

# THREE

I sat cross-legged on one of the living room sofa of the Watson Mansion taciturnly, concentrating to thgink. It had been almost an hour since I started thinking about what the numbers '79-74' might possibly refer to, but I still couldn't figure out what it was supposed to mean. I had come up some possible educated guesses, but none of them was suited to the murder.

As I sat there and focused, George appeared in front of me while holding in his right hand a small piece of paper full of jumbled numbers. I looked up at him with an anticipating stare. George waved the paper right in front of my nose. "I found this in the study room," he explained briefly. "It has numbers written all over it, and I couldn't think of any possible meaning of the numbers."

I grasped the paper from him then started reading. It was filled with a list of confusing numbers, just as I expected.

11-12-1 -200--2-120-2,

100—110-1 00-1 02-12--221-120-210-200--21 -100-20- 202—

202-22-1-202--221-120-210—201-12-112-202—110-1- 201-202—

212-12-12-102.

100-202—212-1-201--212-120- 112-11-12-200-20-210-110...

1212-101-101-1-101— —1212-101-101-1-12

My mind was completely blank by the time I had finished reading, but after a short precious while I realized something that might be connected to the numbers.

"It's base numbers!" I exclaimed excitedly. "This is a letter written in base numbers! That's why the numbers are all jumbled up!"



I handed the paper back to George, who then took a quick look at it again before clicking his hand in eagerness.

“Good! I’m expert at base numbers! Leave it to me!” he smiled tauntingly at me. “Sorry, Matthew, but you’re always weak at calculations.”

I laughed frankly. “Well, maybe I should entrust this to you, then, shouldn’t I?”

George took a seat on the opposite side of me, pulled out a pen from his pocket, then started to scribble on the paper solemnly. I surveyed him with a smile I couldn’t hide. I knew very well that once George had been put into a work he liked, he wouldn’t stop until he finished doing it, and he wouldn’t let anybody disturb him at all.

I stood up, then headed towards the kitchen to the fridge in order to look for something to quench my thirst. I found nothing else than a solitary can of *Diet Coke*, which I took reluctantly, as I didn’t really fancy drinking Coke. The fridge was almost empty, in fact, because besides the Diet Coke can, there was barely anything else other than a plate of rotten apples.

The owners of this mansion had to be really, really senile. And lame.

When I came back, George had already finished with whatever he was doing with the paper. By looking at his satisfied expression I could tell that he was successful.

