JOHNNY THE CENTIPEDE.

by

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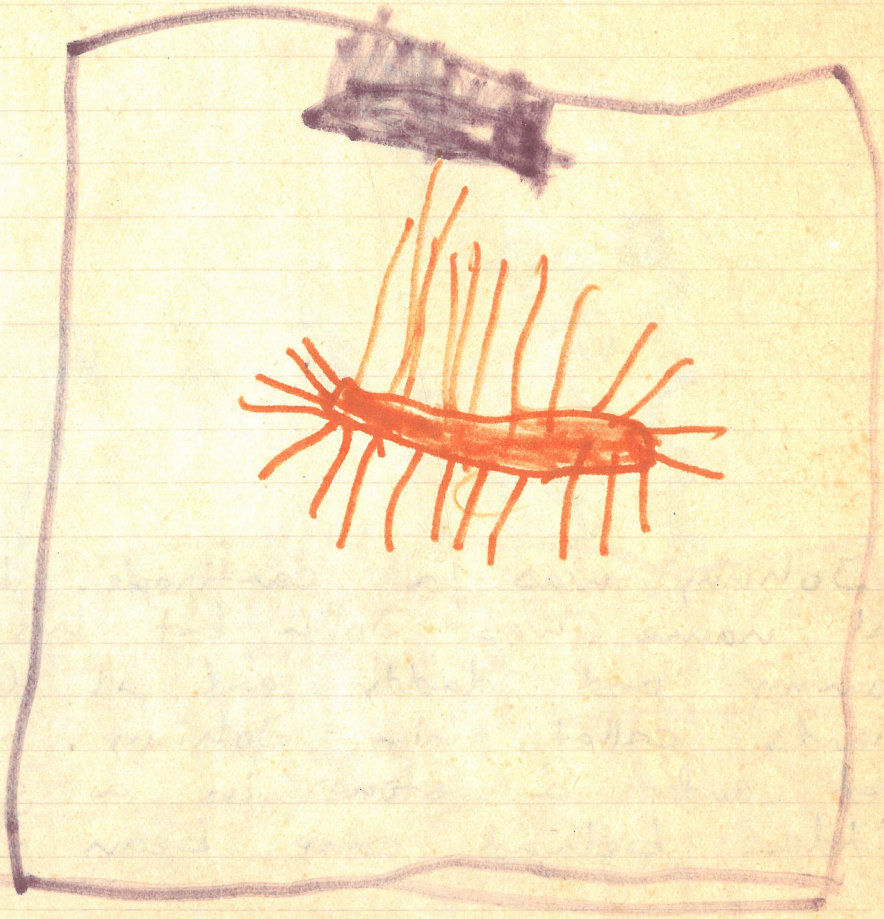
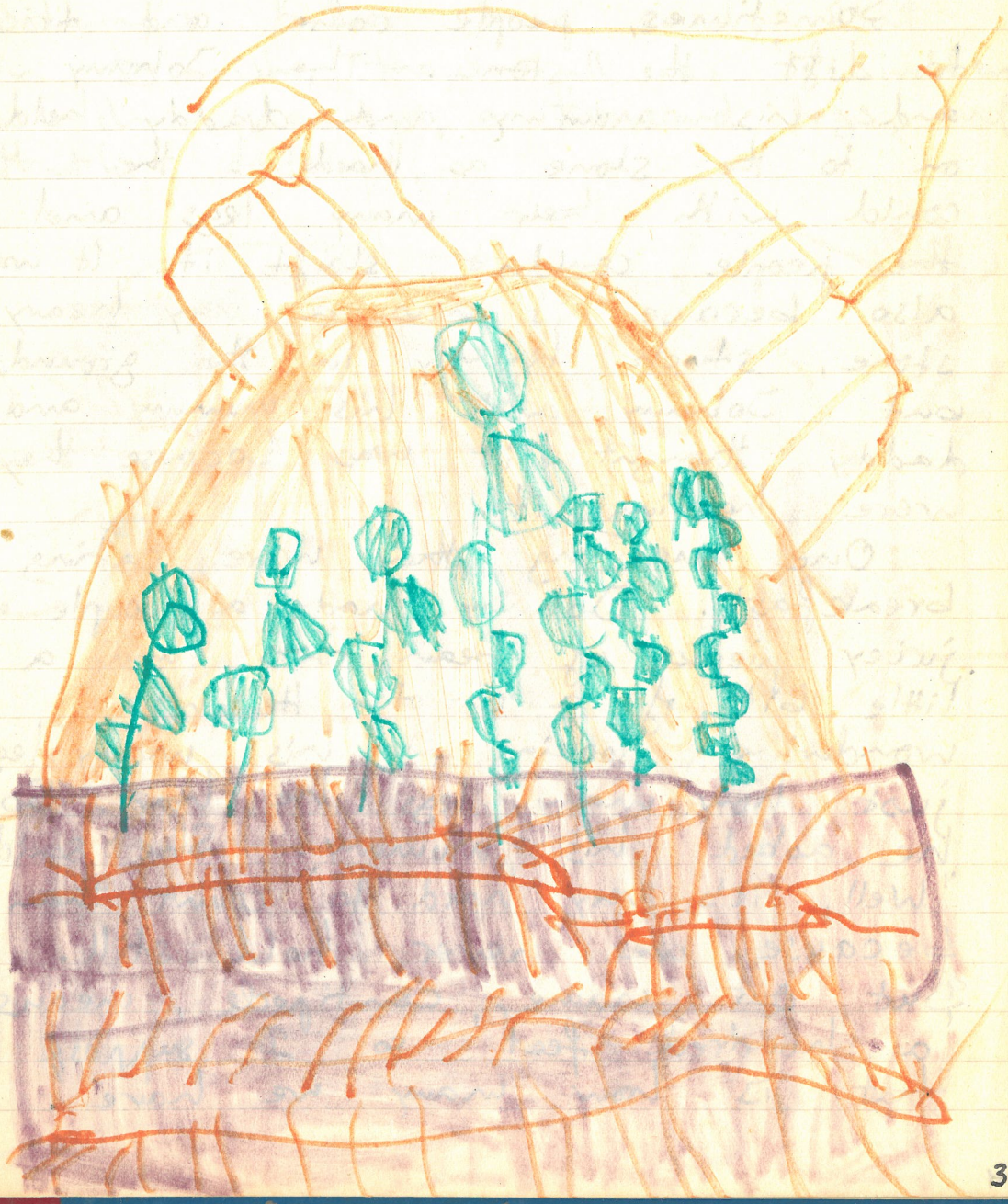


