



TWO

When I arrived at the plush mansion, I wasn't surprised to see policemen all around. I began to stride inside the mansion inquisitively, alerted to see every little clue as I walked. My eyes wandered around, looking for evidence, but nothing seemed unusual.

“Oh, there you are, Matthew! Thank goodness you've come!”

I spun around at once to see George hurrying towards me with a flustered smile on his face. His loyal camera dangled cheerfully on his neck habitually. I forced a small grin as a response to his smile, then advanced to him.

“Where's the body?” I asked him at the first place.

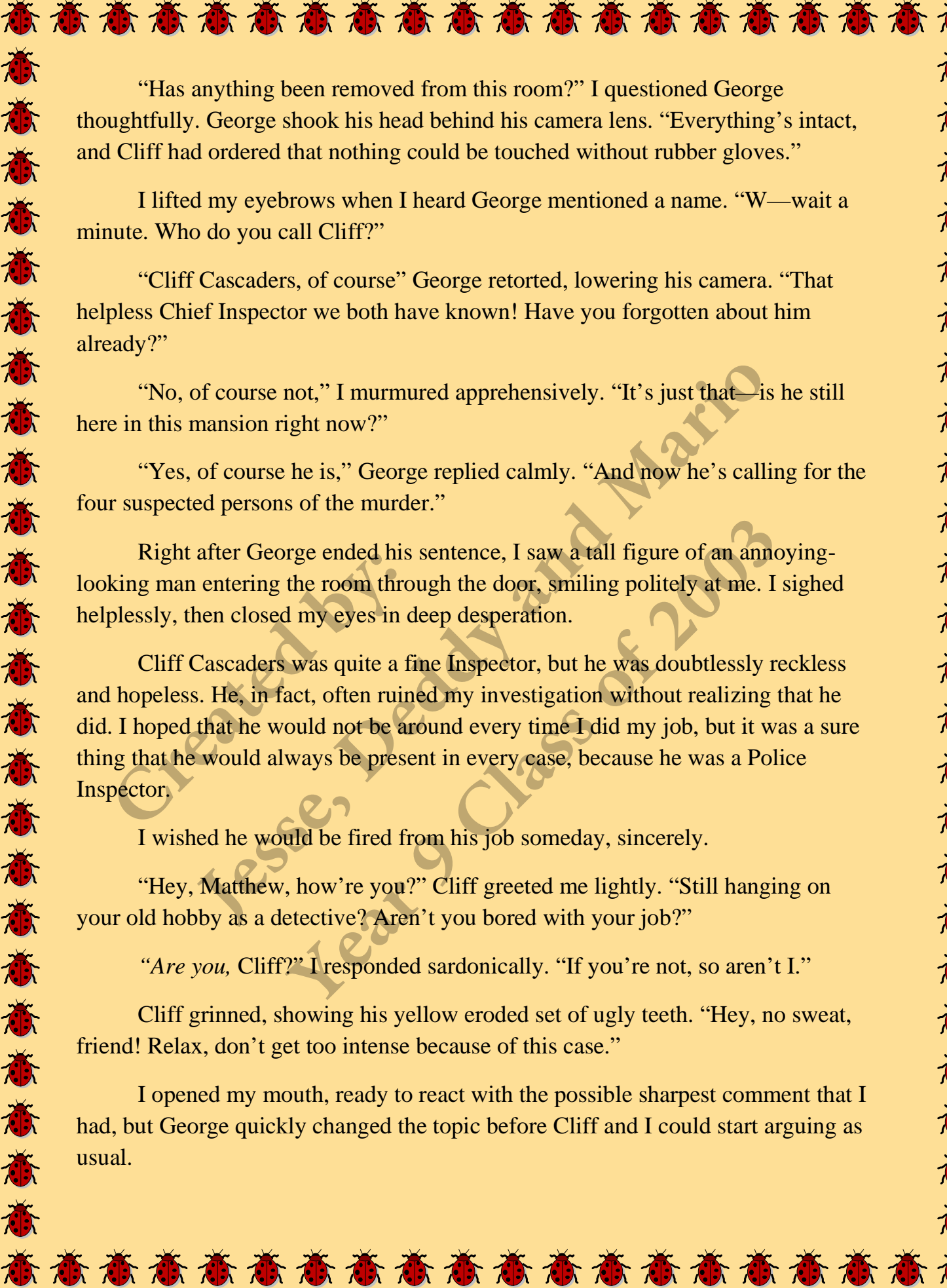
George pointed to the second story of the mansion. “He's up there inside his bedroom,” he said while wiping his forehead with a handkerchief. “Do you want to take a look at the scene now?”

