



The two detectives lost track of the number of hours they spent tossing ideas around, transfixed by the magical world summoned up by the pages. Then, suddenly, it clicked.

“I’ve got it!” cried Cisra. “It’s not a ransom note at all!”

He rushed out of the office, leaving his colleague behind. Through the busy halls, past the desks and offices, past the cage and the reception, and out into the street. He vaulted into a waiting police car and drove to the estate.

The sun was setting, casting the surrounding countryside in a warm, orange glow. Anxious with anticipation, the detective pulled into the mansion’s long driveway, gravel crunching underneath the car’s wheels, and parked at the foot of the grand stairs leading up to the even grander entrance. He rapped on the door, and was promptly escorted inside by the immaculate butler.

“Oh, Chief Inspector, please tell us you have good news!” cried the mother, almost tripping down the winding staircase to greet the eager man in the hall. The father swiftly joined his wife, concern etched into the hard lines of his face.

“Good evening sir, madam,” said Cisra without delay. “Pardon me, but where do you keep your chess set?”

The pair were bewildered. “What do you mean, chess set?” stammered the mother.

“In the attic,” said the father bemusedly, “but what has that got to do with... - oh!”

The detective had already launched past the parents. Two, three, four flights of stairs, before coming to the entrance of the attic. He opened the door.

The girl was there, sitting at a desk, furiously scribbling at the page. The room was filled with papers, diagrams, puzzles and riddles, stuck to the walls and jammed into overflowing bookshelves. A miniature tea set lay at one end, a delicate chess



set at the other. She turned to the door. “Oh, hello officer. Do you know why a raven is like a writing desk?”

The detective quirked an eyebrow and smiled. Alice, who had caused a national uproar, had been at home the entire time, hidden away in her secret world of magic and wonder. Her parents followed quickly, and launched into the room to engulf their bemused daughter.

Cisra stepped back into the doorway. “Sir, madam,” he said, “you have a very talented daughter.”

“Talented?! What are you talking about? Oh sweetheart, you scared us half to death! How many times have I told you, enough with the...”

“You figured it out, didn’t you?” Alice asked the detective, ignoring her parents. At his nod, she smiled. “Mother, Father, I’m not going to marry the Harbatkin boy. And I’m not going to stop with the riddles and the puzzles. I’m going to be a famous author!”

Cisra turned to leave the room. As he did, he was sure he caught a glimpse of a spectacular sword in the corner of his eye, but when he looked around the room, it was gone. He smiled once more, straightened his tie, and walked out of the room.

On the drive back to the station, Cisra was once again feeling that wonderful elation that comes only after solving the toughest of mysteries, and it had little to do with the promise of a promotion. Tomorrow, he would be back to work, cracking the hard cases and earning his keep. He knew the media would be hard at work too - calling the entire case a waste of everyone’s time - but in a way, the girl’s desire to immerse herself in the fantastic and the mysterious was not unlike his own. That urge to have magic and riddles occupy the mind, rather than the drudgery of the everyday.

The stars came out over the city, and the satisfied super sleuth stopped on the side of the road, looking for the patterns and hidden meaning in the constellations. He would return to the station, eventually. But not tonight.