Johnny was a centipede. His real name was John but his mummy and daddy and all his friends called him Johnny. He lived under a stone in a garden, hidden behind some bean plants.



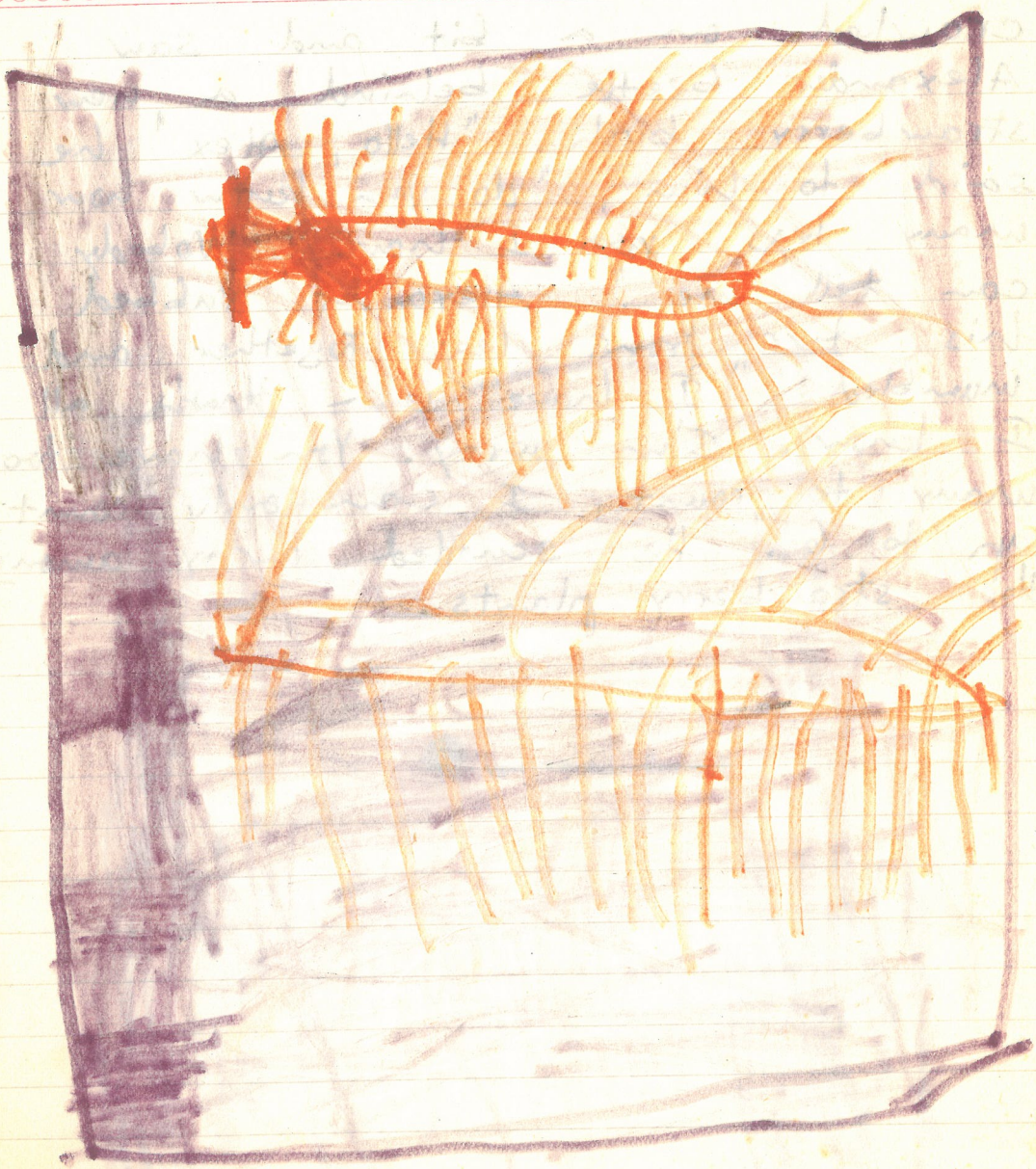
Sometimes, people came and tried to lift the stone. Then Johnny and his mummy and daddy held on to the stone as hard as they could with their many legs and the people couldn't shift it. It was also because it was a very heavy stone, stuck tightly in the ground, but Johnny and his mummy and daddy thought it was because they were holding it.