“Yes, please,” I nodded as a sign of agreement. “We can't waste time at all. At what time did the murder happen?”

“Seven thirty, if I'm not mistaken,” George said. “All right, follow me, Matthew.”

I followed George upstairs to the bedroom where the murder of Wilbur Watson took place vigilantly. My mind was already making several possible assumptions of the murder, but none of them seemed to be making any sense.

When I reached the room, I saw the dead body of Wilbur Watson lying on the floor with red blood marks spread on his upper part of his white shirt. Nothing in this room was damaged, except the carpet, which was now soaked with blood. Three policemen were wandering all over the room, thoroughly inspecting every single thing inside it. George began to take pictures eagerly with his camera, carefully searching for the perfect angle to photograph the corpse.



“Has anything been removed from this room?” I questioned George thoughtfully. George shook his head behind his camera lens. “Everything’s intact, and Cliff had ordered that nothing could be touched without rubber gloves.”

I lifted my eyebrows when I heard George mentioned a name. “W—wait a minute. Who do you call Cliff?”

“Cliff Cascaders, of course” George retorted, lowering his camera. “That helpless Chief Inspector we both have known! Have you forgotten about him already?”

“No, of course not,” I murmured apprehensively. “It’s just that—is he still here in this mansion right now?”

“Yes, of course he is,” George replied calmly. “And now he’s calling for the four suspected persons of the murder.”

Right after George ended his sentence, I saw a tall figure of an annoying-looking man entering the room through the door, smiling politely at me. I sighed helplessly, then closed my eyes in deep desperation.

Cliff Cascaders was quite a fine Inspector, but he was doubtlessly reckless and hopeless. He, in fact, often ruined my investigation without realizing that he did. I hoped that he would not be around every time I did my job, but it was a sure thing that he would always be present in every case, because he was a Police Inspector.

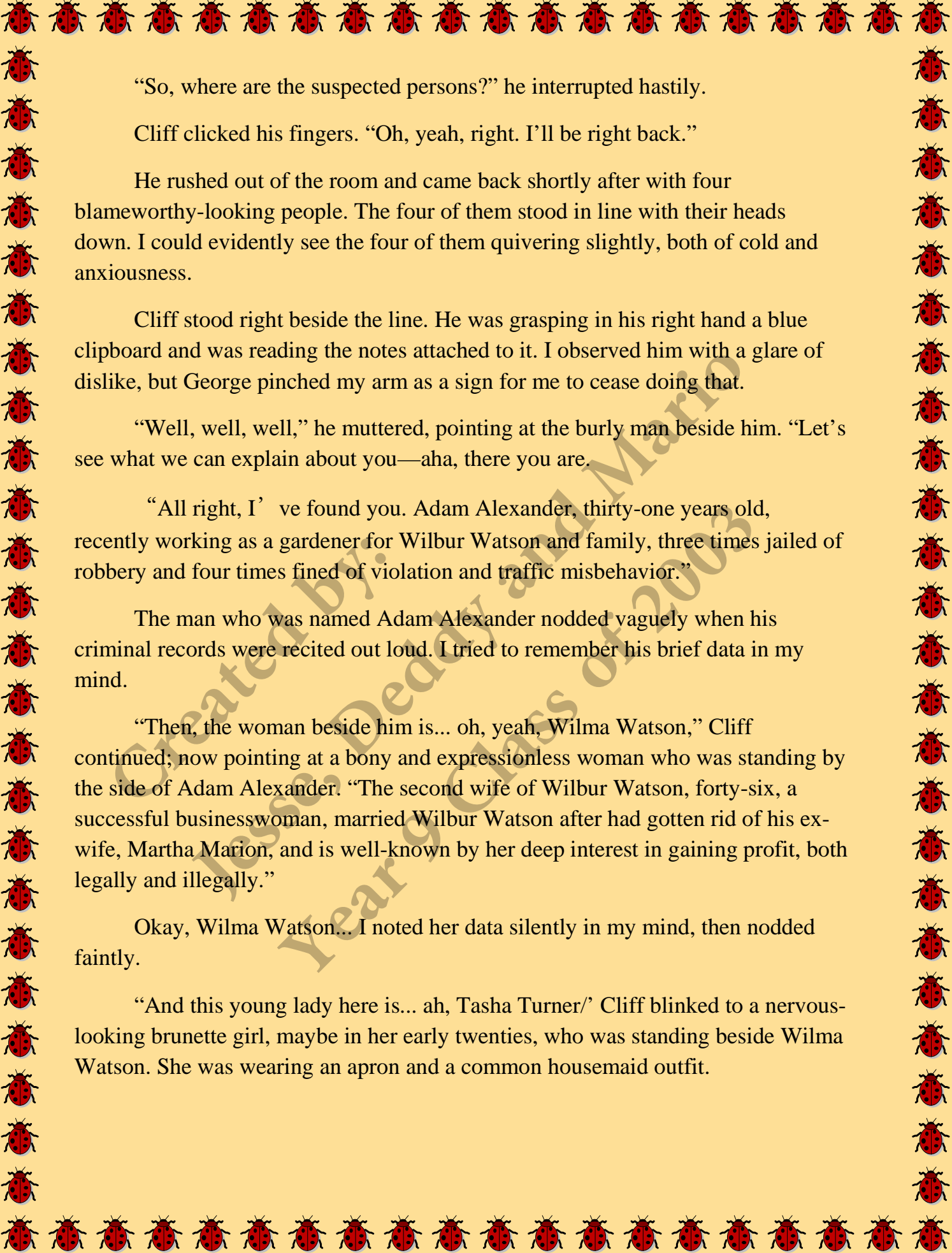
I wished he would be fired from his job someday, sincerely.

