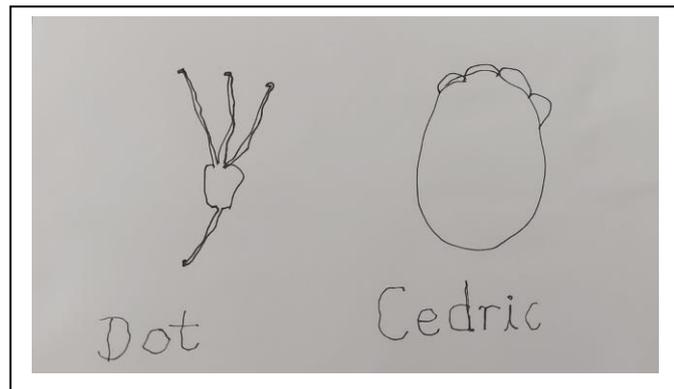


## Dorothy and Cedric

Dorothy, or Dot as she was sometimes called, and Cedric were missing. We realised something was gravely wrong when they failed to appear for breakfast at the usual time. On any typical day Dot, who was 6 years, and Cedric who was 4, would amble over, peer through the rear door to the kitchen and wait patiently. But it had been two whole days now and there was no sign of them. Yesterday Bessie had explored the meadow behind our house, calling through cupped hands. She was unable to penetrate the forest. A thunderclap had hurried her inside in the early morning and we were unable to leave the house until the late afternoon by which time the darkening sky and pools of water dissuaded us from venturing further. But today brought hope and the morning dew was evaporating in the keen sunshine. Dot and Cedric were still missing.

The edge of the meadow melted into the forest. It was here that Charlotte made a discovery. I have drawn a picture for you,

dear reader, because this was an important clue. Charlotte is very small, only 5, but she spotted them. Two prints. This must be Dot on the left and Cedric on the right. The rain had washed most of the tracks away, but we could tell from the few that were preserved that they were heading into the forest. Perhaps the thunder had frightened them, and they sought refuge there. Dot was leading the way. Nothing much scared her, except of



course the large coffee tin with a hole cut in the bottom (they wanted to put her head through there and it was only my pleading and Charlotte's wailing that saved her). Cedric was, generally, a much more nervous person (a small noise can make him shiver so a thunderclap would disorientate and panic him). Dot was kind, and brave, so she would have taken the lead. Her prints were slightly in front confirming our assumptions.

The leaves grew more plenty and the air cooler as we moved between the trees. Cedric's feet we could no longer see because he is large and heavy, and Bessie pointed out that we could not distinguish between feet and smudges in the ground and mud. Dot's we could see here and there. But we could still tell the direction. They were heading for the spruit where Cedric likes to bath. After that was the dust and the road and Bessie grew more anxious. She knew about the trucks carrying the logs and the busses ferrying the people. They will not see Dot and they will kill her, like they did Norman. We urged Bessie on. Please. Go quicker. By now the leaves and grasses covered any remaining trace of Cedric. Sometimes we saw a half print or a poke from Dot's middle toe in drying soil, but these were fading. Charlotte began to weep so Bessie put her on her back and wrapped her tightly with the blanket that she seemed to have forever around her waist. We guessed they were still heading for the spruit. Even though it was Cedric who I bathed there, he had a bad sense of direction. But Dot was clever (Dad said so) and she always went with to share in Cedric's joy and mischief when he squirted water at me. She would go there. It was the only place she knew.

Charlotte spotted them first. Bessie let her say that to cheer her up. First Dot. She was perched on a low branch, irritated by the sobbing coming from below. Her feathers were sodden and she hated water, maybe because her toes were like sticks (not webbed like a duck). Cedric was slumped against the tree forlorn and defeated. Between very long eyelashes I could see watery eyes and the little streams running down the sides of his face. Large drops falling to the ground.

Bessie directed Dot who led the way back home. With all my might I pushed Cedric from behind, Bessie and Charlotte each holding an ear to steer him. When we reached the meadow, there was Dad. Corn for Dot and an apple for Cedric (the sweet yellowish kind).