barbara, but there were enough reasons to call her Cranky, so nobody ever used it), Linda, Sarah, and me. Even some of their dads started behaving like rascals and took part in the clamour. Of course nobody had liked my uncle. Although he had lived in this village his whole life, payed taxes, as he always assured me, telling me, that one day I would grow up to do it, too, and if for some reason I didn't, grandma would come and haunt my dreams together with all the police dogs of Birmingham whom she commanded now from where she was, and he had gone to church, even sometimes sat outside his house, I hadn't really ever seen him at the festivities which kept happening all year around, and he didn't seem to have any

friends here, except perhaps for his neighbor Lucky Ben who was the village's crazy man and nobody talked to him either.

So what the girls and I observed in the hours after the accident was that first of all, Old Lady Sue walked over to the Deans' place. From there, Mr Dean and Old Lady Sue went on to Mr Porridge's place where they also left very quickly again. On the way to the next place – the village mayor's house, Mr Adcock, they ran into mean Mrs Lancaster and she went with them, too. This took a little longer, but from there, all three of them went off into different directions, looking mischievous and excited. Soon we found out, it was all about a fight Old Lady Sue and Mr Dean had had over what happened, and they started a bet. They then thought their bet wasn't valid unless Mr Porridge could witness it proceeding, who then heard what it was about and wanted to take part as well. So in the end, they all came up with

## Throwing A Cyclist

Old Man River was crossing the bridge after a long day's work. He was in his head, imagining arriving home, sitting down in his armchair with a cool towel over his head and peeling one of the oranges he had picked up from the market, when he started to hear a low hum. He was not ready to look behind him. No sooner had he braced himself than cyclists began to flood towards him.

Young people in all sorts of special sports outfits, riding at full speed, with and without helmets. They whizzed by.

Some rang their bells. Others simply swooshed through. Old Man River had bad nerves and he was standing at a point where the bridge begins to run downhill. The cyclists were gaining momentum and they were fast.

Old Man River had nowhere to escape. Suddenly something came over him. He got an idea and went with it. He stuck out his walking stick and let it get caught between the spokes of a wheel. With the momentum gained going downhill, and the front wheel stuck, an unlucky cyclist

flew out of his seat. His bicycle swung forward with the handle of the walking stick caught on other bicycles. The cyclist injured himself and his bicycle crashed into others. Critical mass had fallen into a major accident.

Old Man River did not realize what he had done. When all the flopping and colliding died down, he was still standing on the same spot. Piles of bicycles and injured cyclists surrounded him. He hummed and sighed. He lost a walking stick and the night did not become any shorter. *ck*

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## Letter To The Editor: Killed By A Cow

Dear editor,

I want to bring your attention to an article printed in the last issue, page 3. The headline was "Man Killed by Cow."

I think you and your team have misinterpreted and misreported the event. As the article says the man killed initially was abusing the cow, so much so that his walking stick broke from beating the cow. The cow thus resorted to kicking the man back with its hindlegs. This resulted in the man dying from the blow.

In this case, if I understand correctly, the cow is the subject, since it fought against the violence of the man. According to the principle of subject-verb-object sentence structures, the headline should read as 'Cow Killed Man.' The article ought to be reprinted with the cow being the central figure. I hope you can rectify this error and avoid similar ones in the future.

your faithful reader, James *ck*

## Correction: Plaited Rush Walking Stick

What was meant in the article in our last issue was fashionable walking sticks, not with plaited rush, which obviously would never hold up even the tiniest bird, but a walking stick in the shape of a monkey's head made from straw, which a lady could lean on, sit down on, walk with, and collect flowers in, put her head in if she's chilling, as well as using it when it lays on its side, as a coffee table or an easel for her water colours. It is very light and handy and tough enough for all ordinary purposes. The grinning ape is copied as nearly to life as possible, and approximately measures the volume of a small wine barrel. This walking stick is the essential item of the season! *tk*

> the idea that the mayor's house would probably be the safest place to arrange a village-wide bet on the outcome of my Uncle Bill's accident. In fact, Sarah had noted already before they went into Mr Adcock's house, that it couldn't be anything friendly they were looking for help with from him. We all decided that no matter what would happen to Uncle Bill, we had to stop the lunacy of these people and spoil the bet.

How Uncle Bill's accident had happened was actually quite unclear. The thing was that Fred and Pam had found him, just coming by for a visit to Uncle Bill's scary stamp collection which they occasionally liked to look at, with his walking stick down his throat. Only the little part with the handle was still sticking out of Uncle Bill's mouth. As it stood, he couldn't say anything about it for the moment, and the stick seemed to be very stuck in him, too, and he couldn't really sit down, but a man of 65, he looked like he had just run a marathon, all sweaty and red-faced and leaning against a table with his knees slightly bent. Fred said, his eyes had screamed for help, but he hadn't been in a panic. He had groaned. Pam said, it had looked as if the groaning had produced the stick. In a moment of brilliance, Fred had tried to pull the stick out of our uncle's throat by the handle, standing on the table with his arm angled so as to pull it out straight, but Uncle Bill had tried to bite into his hand and taken him by the shoulders and, Fred said, threatened to choke him without words. I thought Fred had been doing the right thing and was actually very brave when he tried to save Uncle Bill. We all agreed on that. But because Uncle Bill apparently didn't want their help, and because he also couldn't say what had happened, the boys ran out and fetched the constable, Mr Fowler, who in his turn just forced Uncle Bill to hold still while he pulled, not impressed by the mysterious conditions of the accident. Unfortunately, and Fred said it had been extraordinarily disgusting to see, only part of Uncle Bill's walking stick had come out. Some sixteen inches of hard wood and chipped varnish were released by the constable, and the rest was still inside of Uncle Bill. My brother ran to get our mum. When they returned, apparently Uncle Bill had managed to throw up another piece of walking stick. Mum was out of her mind and looked panicked, like Fred had never seen her. That's when he got really scared himself, and noticed that Uncle Bill was not at all afraid, just seemed annoyed and in pain, and exhausted. I thought it was very hard to imagine how it would feel to have Uncle

Bill's walking stick down my throat, but it proved very hard to imagine, so I left off feeling sympathy with his own suffering only. Hopefully that would never happen to anyone else I knew. They ended up taking him to the hospital and the last piece of stick had been retrieved under anaesthesia there.