“Hey, Matthew, how’re you?” Cliff greeted me lightly. “Still hanging on your old hobby as a detective? Aren’t you bored with your job?”

“Are you, Cliff?” I responded sardonically. “If you’re not, so aren’t I.”

Cliff grinned, showing his yellow eroded set of ugly teeth. “Hey, no sweat, friend! Relax, don’t get too intense because of this case.”

I opened my mouth, ready to react with the possible sharpest comment that I had, but George quickly changed the topic before Cliff and I could start arguing as usual.



“So, where are the suspected persons?” he interrupted hastily.

Cliff clicked his fingers. “Oh, yeah, right. I’ll be right back.”

He rushed out of the room and came back shortly after with four blameworthy-looking people. The four of them stood in line with their heads down. I could evidently see the four of them quivering slightly, both of cold and anxiousness.

Cliff stood right beside the line. He was grasping in his right hand a blue clipboard and was reading the notes attached to it. I observed him with a glare of dislike, but George pinched my arm as a sign for me to cease doing that.

“Well, well, well,” he muttered, pointing at the burly man beside him. “Let’s see what we can explain about you—aha, there you are.

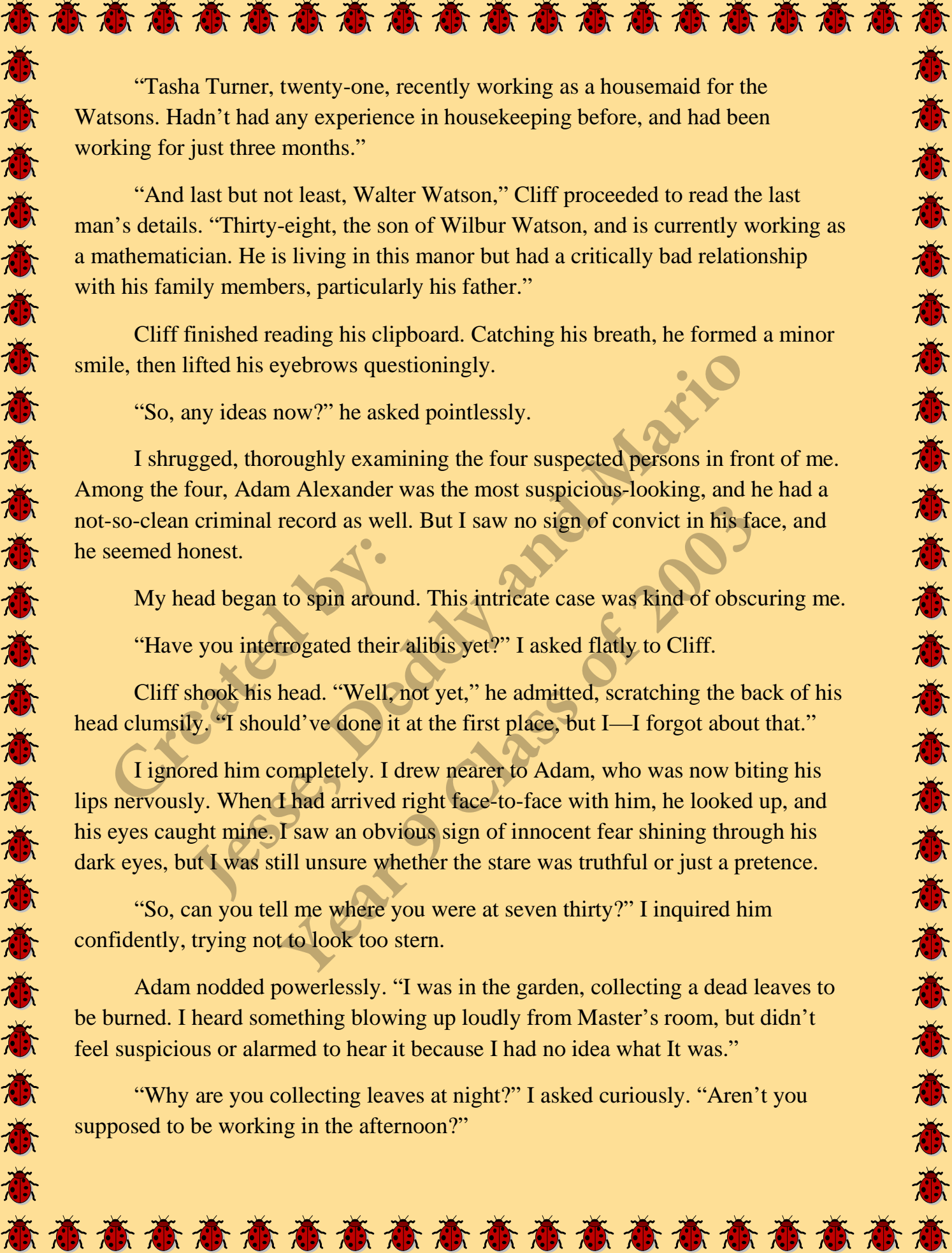
“All right, I’ve found you. Adam Alexander, thirty-one years old, recently working as a gardener for Wilbur Watson and family, three times jailed of robbery and four times fined of violation and traffic misbehavior.”

The man who was named Adam Alexander nodded vaguely when his criminal records were recited out loud. I tried to remember his brief data in my mind.

