Chief Inspector Cisra sat in his dank office overlooking the park, swinging back on his chair in the dim light. The meeting with the missing girl’s parents remained fresh in his mind, and once again he was battling his own confusion. This was just like solving the Bodwell murder last year...

The loose pages were slipped through the crack under his door during his afternoon break, and told a jumbled tale. They had showed up the day their daughter went missing, having been last seen wandering the grounds of their summer estate. Apparently the girl was an imaginative sort, prone to flights of fancy and wilfulness, but would not have left without notifying them. Or so they said.

The means, the motive... it all remained opaque to him. Was she taken? Or did she simply wander off, leaving these behind as some sort of parting note?

The grizzled detective was having no luck. His Cluedo board, displayed proudly in his office, reminded him of what he could accomplish, but could he do it again? He walked into the break room and ran into a promising young Inspector who had just transferred from an adjacent district.

Cisra lit the stove under the aging kettle. “How’s it going?” he asked the younger officer offhandedly.

“Eh, it’s all right. I’ve made quota for this month, though the Dodgson case is still bugging me.”

“Well, you might have time to help me with this. You know that rich kid who went missing? Alice?”

“Of course, the story’s all over the news.”

“Well, the parents are well connected, and the Superintendent has made it clear that the case is to be my highest priority. You know how it is.”

Ignoring the kettle’s whistle, the older detective made some room on the table - cluttered as it was with sugar packets and biscuit crumbs, stained in rings by the countless cups of milk and tea consumed by the police force - and spread the pages
across it. Lying on top was the mysterious grid, with the curious message underneath in flowing cursive.

“Looks like nonsense. Is it some sort of ransom note?”

“Either that, or she wrote it. I can’t make head nor tail of it, but it’s all I’ve got to work with.”

The young man nodded, and began to read. They both hunched over the table, lost in thought.

White to play, and Alice to win in eleven moves.