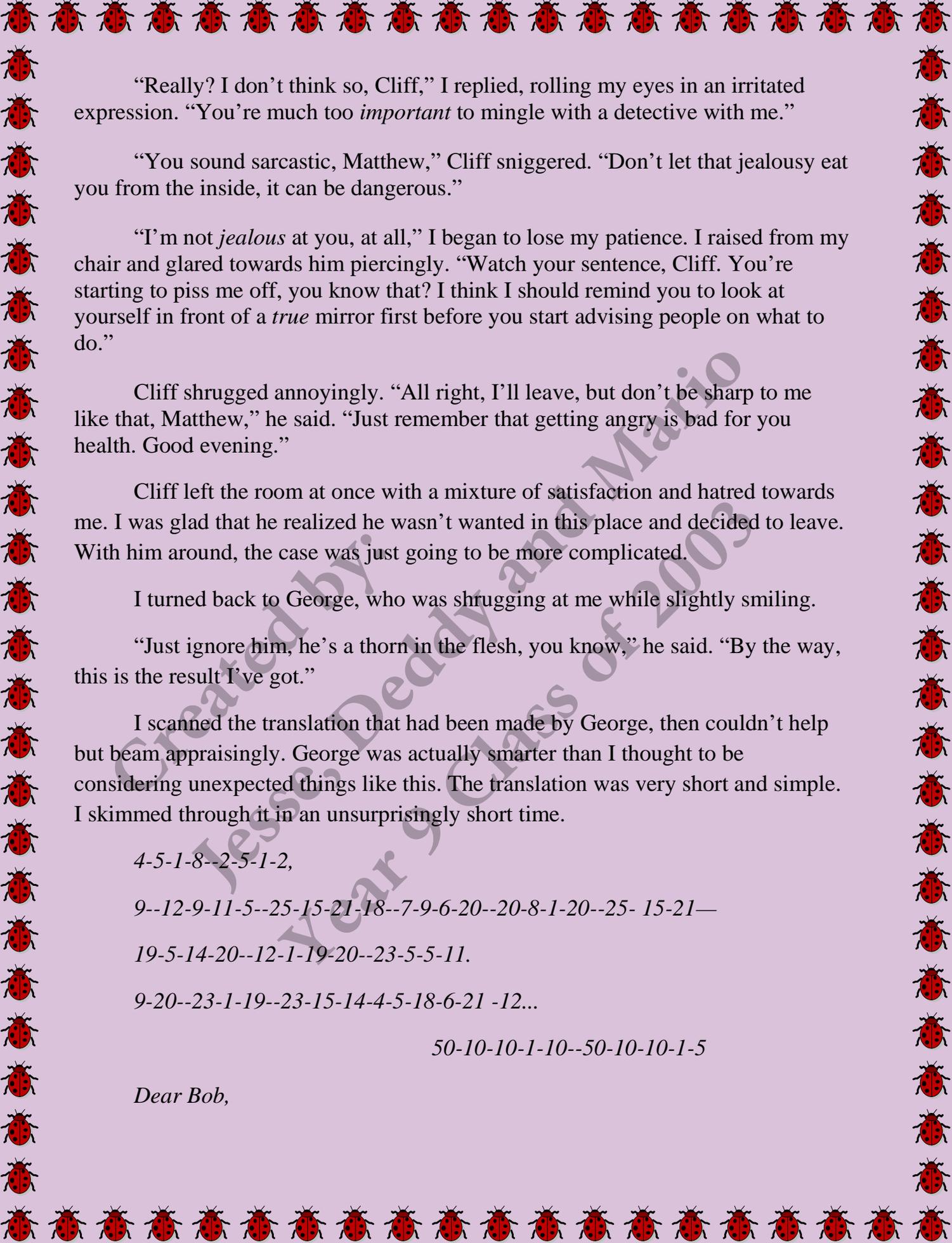
“I had interpreted it, Matthew,” he informed me jovially. “I converted it to base ten, then realized that if this is indeed a letter like you had said earlier, then I reckon it has to do with alphabetical orders, so I—”

“Hey, guys, what’s up?”

I snorted. Not that Cliff *again*.

“What do you want now, Cliff?” I asked coarsely. “We’re busy right now, so if you just want to mess up, just go.”

Cliff forced out a noisy chuckle. Oh, c’mon, Matthew, don’t be too formal, will you? We’re friends, aren’t we?”



“Really? I don’t think so, Cliff,” I replied, rolling my eyes in an irritated expression. “You’re much too *important* to mingle with a detective with me.”

“You sound sarcastic, Matthew,” Cliff sniggered. “Don’t let that jealousy eat you from the inside, it can be dangerous.”

“I’m not *jealous* at you, at all,” I began to lose my patience. I raised from my chair and glared towards him piercingly. “Watch your sentence, Cliff. You’re starting to piss me off, you know that? I think I should remind you to look at yourself in front of a *true* mirror first before you start advising people on what to do.”

Cliff shrugged annoyingly. “All right, I’ll leave, but don’t be sharp to me like that, Matthew,” he said. “Just remember that getting angry is bad for you health. Good evening.”

Cliff left the room at once with a mixture of satisfaction and hatred towards me. I was glad that he realized he wasn’t wanted in this place and decided to leave. With him around, the case was just going to be more complicated.

I turned back to George, who was shrugging at me while slightly smiling.

“Just ignore him, he’s a thorn in the flesh, you know,” he said. “By the way, this is the result I’ve got.”