“Then, the woman beside him is... oh, yeah, Wilma Watson,” Cliff continued; now pointing at a bony and expressionless woman who was standing by the side of Adam Alexander. “The second wife of Wilbur Watson, forty-six, a successful businesswoman, married Wilbur Watson after had gotten rid of his ex-wife, Martha Marion, and is well-known by her deep interest in gaining profit, both legally and illegally.”

Okay, Wilma Watson... I noted her data silently in my mind, then nodded faintly.

“And this young lady here is... ah, Tasha Turner/” Cliff blinked to a nervous-looking brunette girl, maybe in her early twenties, who was standing beside Wilma Watson. She was wearing an apron and a common housemaid outfit.



“Tasha Turner, twenty-one, recently working as a housemaid for the Watsons. Hadn’t had any experience in housekeeping before, and had been working for just three months.”

“And last but not least, Walter Watson,” Cliff proceeded to read the last man’s details. “Thirty-eight, the son of Wilbur Watson, and is currently working as a mathematician. He is living in this manor but had a critically bad relationship with his family members, particularly his father.”

Cliff finished reading his clipboard. Catching his breath, he formed a minor smile, then lifted his eyebrows questioningly.

“So, any ideas now?” he asked pointlessly.

I shrugged, thoroughly examining the four suspected persons in front of me. Among the four, Adam Alexander was the most suspicious-looking, and he had a not-so-clean criminal record as well. But I saw no sign of convict in his face, and he seemed honest.