Nobody had indeed ever heard such a story. That, and Uncle Bill's lack of social credit with the villagers probably was what made them bet with each other whether, first of all, he would survive, and second of all, if it would turn out to be an accident or a murder attempt. Because still after a few days of his disappearance into the hospital, no news had emerged as to what had happened. I was wondering myself if he had told my mum what had gone down, now that he could talk again. I saw them talk through the window of his room at the workhouse infirmary where they had brought him from the Queen's Hospital.

Now it was Saturday, and the news of my Uncle Bill's death from walking stick made its rounds in the shape of Old Lady Sue along the bleached and dusty summer streets of our village. This morning, Linda had said, when we had our early bird briefing as every one of these past days of gambling terror – and the business sure was going well – that the police had started showing up and interviewed Lucky Ben for almost an hour, my dad for a few minutes by the door after that, and then gone to Mr Adcock's house from where they had left very soon to their car. Lucky Ben had run out after them and swung his own walking stick at their rear, shouting something Linda hadn't been able to make out. Cranky mentioned that it was very probable that they had been words which Linda had simply never heard, and then we had all giggled. Lucky Ben was well known for spreading what mothers didn't want their children to know like a watering can. For us it was fantastic that he was living next to the playground. And because he was a lucky fellow, he also never got in trouble for telling us the adults' secrets.

In any case, now that the terrible end had come, we had to begin our actions to prevent any single possible successful outcome of the adults' bet. Our plan involved Fred and Pam, an army of ants, the still unknowing constable, some half wiped chalk drawings on Uncle Bill's cellar walls, and a copy of "When Biblical Ghosts Take Over Your Body" from the school's library.

Because this was an idea from the world of children, they weren't ever going to

find out that it wasn't true; they simply wouldn't be able to imagine that.

It was Monday. Sunday had passed in mourning and cake. Fred had gotten a key to uncle Bill's house, so we could slip in through the back. Fiona whom older women regularly referred to as an angel had borrowed the book from the library inside a cover sleeve of "Flowers and Fairies". Cranky and Laura had used an egg-carton filled with jam to lure a huge crowd of ants away from their pile, then closed and wrapped the crawling box in cellophane. For now it lay hidden under some elderflower bushes in uncle Bill's backyard. Pam, Sarah and Clara had inconspicuously found out when the constable was going to inspect uncle Bill's house. Fred and I had spent all morning checking the house for clues for ourselves, things we would have to hide or undo in order for our plan to work. But really, there was nothing there. In a second of doubt if what we were doing was alright, we looked at each other, and I could see my brother utterly helpless as to why this had in fact happened to uncle Bill.

In the 1897 edition of "When Biblical Ghosts Take Over Your Body" from our library, there was a very outstanding story. It described a man from Sussex who was possessed by a ghost, and he wasn't just possessed in his head, but he found his stomach talking to him quite regularly, threatening him with the scariest things and quoting the book of Isaiah. Because that particular biblical script ended with people on fire as punishment, the poor man set himself on fire, and thereby, according to this very informative book, extinguished the ghost. In our view, uncle Bill might have believed to also have such a ghost inside of him, but because he was a little more reasonable than the man from Sussex, and perhaps his ghost didn't quote the same verses to him, he thought he could exorcise it by just poking it out of his belly. So to do that, in a moment of rushed pragmatism, he just shoved his walking stick down his throat and reached as far as he could, and felt a huge relief. Because he was afraid to have anybody see him while executing the exorcism, he did it in the basement of his house. But because he thought it would be a good idea to let people know what had happened in case it went wrong, he had also started documenting the process with chalk on the walls of the basement. We had sufficient quotes from our book to chose from to make the story of a crazy and possessed uncle Bill believable. In this instance of how things would have gone down, people would neither be able to talk of an accident nor of a

murder, so that eventually the bet would fall through. The girls and I had made this up within one single afternoon, after Cranky had reminded us of this horrible book she had been reading during study hour every now and again, and when we – quite proudly – presented the idea to Fred and Pam, they had only had one thing to contend. It was that there was no reason for the constable to go down into the cellar during his inspection, because he had actually already been there when Fred had gotten him in to help with the walking stick, in order to look for tools. This is where the ants came in. We would have to force Mr Fowler down.

So far so good. It was midday on Monday, it was all set up, and were laying in cahoots with the elderflower bushes once again, but for real this time. Clara had to go home, which made us all sad, but her mum just wouldn't let her skip lunches even in the holidays. On the other hand, she was also still a year younger than most of us. We were settling down, careful and quiet, and occasionally checked Fred's watch to see how much longer it would be. I could see Fiona dozing off quite peacefully. But then the unimaginable happened – someone found us lying in wait. Lucky Ben's voice sounded from behind us, where a thick hedge was standing in his garden, and it was angry. He shouted, stammered, and accused us of using a freshly dead man's garden as our new playground, we punks, seculars, corrupt children, and he made terrible sounds, and we had nothing left but to run away, trusting that our plan was set up well enough to function without our supervision, because we couldn't explain to Lucky Ben that we weren't playing hide and seek at all. Hopefully nobody else had heard him and started looking out for what was going on. He'd nearly ruined it. On the next street corner we gathered, the shriveled lot, and pouted for a little bit, but then decided it would probably be best if everybody went home to pretend that we had nothing to do with it anyway. We would meet up at the four o'clock bells to evaluate.