I scanned the translation that had been made by George, then couldn’t help but beam appraisingly. George was actually smarter than I thought to be considering unexpected things like this. The translation was very short and simple. I skimmed through it in an unsurprisingly short time.

4-5-1-8--2-5-1-2,

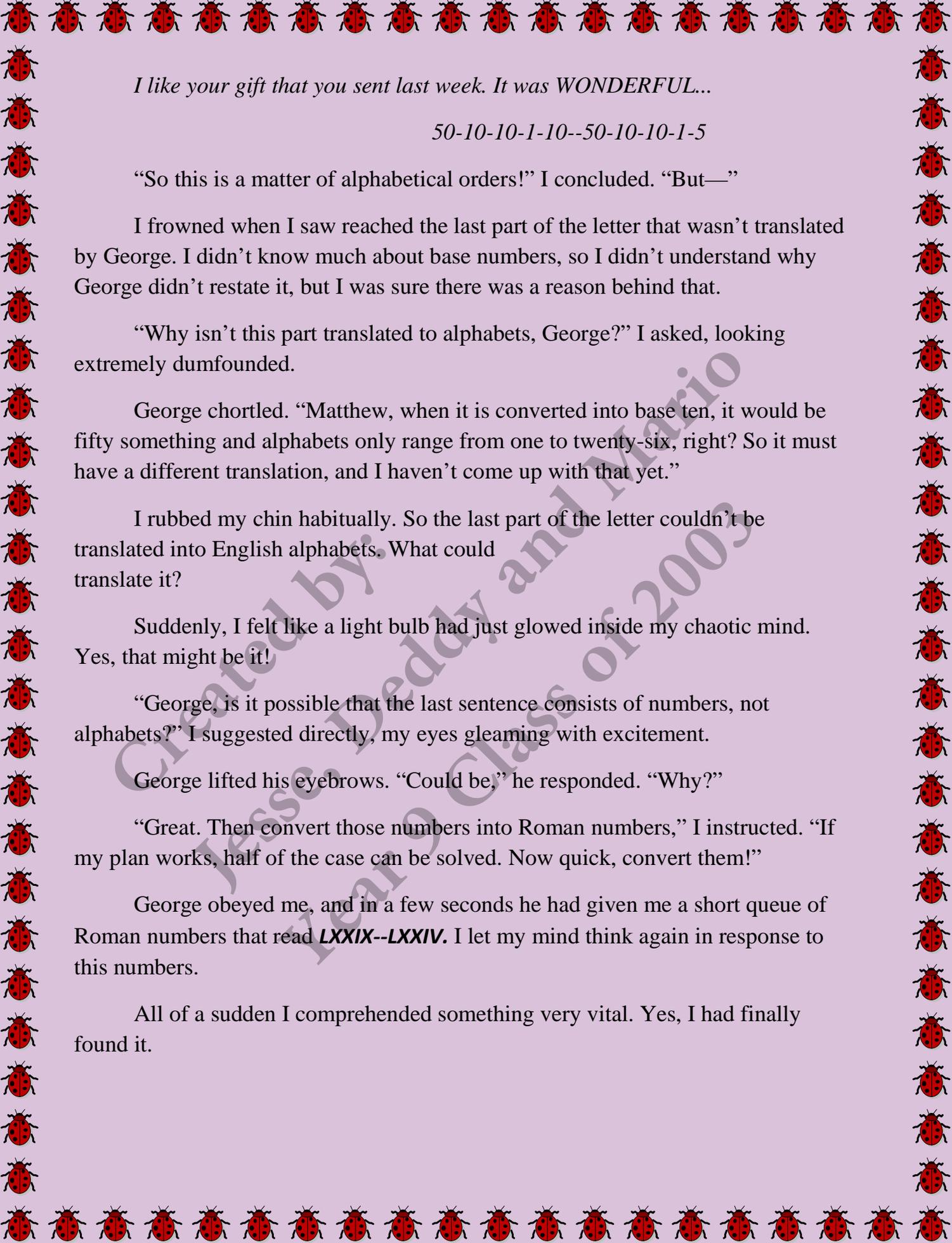
9--12-9-11-5--25-15-21-18--7-9-6-20--20-8-1-20--25- 15-21—

19-5-14-20--12-1-19-20--23-5-5-11.