My head began to spin around. This intricate case was kind of obscuring me.

“Have you interrogated their alibis yet?” I asked flatly to Cliff.


Cliff shook his head. “Well, not yet,” he admitted, scratching the back of his head clumsily. “I should’ve done it at the first place, but I—I forgot about that.”

I ignored him completely. I drew nearer to Adam, who was now biting his lips nervously. When I had arrived right face-to-face with him, he looked up, and his eyes caught mine. I saw an obvious sign of innocent fear shining through his dark eyes, but I was still unsure whether the stare was truthful or just a pretence.

“So, can you tell me where you were at seven thirty?” I inquired him confidently, trying not to look too stern.

Adam nodded powerlessly. “I was in the garden, collecting a dead leaves to be burned. I heard something blowing up loudly from Master’s room, but didn’t feel suspicious or alarmed to hear it because I had no idea what It was.”

“Why are you collecting leaves at night?” I asked curiously. “Aren’t you supposed to be working in the afternoon?”



“I went to downtown to buy fertilizers this afternoon and came home late, so I had no time to collect dry leaves on time,” Adam explained with a quivering tone.

I blinked several times. “Okay, I think that’s all I’ve got to ask you,” I said politely. “Thank you.”

I moved to Wilma Watson, who, unlike Adam, was looking questionably self-assured. She held her head high, and when she saw me, she snorted arrogantly.

“Could you please tell me where you were at seven thirty?” I inquired, ignoring her overconfident act.

“I was in a party with my friends,” she replied unwillingly. “I had just arrived at the front gate when that man”—she pointed at Cliff—“brought me in harshly. I didn’t know what the hell is happening here, but I don’t care at all. Let the old man be dead; he deserves to get it.”

My eyes narrowed in response to Wilma’s statement. “What do you mean by ‘he deserves to get it’, specifically?”

“Well, he’s a damn great cheater! And his money isn’t as many as I thought he would’ve possessed!” Wilma replied furiously. “If I had known about his actual condition, I wouldn’t have agreed to marry him at the first place.”

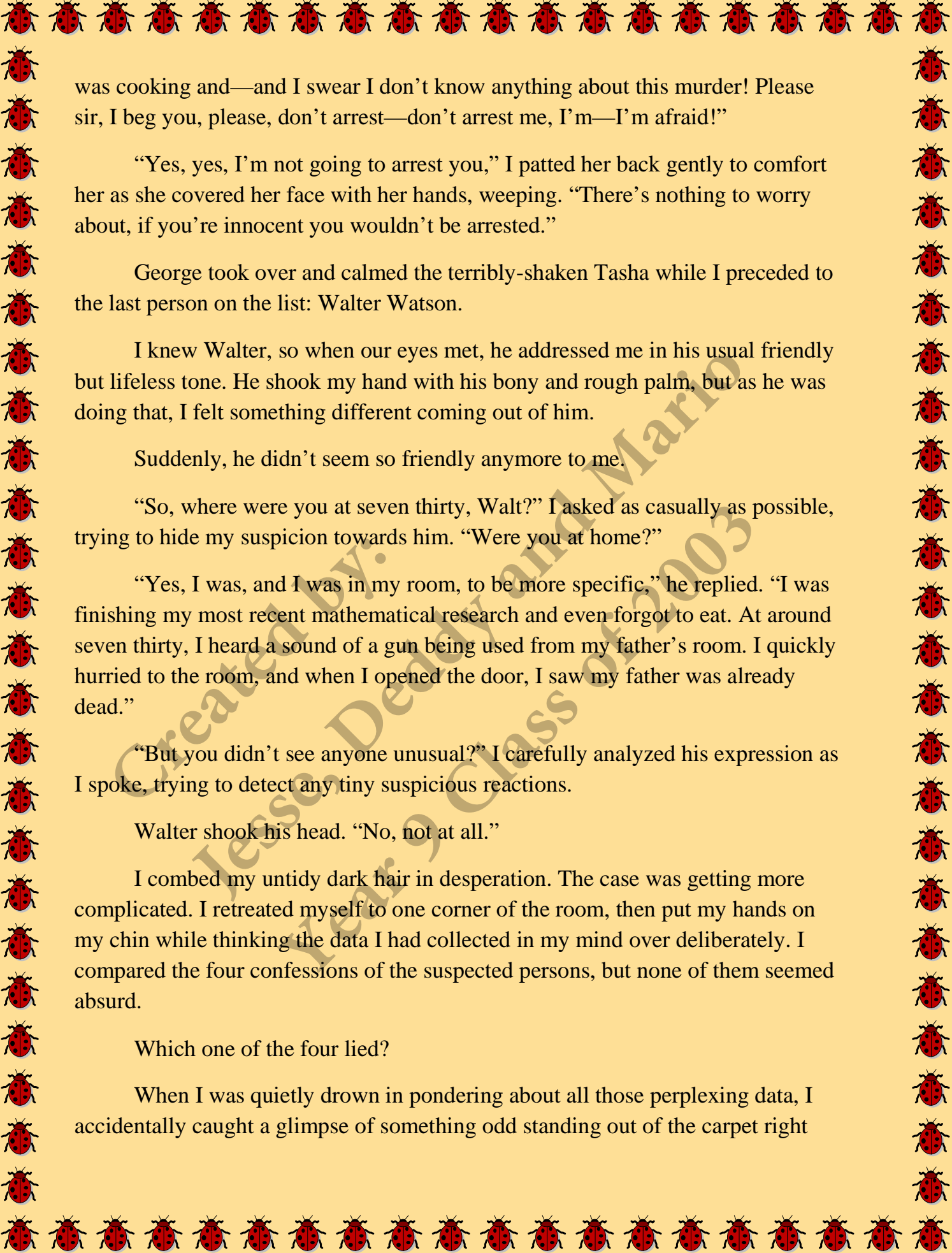
“Thank you,” I decided to end this worthless conversation, then went to the next person, who was Tasha Turner.