When the first news came, I was just reading in a comic book on the sofa. Because of the heat, even the windows to the street were open, and after a while I got distracted from Joey the bumblebee and his friend and accomplice in bank robbings, Halty Stalty, a horsefly. It was a buzzing, sometimes a single voice stood out, but mostly it was the sound of a big group of people getting more and more excited. I knelt on the couch and peeked out at what was going on. Fred appeared just behind me, shoving his head out of

the window next to mine, and his excitement, his heaving chest and fluttering arms, infected me with nervousity. Even our mother joined us by the window and asked what was going on. She had been letting out the seams of some of my dresses. We looked out into the street. Lots of neighbors and people from the center of the village were standing around a house further down the road. My heart sank for a moment; of course it was Mr Fowler's place, of course, but what was the news, I was dying of curiosity, and just wished we could have run down to see, but I was also terribly afraid that something had gone wrong. A person separated from the crowd and started walking towards our end of the street. It was our neighbor, Mrs Harlow. Fred's fingertips were making their way into my little bicep. I shook my arm a bit, but he didn't seem to notice. Stop looking suspicious!, I thought, perhaps more to myself than to him. As she came closer, I saw that Mrs Harlow in fact looked quite disappointed. She saw the three of us peeking out our window, and leaned in a little, making a sober and sarcastic face at us. Can you imagine that the constable didn't find anything, nothing at all, at your uncle's house, he says he left even earlier than expected and took a walk, that's why he is home now, because he then fell into an anthep and is covered in red spots now. How incapable could he be! Of course nobody believes him, but – oh dear, I'm sorry my loves, naturally you wouldn't want to hear any of this nonsense! Her face had turned a bit red, but she smiled at us and quickly walked away. What?! I was speechless. What had happened? Didn't the sudden attack of hundreds of ants force him to retreat into the cellar? He didn't find any of it? But why would he lie about where the ants came from? Something strange had happened. We had to find out. In the meantime, mum had enclosed the two of us in a big hug on the sofa. Oh it was terrible to see her so unhappy. Why did the donkey of a policeman let everybody make such a fuss, what had gone wrong. My poor uncle still hadn't resolved his mysterious death. Fred and I must have seemed very deranged, because our mother started patting our heads and murmuring sweet assurances into our ears. We stayed there for a while to comfort her, but then we signaled each other to meet as soon as possible on the playground to figure out what had happened. Surely, the others would have heard by now as well and come there sooner than at four.

One after the other, we trickled in. Pam had already been sitting on the swing for

an entire hour before we showed up. In an inspired moment, he had also managed to get a piece of the news from Old Lady Sue across the fence, complimenting her on her posture, while she hurriedly was on her way to Mr Dean's house. All that she knew so far was this: Mr Fowler – the constable – had gone to search uncle Bill's house around noon. He had left the house again about three quarters of an hour later, looking utterly shaken, almost running back home, looking behind him every once in a while, as if he suspected being followed. Because it was Mrs Lancaster who had observed him leave and run home, she had been the first to see him about what had happened, too. She had basically just forced her way into his livingroom and started asking questions. Because, at that moment, the constable still was very much out of order, he had just gone along with it for a second, before throwing her out. So she found out that, one, he had gotten the rash all over his body inbetween going into uncle Bill's house and arriving home at his own place. Two, he had found a piece of paper with a few sentences, almost unreadable so quickly had they been scribbled down. He was suspecting that it was uncle Bill's handwriting, and that it was some sort of good bye letter to those who would find him. None of this made sense to us. But according to Pam, Old Lady Sue had looked very convinced, and quite sadly so, that it was now clear that uncle Bill had tried to kill himself, even though later on he didn't want to confirm any of it anymore. It made us wonder even more what had happened now.

A few days later, a jury returned the verdict "suicide", based on the piece of writing the constable had produced as only evidence. The bet fell through, because nobody had anticipated this turn out. The mood was solemn. My mother whispered to me one night that she knew it hadn't been uncle Bill's intention to kill himself by swallowing his walking stick, it really had been an accident, and that the sore-headed constable just didn't know any better. She seemed content, sometimes she still cried, but I now think the story didn't leave a scar on her at all which I admired her for. Fred and I still tried to find out more, but nothing turned up. The only thing that changed was that the constable himself became extraordinarily friendly to us, and invited us for chocolate and biscuits every once in a while, very carefully sweeping any crumbs and spills we produced at these occasions, which we knew was, because he was so afraid of ants now. *tk*

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### Walking Stick As Yard Stick

Esther pushes through the swinging doors and marches toward the counter.

George looks up, sees Esther, and puts out his cigarette.

Esther asks about the ribbons in store while George listens.

George turns around to pick a roll out of a drawer behind him.

From out of nowhere, he also pulls out a wooden dowel.

The dowel curls up on one end, resembling a walking stick.

George lays the dowel down and unrolls the ribbon. He measures the two against each other and snips off the longer end.

George wraps the ribbon between his fingers until it is neatly folded.

Then places it on the counter and points Esther to the cash register.

Esther pays for the ribbon and leaves the store.

Feeling dissatisfied, Esther goes to court with George.

In front of the judge, Esther presents the ribbon as well as a standard sized yard stick.

George explains that for 250 years it has been his family practice to measure their goods against the said curled dowel. George goes further with a carbon dating certificate, to prove the curled dowel to be 250 years old.

The judge assesses the evidence presented and decides to fine George for giving false measurements but does not confiscate his hand-me-down walking stick.

George cannot accept the ruling and wishes to appeal the court's decision. *ck*

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### Talk With Stan

This week he interviews our local elder, Mrs Hale, for her experiences with walking sticks, their repair, custom made features, and the best places to buy new and used walking aids in the city.

*Stan:* Mrs Hale, what a pleasure it is to speak to you. I heard from a few friends before that you are one of the most experienced citizens in town in regards to walking sticks, on the one hand, because you have already celebrated over 80 birthdays, and on the other hand, because you have one of the highest wear and tears of these instruments in the region. How many walking sticks do you regularly use in one year?

*Mrs Hale:* Yes, you have come to the right person for the issue. I will be able to answer all your readers' questions about walking sticks, and maybe even tell you my secret spots. The last few years, my rate has gone up a little, I would say, by now, I go through about 15 to 18 sticks each year.

*Stan:* That's amazing, but please tell, why do you need this many sticks? We researched a little, and it turns out, on the average a person your age uses only two to three walking sticks each year.