9-20--23-1-19--23-15-14-4-5-18-6-21 -12...

50-10-10-1-10--50-10-10-1-5

*Dear Bob,*



*I like your gift that you sent last week. It was WONDERFUL...*

*50-10-10-1-10--50-10-10-1-5*

“So this is a matter of alphabetical orders!” I concluded. “But—”

I frowned when I saw reached the last part of the letter that wasn’t translated by George. I didn’t know much about base numbers, so I didn’t understand why George didn’t restate it, but I was sure there was a reason behind that.

“Why isn’t this part translated to alphabets, George?” I asked, looking extremely dumfounded.

George chortled. “Matthew, when it is converted into base ten, it would be fifty something and alphabets only range from one to twenty-six, right? So it must have a different translation, and I haven’t come up with that yet.”

I rubbed my chin habitually. So the last part of the letter couldn’t be translated into English alphabets. What could translate it?

Suddenly, I felt like a light bulb had just glowed inside my chaotic mind. Yes, that might be it!

“George, is it possible that the last sentence consists of numbers, not alphabets?” I suggested directly, my eyes gleaming with excitement.

George lifted his eyebrows. “Could be,” he responded. “Why?”

“Great. Then convert those numbers into Roman numbers,” I instructed. “If my plan works, half of the case can be solved. Now quick, convert them!”

George obeyed me, and in a few seconds he had given me a short queue of Roman numbers that read *LXXIX--LXXIV*. I let my mind think again in response to this numbers.

All of a sudden I comprehended something very vital. Yes, I had finally found it.



“George, I had found what ‘79-74’ means,” I said in a low voice. “LXXIX-LXXIV is 79-74, isn’t it?”

George slapped his forehead. “My Gosh, you bet it is!” he shouted energetically. “I know! 79-74 must be some kind of a code for a person’s name’ It must be, it couldn’t be mistaken!”

I nodded. “Yes, but another problem is bothering me now,” I mumbled. “Who is *BOB*?”

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I’ve found it! I’ve found it!”

I turned around and see George running with a wide grin on his agitated face. I knew at that instant moment that he had figured out who Bob was.

“Who’s Bob? Have you known about it?” I questioned him expectantly. “Is my guess accurate or is he a different person?”