She was biting her lips nervously and fidgeting with her fingers when I arrived in front of her with a friendly smile on my face. She looked up for a fraction of a second, gasped, then turned her head down directly after.

I could fully understand that she was nervous. I would be feeling the same way too if I were at her position.

“Urn—excuse me, I wonder if you could tell me where you were at seven thirty, Miss Turner,” I said to her with the softest tone possible, scratching the back of my ear.

Tasha looked at me, and I saw that her eyes were already wet with timid tears. “I—I was at the kitchen, s—sir,” she replied while starting to sob. “I was—I



was cooking and—and I swear I don't know anything about this murder! Please sir, I beg you, please, don't arrest—don't arrest me, I'm—I'm afraid!"

"Yes, yes, I'm not going to arrest you," I patted her back gently to comfort her as she covered her face with her hands, weeping. "There's nothing to worry about, if you're innocent you wouldn't be arrested."

George took over and calmed the terribly-shaken Tasha while I preceded to the last person on the list: Walter Watson.

I knew Walter, so when our eyes met, he addressed me in his usual friendly but lifeless tone. He shook my hand with his bony and rough palm, but as he was doing that, I felt something different coming out of him.

Suddenly, he didn't seem so friendly anymore to me.

"So, where were you at seven thirty, Walt?" I asked as casually as possible, trying to hide my suspicion towards him. "Were you at home?"

"Yes, I was, and I was in my room, to be more specific," he replied. "I was finishing my most recent mathematical research and even forgot to eat. At around seven thirty, I heard a sound of a gun being used from my father's room. I quickly hurried to the room, and when I opened the door, I saw my father was already dead."