*Mrs Hale:* Well, you know, I leave them behind a lot of the time. Sometimes I see somebody who could use the one I am carrying much better than me, or who is embarrassed to use one, but clearly needs it, and then I go and convince them it is a good thing to carry a stick. Sometimes I simply forget my stick somewhere; there must be an ocean of sticks at the lost and founds, if you ask me. And then it has happened a few times that I've had to defend myself or another important cause of the public good with my stick,

and they do break much easier than you would think.

*Stan:* Oh Mrs Hale, you must lead a very upright and exciting life. Probably this is why so many people know of you in this region. Let me pose another question. Where is your favourite place to find the perfect walking stick?

*Mrs Hale:* There are two places I would like to recommend to the readers out there. If you are looking for a new regular stick, you can simply go to any orthopedic shop. But if you are looking for second hand sticks and special gems, you will want to go to Andreas Dilli's Decluttering Storage in Rollwald which is open every Saturday afternoon. It is a really wonderful place full of surprises – I would also recommend it if you're looking for very meaningful wedding gifts, hidden antiques, or historical mannequins. I have seen the most marvellous canes there.

*Stan:* This is a place I have never heard of – thank you so much for telling us your secret. We promise we won't tell. (Laughter) Please also tell us what you do if you find a stick you really love, but which just won't fit your physical requirements?

*Mrs Hale:* Ok, hold your breath, now come the real secrets. There are two people I trust with altering my walking sticks. As you mentioned, if one is so fantastic that you will go through altering it, you will want it to be done perfectly. In the center of town, there is an artist and craftsman called Stoehrer who works in a wood workshop close to the river. He has done very precise work for me numerous times. A bit further out, to the East, there is a more experimental artisan, Winter, whom I engage for more special cases. He is very professional in working with

materials besides wood. Once I requested him to recast the handle of a cane made of plaited rush in bronze. Within a week, I received a call from him to pick up the cast.

*Stan:* Mrs Hale, you have surely been most helpful to all of our readers, both those who already use walking sticks with pride, and those preparing themselves for it. Just one last question: How long have you been using walking sticks?

*Mrs Hale:* Stan, in fact, I have always had sticks in my life. They are one of the best objects to have around, for so many different purposes. You may not remember this, but in 1904, the Olympic games still had a discipline called 'walking stick fencing'. I was one of the first teenagers to have sufficiently mastered in this particular sport to go on and represent my home country at the Olympics. When I was still young, during the black years of the great depression, I actually made counterfeit yardsticks for seamstresses and fabric vendors for a while. Ah, honey, you can't believe all the things I've done with my sticks...-

*Stan:* Fantastic, Mrs Hale, thank you so much! And next week I will be interviewing Mr Bumsdale from Bumpsdale's market about the new wave of estranged shoplifting in his and other grocery stores in town which have recently seen many of their packaged products opened and half eaten to then just be left on different shelves. While the culprit is still missing, Mr Bumsdale is positive that by the time of our next issue the readers can be ready for a full feature on this uncivilized behaviour. *cktk*

## Parade

As the city council is in flames with discussions over active lifestyles, health and wellness, councillor Jameson brought us into his office to give us a closer look of his plans and outlooks. He started out by saying people must lead busy lives, taking risks and challenging themselves. He added perhaps people are not ready for it but he will motivate everyone to get out and move around.

Jameson's assistants later led us to a room filled with maquettes to illustrate their vision and focus. 'The councilor has asked his interns to organize flash mobs. They are still hiring interested parties to parade their idea of healthy living to attract the attention of ordinary bodies. It will be a regular thing and Jameson wants it to snowball into a workable platform. At the legislature he will push for greener spaces: city parks and pedestrian only zones. Zoning laws, public prop-

erty and healthcare regulations are on his preliminary agenda.

After the visit at the councillor's office, we contacted Professor Sorto of political science at Cyc Undfi University to get some perspective on Jameson's vision. Prof. Sorto replied with earlier accounts of Jameson's career. Jameson has complicated intentions. Ten years ago, he rolled out with schemes on the virtual city, which was supposed to appeal to the younger demographic building start ups and printing bitcoins. When the project died down, reports turned up and his project was evidently driven by contracts signed with telecommunication firms and natural resources exporters. Healthy city may be a very similiar situation.

Taking in Prof. Sorto's predictions at a distance, we also consulted the opinion of Susann Smoltva, spokesperson of

SWS, a private insurance company. She said ,I cannot say that Jameson's vision will affect us nor can I say that it will not. We are an insurance company that works with statistics, we insure folks according to mostly their current health condition, and lifestyles are secondary. Under Jameson's plan, there might be a shift, at least in the realm of public insurance.' Smoltva added, ,folks wanting to live longer also means having to make the most out of their retirement savings. Our company has tailored plans for all sorts of investment needs for everyone. This is the SWS motto: take a risk.

We also tried to interview people out on the streets to get their two cents on Jameson's position. People mostly expressed that they are unaffected by Jameson's cause. Some however said they look forward to the flash mobs and hope to attend. *ck*

## Celebratory Parade of Inventions

On Tuesday afternoon the city saw an uncommon celebration at its core. Our reporter was called to the scene in the very beginning, so you receive a first-hand report.

By midafternoon, a large group of strangers gathered in the city centre, walking closely together and apparently associating per their commonality – every one of them was carrying a walking stick or cane of sorts. They attracted onlookers quickly while turning their walk into a little parade. The group included mostly senior citizens, and it is still unclear if by the end it had gathered more than thirty people or not. As it stands, the police describes the event as ending after about two hours with the dispersion of the mob.

When on scene, I asked a few onlookers what had happened. Mrs Elridge told me: "I was just running my regular errands when I just couldn't move forward anymore, because there were so many people crowding the square. First, I thought it was a demonstration, because I could see sticks above people's heads. Then I thought it was a street show, because the crowd was gawking at something further back, and I could hear cheering. So I tried to see what was going on, and shoved my way through the mob with my walking stick and shopping bags. When I could finally see something, it was just a cohort of old people like me who were in a sort of parade, crossing the square. So I

turned around and made my way to the other side, to where they came from, but a young man actually pushed me back shouting at me that I should go back to my group. He only stopped when I hit him a little bit on the head. Whatever they were doing, in my opinion, there was no reason to watch them like this."