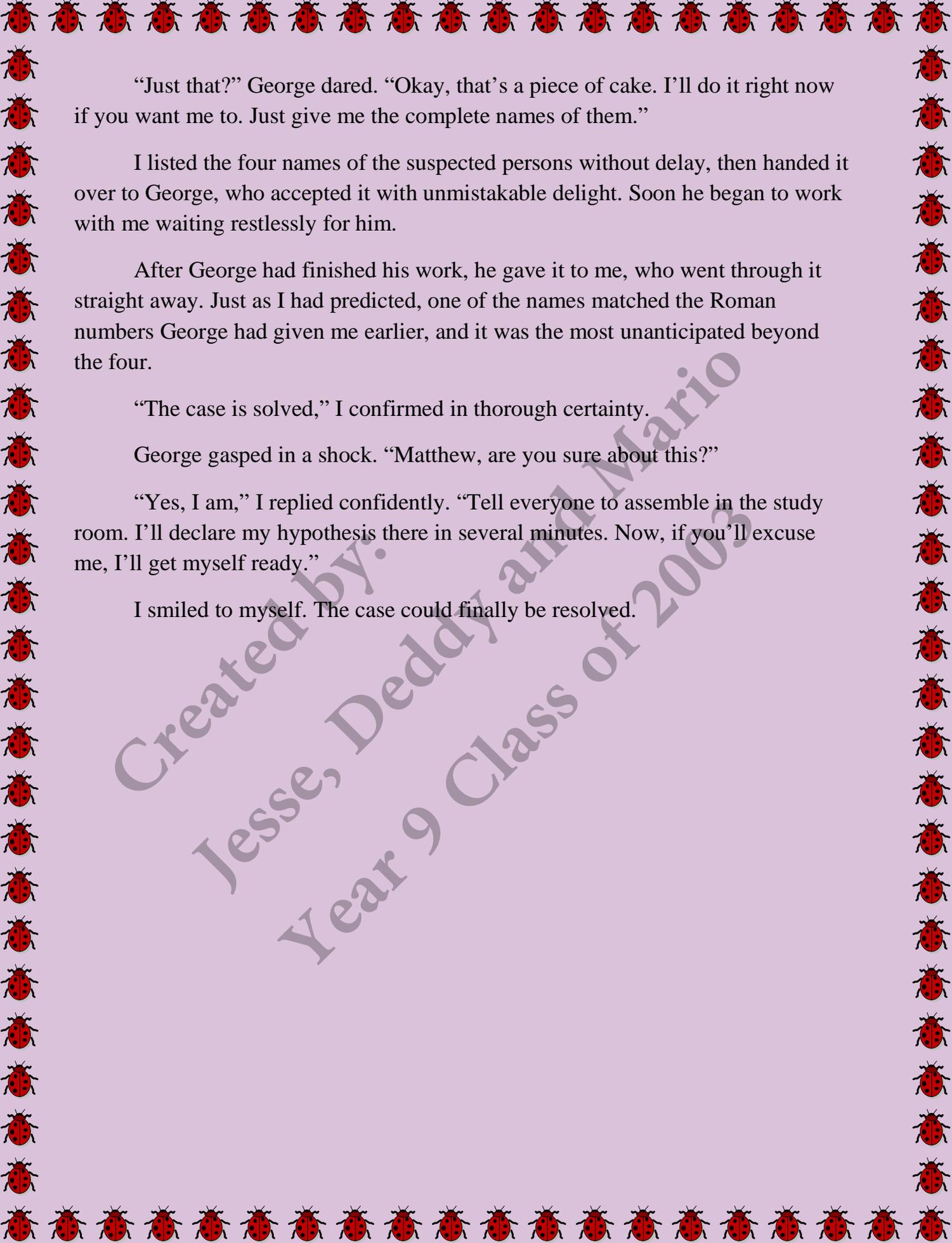
“No, Matthew, you’re terrific,” George replied with unstable breath. “Cliff told me Bob is a close friend of all the Watson family members. He’s a mathematician, just like that Walter Watson.”

I couldn’t help but smiled assuredly. So my guess was correct. It was then time for my second plan.

“George, can you do me a big favor?” I asked George, who was by then busy wiping his sweating face with a handkerchief. “This is for the sake of this case!”

“What is it?” George said. “If it’s another physical work, I reject before you say it.”

I chuckled. “No, it’s not, George, trust me,” I convinced him. “I just want you to perform some of your mathematical abilities once again. It’s simple, very simple. Just convert the names of the four suspected persons into base-ten numbers, then give it to me.”



“Just that?” George dared. “Okay, that’s a piece of cake. I’ll do it right now if you want me to. Just give me the complete names of them.”

I listed the four names of the suspected persons without delay, then handed it over to George, who accepted it with unmistakable delight. Soon he began to work with me waiting restlessly for him.

After George had finished his work, he gave it to me, who went through it straight away. Just as I had predicted, one of the names matched the Roman numbers George had given me earlier, and it was the most unanticipated beyond the four.

“The case is solved,” I confirmed in thorough certainty.

George gasped in a shock. “Matthew, are you sure about this?”

“Yes, I am,” I replied confidently. “Tell everyone to assemble in the study room. I’ll declare my hypothesis there in several minutes. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll get myself ready.”

I smiled to myself. The case could finally be resolved.

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