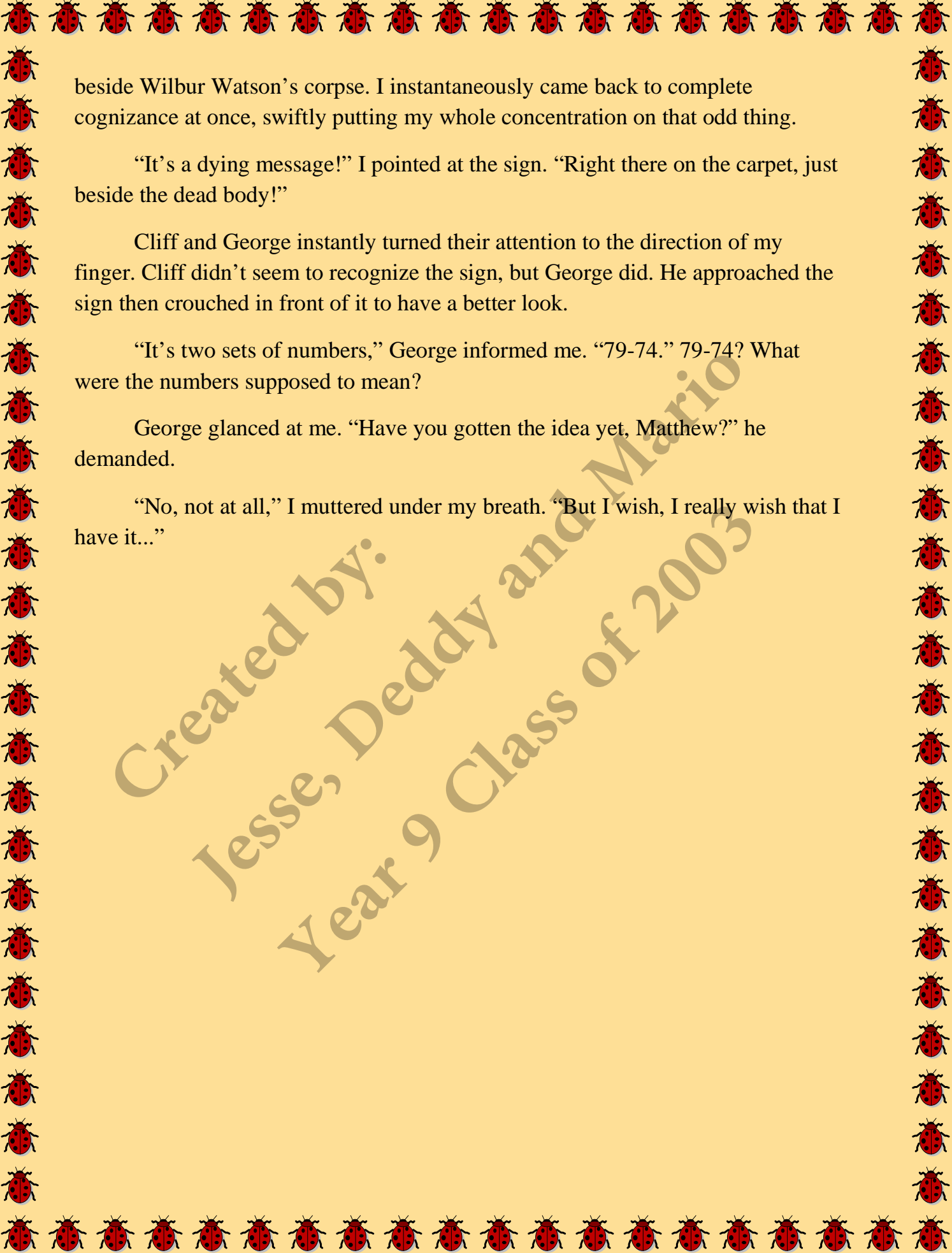
"But you didn't see anyone unusual?" I carefully analyzed his expression as I spoke, trying to detect any tiny suspicious reactions.

Walter shook his head. "No, not at all."

I combed my untidy dark hair in desperation. The case was getting more complicated. I retreated myself to one corner of the room, then put my hands on my chin while thinking the data I had collected in my mind over deliberately. I compared the four confessions of the suspected persons, but none of them seemed absurd.

Which one of the four lied?

When I was quietly drown in pondering about all those perplexing data, I accidentally caught a glimpse of something odd standing out of the carpet right



beside Wilbur Watson's corpse. I instantaneously came back to complete cognizance at once, swiftly putting my whole concentration on that odd thing.

"It's a dying message!" I pointed at the sign. "Right there on the carpet, just beside the dead body!"

Cliff and George instantly turned their attention to the direction of my finger. Cliff didn't seem to recognize the sign, but George did. He approached the sign then crouched in front of it to have a better look.

"It's two sets of numbers," George informed me. "79-74." 79-74? What were the numbers supposed to mean?

George glanced at me. "Have you gotten the idea yet, Matthew?" he demanded.

"No, not at all," I muttered under my breath. "But I wish, I really wish that I have it..."

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