"I followed them from the very beginning, you know, when there was only the young man on his crutch, a couple of seniors with canes, and the lady with an umbrella on Main Road. I saw them starting to talk to each other by the traffic lights with the short pedestrian green lights. That's when the group started.", said Mr Thomp. „I heard somebody say something about ,sleeping with the mother of invention.' I think that was what they were celebrating."

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*Korrekt, zuverlässig  
und kostengünstig!*

An onlooker who wants to stay anonymous explained what happened on Main square: "They were showing off their sticks, hundreds of them! You wouldn't believe what cool canes there are. They were walking onto the square and suddenly you thought this old dude had fallen down, but actually his stick had given way by falling apart, and the next second it was whole again and he was just walking like nothing had happened. I think some people thought they'd just imagined it. And then the lady with the pumping stick. She put it in one of the puddles you always find in the square, you know, the ones people always swear about, and the puddle disappeared. While they were walking, these crazy things happened as if they were actually performing. That's why so many people stopped to look. One guy had matchsticks, another a stick made of croissants. Oh man, and then in the middle of Main square, it suddenly turned into a real demonstration full of stick weapons when more people were carrying the others' sticks. But nobody believed us later, because it went by so quickly that it could have also never happened! Oh man, oh man, it was so cool!"

Now the readers who weren't there can perhaps imagine the celebration, as it was termed later on by the city. *tk*

## Extraordinary Charge Of Theft

Isaac Tobias had the wrong friends. Or enemies. He wasn't sure now.

It wasn't him who stole the stick. He had sincerely offered Mr Emin his services, because it was no big effort for him to bring the token of goodwill from the people of Tartary to Mr Quilliam from here on. The man had already covered 5000 miles with the stick. And even when he'd left Mr Emin at Lime-Street-Station who'd seemed very relieved to be rid of the cane, Isaac Tobias had simply thought to walk past the solicitor's office on his own way to work – today was his late shift, so he only started in the early afternoon. Mr Emin had gone to pray.

Mr Emin was very impressive. He spoke his native Chinese dialect, Arabic, Russian, and French. And he looked like a child of abundance. It had been a pleasure to look at him. Only because of the Tartar's impressive appearance had he embellished a little bit about working as a translator for the Russian Consul even though he was a mere clerk at the Russian Embassy. Mr Emin had wished him good swimming as they departed, and Tobias had still been pondering half an hour later whether it was due to a lack in his Russian skills or because 5000 miles on the map are also 5000 miles of distance between cultures, that he just didn't know what good swimming meant. He would ask his wife later who was from a more Eastern part of Russia than him.

When he walked down Lime Street, something incredible happened, though. He tripped, belatedly seeing some creature's feces, and jumped across the gutter. While he moved up, the bottom of the precious stick fell off. Following the bottom knob, one tiny piece after another – the whole Mosaic of silver and amber and sandal wood, slid off the apparently intricate construction which was the only thing left in his hand after a few, terribly long seconds of watching the Tartar gift fall apart into the gutter.

How did he deserve this. How could he swim now. Tobias was standing in the street, staring down at his feet in disbelief. Inside his fist, the handle of the cane still sat comfortably, but it had become much lighter. A solid string was dangling down from it. Oh no, what should he do!

While he was picking up the pieces he could find and tucking them into his knotted shirt – lacking any other means, he'd had to take it off to make sure he wouldn't lose anything on his way to repair the monstrous damage – he heard a voice calling his name and noticed feet hurrying toward him. He didn't look up, he didn't want to lose track now, before

any of the neighbors decided to throw out a bucket of water or waste. But it was Ilija, thank god, it was his friend Ilija Chestov. At this moment he could feel his friend's eyes burn two little holes into the back of his head, staring down at him to figure out what he was doing. Isaac told him briefly. Ilija complained for a little bit about missing love from his brother-of-a-different-mother, smoked a cigarette, ashing into the very gutter Isaac was picking pieces out of, and then crouched down next to him, to tell him about his night out. Apparently he was still on his way to bed, since last night! Isaac was slightly annoyed at not getting any help. It seemed like Ilija had noticed, because at that moment he asked if Isaac wanted to bring the pieces to his house to reassemble the stick. It would be much more practical since his place was just around the corner from here. After pondering it, Isaac decided that, by now, he was late for work anyhow, and would just call in sick from Ilija's landlord's phone. He wasn't even wearing a shirt any longer, so how could he show up there. In this moment, he wanted to go pray as well.

When they arrived at Ilija's house in Blake Street, his landlord, a print shop owner, was just sitting outside his shop. Around lunch customers were generally low. Mr Carraghan greeted them amicably, having seen so many strange occurrences with this particular tenant that he didn't stop to wonder why his friend wasn't wearing a shirt. Broke something?, he asked. Isaac blushed, and he tried shoving politely around Ilija to make his way up the stairs faster, nodding at Mr Carraghan, but Ilija inelegantly used his elbow to punch right into his ribs and make him stop dead. He coughed, turning away and clutching his bundle. He swore silently in Russian, whispering to his friend how he would kill him in seven different ways, and then he was alright again. He simply gave up. What else this day held for him, only god knew – bring it on, he thought. His friend had started talking to Mr Carraghan about the advantages and disadvantages of Liverpool's new and improved sewer system when he joined them on the bench outside the shop. He was beat. Ilija told Mr Carraghan about Isaac's bundle in the most marvellous colours, possessing story telling skills available only to those who spend half their lives in pubs with people they don't know, and right now, Ilija was on a good stretch of using his talent, having already been at it for nearly a day. Mr Carraghan threw his hands in the air, his mouth flew open in astonishment, and his eyes got bigger and bigger, until Ilija

finished him off with a comment on how Mr Emin was also the first man to cross the Great Chinese Wall all by himself, and just in order to go pray in Mecca, a most holy man. Who didn't love an entertainer. But then Mr Carraghan got curious about the walking stick. And because, as a man of printing presses and stamping letters, he was very handy at setting small pieces into frames, Ilija suggested using the print shop's typesetting table to reassemble the stick, as long as there were no customers in sight. Isaac sighed. Then he handed over his bundle and they all got up.

The pieces just didn't fit together anymore. It was a marvellous puzzle Isaac would have enjoyed spending time with at another time than this. Now, Mr Carraghan, Ilija and Isaac were close to losing their minds over it. It had been three hours already. Isaac was pondering delivering the stick in pieces and telling Mr Quilliam that part of the gift was to assemble it correctly, that a great Tartarian revelation was said to come upon the one who fulfilled the challenge. They had found three fitting pieces from somewhere in the middle. There were 273 pieces in total. From the 2 florins Mr Emin had given him for his services, Isaac went to buy shortbread and ale for all of them to charge their energies anew. Ilija had become most frustrated by now, being tired and quite useless. The Liverpool streets were crowded with people now who were on their way home from work. It was already too late to deliver the stick today. Isaac was hopeless. Why hadn't he just stepped into the shit in the gutter.

Upon returning he found the shop closed. He walked up to Ilija's room, but nobody answered the door. Another moment of determination overcame him, knowing he should run and never return, but he just stayed put until the next day the police came to fetch him. He was looking forward to seeing Mr Emin again before the moulah went to Mecca. *tk*

### **Drinker's Walking Stick**

Although she was asked to remain silent, she was not expected to remain completely silent.

Although she had no speech impediment, she could not explain why she carried her walking stick at this disproportionate distance.

Although her stick was confiscated and its mechanism was broken, there was no evidence left inside.

Although the interrogation lasted for six hours and no charges were made, she was kept for another eighteen hours.

Although she made use of her time and slept, she has no memory of the previous day. *ck*

### **Swallowed A Walking Stick**

A boy who lives with his mom heard their downstairs' tenant groaning loudly. He went to see what had happened and found the man on the floor struggling to breathe. The man had a stick stuck in his throat. The boy wanted to help but the man bit the boy instead.

Help eventually arrived. Both paramedics and policemen offered their assistance, but only the boy accepted. After bandaging his little index finger, everyone sat down and waited to witness this slow and painful death.

Suddenly the boy's mom appeared at the doorway and shrieked 'assisted suicide is not legal in this country.' Her statement shook everyone off their bums. So they ushered the man into the ambulance.

Seeing the cars leave, the boy waved goodbye. His mom walked him upstairs to his room and said today they will not go to school but they will get dressed to go out. They drove south to the sea and spent the day watching waves. *ck*

## Tell-Tale Walking Stick

John Morris was finishing the last words of his article on the horse races in Wolverhampton that Saturday. Formulating “This time, ‘sunny smile from behind IV’ will no doubt have the best chances as ever to be seen laughing at the others with her royal back”, gave him intense pleasure, and he took out the sheet of paper from the typewriter with an elegant, yet somewhat shaky gesture of his right hand. As always, he had kept the easiest chores for the end of his working day, and now he was looking forward to a quiet evening on his sofa, far away from the stories of the local press, its grumpy editors and young aspiring writers. He was good in time, too, he would even be home by the time the weather forecast for the next day was broadcasted. Ever since the children had moved out, he had led the quiet life that he deserved, not pursuing the politicians, police detectives, or philistines of Wood-Green and the world any longer. Closing the buttons of the new bag his daughter had brought from London for Christmas, he was on his way out, greeting the remaining secretaries and typesetters, his boss, Mr Bushhound, and sent his mind to wander off when the shutting click of the door to the offices could say farewell to just his bottom for today. The only thing which bugged his peaceful state of mind was that he had left his walking stick at home this morning, when, after a little incidence involving cottage cheese and a hot cup of tea, he had had to hurry to the tram car to get to work in time. Only two more years, he told himself. Two more years, and they will tell me to go home forever, and we will all be glad. I should have joined Labour back when they fought for earlier retirement age. But no, why regret this – just because I don't enjoy the thought of a little exercise. So he pulled himself together leaving the newspaper building, crossed the street, leaned against a garbage can to wait for the tram car, and when he got on, uprightly took the seat a young man with a bowler hat offered him sympathetically.

Upon entering his street, Berner's Road, he had already forgotten his frets, and was swinging his arms as if there had never been an aiding tool to his steps before. Home soon. He was wondering what he would be having for dinner. There still was yesterday's pudding, and Loretta had dropped off some turnips, fresh mustard and cream the other day, none of which he'd touched so far. Today, with so much commotion, he would grant his body the full enjoyment of food and nutrition, and eat all of it. Probably he would have done that with or without the walking stick in

the office, it was a bloody good day after all. And whisky, it was a whisky day!

Arriving in front of his door, one of the sole properly painted ones in his row of houses – only this fall had his son done it up for him in the dark green of woods, military and the Mackenzies – he came to a sudden halt. The door wasn't there. Or, no, what was wrong with the look of his house, his brain stuttered as it was asked to very, very quickly jump into full speed, extra fast speed again, the door was just open. Why would it be open though, unless, oh no, did John Morris forget to close the door this morning when he ran out? But then Loretta would have seen it and closed it for him. That was a neighborly duty. He hurried up the stairs to his house. Again, he came to an abrupt halt; better not hurry, and grab the door frame, otherwise you will fall down and get even more sick days at work. He lurked into the semidark corridor of his house. It all seemed so threatening. If he couldn't remember how he himself had left the house, then what could there be waiting for him inside of it? After all, he was all alone now, a senile, lonely, grumpy, and banned into the sports-section old man with occasional kitchen accidents. Where was the walking stick if you needed it – he must have left it by the door. Or perhaps leaning against the outside of the house? Sometimes he forgot it there, that was why he always got the cheap ones from Bullock's, too much rain on one, and it was ruined, but at least not hard to replace. His eyes had adjusted to how dark it was, and he walked in, nearly tip toeing. He noticed himself not breathing, and grasped. The squeaking sound startled him. He took heart, and made some proper steps into the kitchen to the left, checking corners, also the one behind the door, noticed with disappointment that his tea-cheese mess was still there on the counter, and turned around, made a few moderately swift paces into the living room right ahead, and also couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. The only places left to look for a crime scene were the cellar and the attic. If somebody had dared to enter his bedroom, though, oh he would smash them to bits, the perverts, the room of holy matrimony, what could anyone possibly be looking for in there, the chamber of loving memories of his wife, the wife who could still be perfect in there even if outside this house she had left him for the vice manager of the new supermarket chain down by the main road – these bastards! And thus he climbed the stairs in sheer anger, threw himself at his bedroom door, and surprised another yet undis-

turbed scene. Nothing was strange. Also his children's bedroom was utterly intact, and by the time he got there, he had to sit down on his daughter's bed, next to the moving boxes which had been there for far too long. He was out of order. Had anything happened while he'd been at work? He started to doubt it. If he should ever come around to some money until retirement, he would do a bloody boat trip to the Azores, what was that called, yes, he would do a cruise. That would be good for him. He walked back downstairs, defeated, and closed the front door.

Finally an action adequate to his routine. It was most certainly time for his whisky now. Pouring himself a generous, but modest portion of golden liquid, his mind quieted down already, and he enjoyed thinking that this bottle of old stuff would be finished soon, and he would be able to open his son's christmas present, probably by the end of this week. The naughty boy had given him two bottles of the finest, spoiling his father with alcohol, what a lovely christmas it had been this time. He fell into his armchair and sipped. What a delight. Perhaps it wasn't too weird what had happened in his house. Why the door to his house had stood wide open, there could be perfectly normal reasons for that, and why his stick wasn't there. How could he know, probably he should ask the neighbors what he had been doing earlier. But why was the stick not there? Neither outside, leaning against the wall, nor in the hallway. He hadn't come across it at all, as he remembered now. But instead of committing the same mistake of rushing himself into an angelic anger at the unknown deceitful criminal again, he tried to orient himself, meditating, by the taste, the texture, the smell of his drink, towards more reasonable thoughts on the missing walking stick.

Huuuarghrgh!!! He jumped from his seat, hearing an awful sound, like screeching, grasping, someone who had been drowning probably, where was the lake?! But he was in his house, in the living room. There was a crusty spot on the carpet by his feet, and a glass. Whisky. Oh no, he had fallen asleep. It was bright, it was morning. He had screamed and woken himself up. John Morris looked around. His body ached. Stupid rumble of last night, it had knocked him right into one of his escape-sleeps. What..? Lifting his feet barely enough to not scratch the dried up whisky from the bottom of his bottle with his shoes – he was still wearing his shoes, oh what a mess, dreading the moment of taking them off after a whole day and night, stinking like old

## Swallowed A Walking Stick: Lucky Ben's Epilogue

man's feet – he made his way to the bathroom. He gave off a miserable impression. Looking at himself in the bathroom cabinet, the events of the night came back to him in great clarity. He walked right out and caught hold of the phone by the door, dialing the one extremely short number, and reported a burglary to the police of Wood-Green.

A few weeks after this incident had taken its toll on John Morris, the man had returned to a shape nobody had seen him in for years. He was a journalist. At work, he made colleagues, informants, and customers alike uncomfortable with his unstinting, relentless questioning of their ethics, their intelligence, their stories. He found every least fault in the articles he had written lately, convinced his editor in chief to move at least half of them as reissues from the sports section to spotlight, and had bought a new dark green insipid walking stick he used mostly to speed up whatever was going too slowly or to correct what seemed inaccurate to him. He was back. What had happened was that his pride had been hurt, or better, it had been revealed to him what a bum he had been. The thieves hadn't taken anything valuable or destroyed his home, the only things missing had been the damned walking stick, two prime bottles of finest scotch whisky, and his old bag, the black one that was so worn out that even his daughter had noticed and given him a fancy new one from London for Christmas. In some ways he had deduced that it must have been an old man or woman who had stolen these things; someone in the need for much quality spirit, a walking aid, and a bag to transport these things, in order to have a free hand for the stick as well as a free hand for anything else to hold on to. He'd abandoned looking for them soon. The event was still present as a marker of the time when he reactivated himself from being a nonage vegetable in his own life, but he wasn't very occupied with it any longer. It hadn't been serious, and thus very lucky. *tk*

I have to tell you, it was very impressive to me when I found out to which lengths the children had gone to prevent the mob's bet to conclude. Naturally I agreed fully with them – the blithering idiots had to be disturbed in their desecrations – but I just didn't think they were on the right track with the story they'd laid out. Among the older ones of us villagers, it was known well enough that Bill was nothing near a fanatic, fantasizing Christian martyr, there was in fact no superstition in him at all. The story they had picked from this particular book proved fruitful however. If our fellow citizens didn't believe in a superstitious, possessed Bill Boler, they would certainly believe in his perverse, secret life of promiscuity and the hidden profanation of Christian values by eroticism. That sounded more like a scandal, didn't it? Also, it was the least I could do to honour Bill and the lifelong friendship of mischief which had connected us. So when I had cleared the house and its vicinity from the little gangsters, I simply went in and changed a few things myself. I had prepared a worn out piece of paper and brought a pen. My niece Magnolia had given me a really terrible box of liquor pralines a while back, so I brought that, too. Couldn't let an opportunity like this pass to get rid of them. Since the chalk was still there, I just changed some of the writing on the walls to sound more like studies of sucking on a stick, how deep it could go down, and references to the stories of the possessed, drawing out a nice picture of sexual inspiration for Bill and his imaginary secret lover who had found that the history of religious fanaticism provided some good ideas for other pleasures. And this was how easily an exorcistic tool became a marital aid. The rest of the quotes I simply smudged. What was really cru-

cial, though, was to get the letter right. I imagined the dirty couple actually having an accident with their new experiment, and Bill, full of love and devotion, knowing her life would turn to hell if anybody found out about this, because they did have to call an ambulance or find help at least, sent her away – what a tragic moment. Telling her to go away was in that situation possible by writing it down only, which, what a good coincidence, also left a piece of explanation of what happened to the rest of the world, thus making it very clear what had happened, and it being neither a murder attempt nor an accident, but a dirty, unmentionable story, on which nobody could bet without losing their face in this stuck up little village, because, obviously, everybody would know. Ah, this was fun.

Just, what then happened with the constable was quite sad after so much effort. I still don't know how he had walked into an ant heap in that situation, but he had perhaps also been too shocked by the immensity of my friend Bill's virtual secret life to tell anybody about what he had found. In any case, he had only taken my note, and presented it as a suicide letter. And, damn, it worked. I just hadn't thought about that. But the letter read like a very dramatic note to the loved ones, one of leaving and regret.

After all, I suspected that him swallowing his walking stick was accidental. The chances it was a black humoured joke or a murder were slim. Either way, the bet fell through. But I had just wished that we could have had a little more fun with it eventually, Bill and I. The elderflower bushes across the hedge were nodding while I was absorbed in thought, something I had never seen them do before. *tk*

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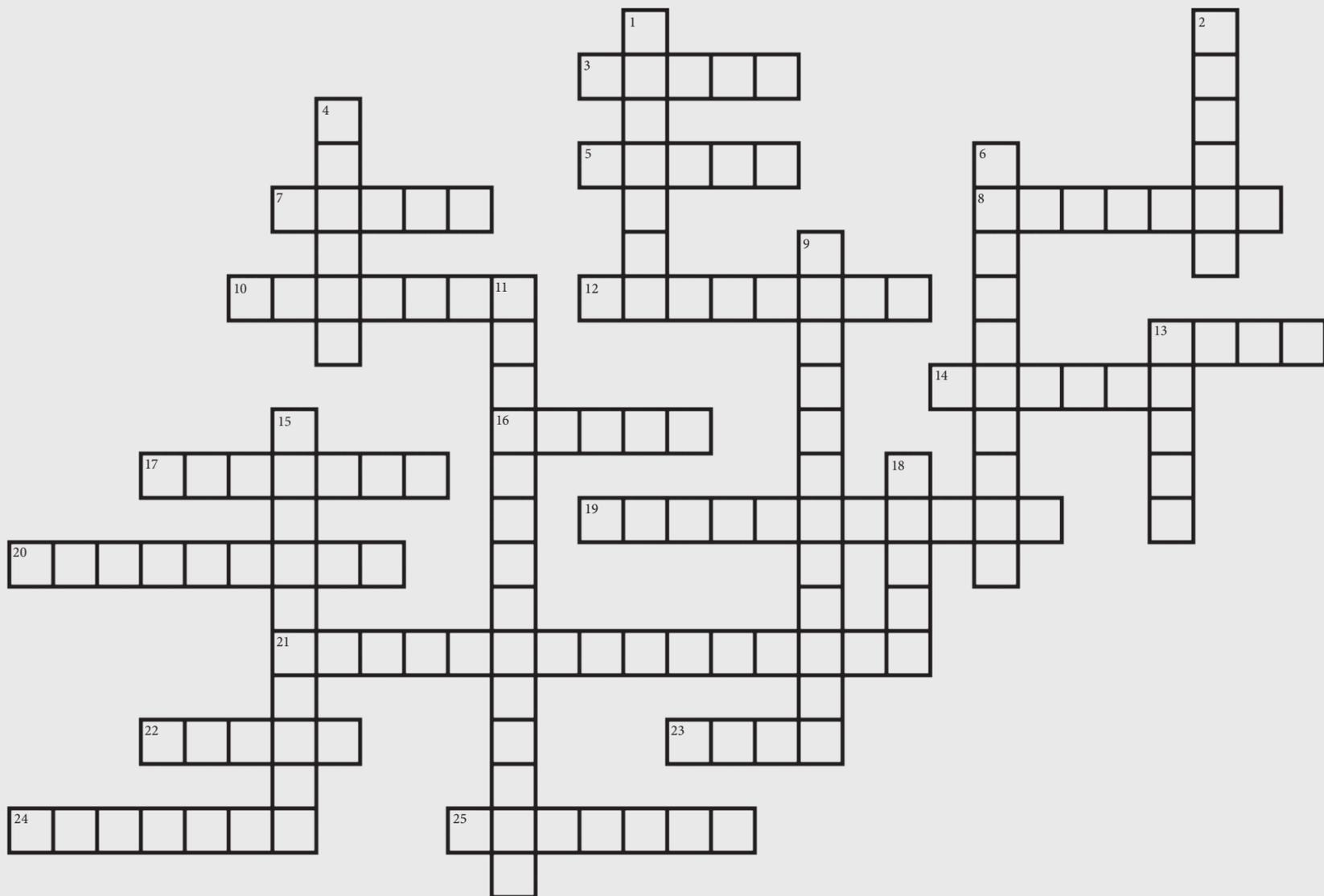
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**Across**

- 3 Compositions characterised by great beauty of language
- 5 A confection
- 7 A roll of tobacco leaves
- 8 Device used in lighting cigarettes, cigars, or pipes for smoking
- 10 Optical instrument
- 12 Small, white ball with a tough cover and resilient core
- 13 Something that nourishes
- 14 Part of a plant that is often brightly coloured, that usually lasts a short time
- 16 Pieces of fabric of distinctive design that are used as symbol

- 17 A clear liquid that has a strong smell
- 19 Pictures
- 20 For personal adornment
- 21 Tools that are designed for food-related functions
- 22 An art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms
- 23 Printed sheets of paper that are held together inside a cover
- 24 Devices for use in attack or defense in combat
- 25 Things that people wear

**Down**

- 1 Plant belonging to the genus Nicotiana
- 2 Communication addressed to a person transmitted by mail
- 4 A stringed musical instrument
- 6 Electric light
- 9 Used for support when walking
- 11 Toys sewn from textile
- 13 Sweet food that grows on a tree or bush
- 15 Coin-shaped tokens of uniform size and weight
- 18 Decorated pieces of thick paper