One morning, they were eating breakfast. Johnny had a couple of juicy pieces of bean roots and a little bit of a carrot. He was wondering, looking at his many legs, just how many legs he had. So he asked his mummy. She said "Well, it's very hard to count them, because we never hold still. But our name, centipede, means a hundred feet so I suppose that is how many we have."

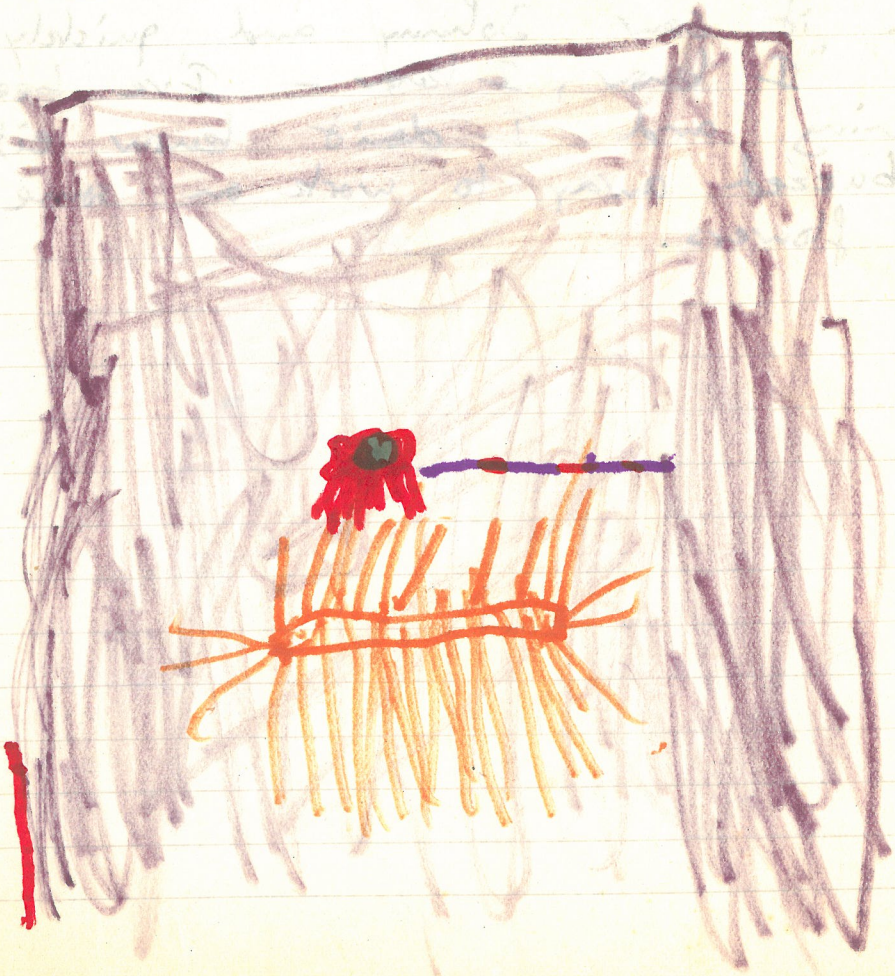
Johnny's father then said, "But in Danish, they call us 'Tusindben' which means 'a thousand legs,' and that's different."

Then Johnny went out for a crawl. He met Willy the earthworm. He asked him "Willy, do you know how many legs a centipede has?" Willy thought for a bit and then said "Too many. Look at me - I have no legs at all, and I can get about alright. But I can tell you that in Russian you are called сорокножка or "sorokonoshka" and that means forty little feet." "Well," said Johnny, "I have now heard that we have 40, 100 or 1000 legs. They can't all be right!".

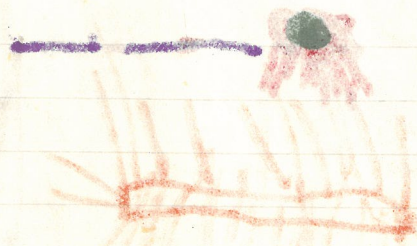
Willy the worm munched on a juicy piece of soil and said, "Well, I can't help you then, so let me get on with my soil chewing. I have to chew on all this, so that it's nice and soft. The people are planting strawberry plants and they need soft soil. Good bye!". Johnny



crawled on a bit and saw Alexander beetle behind a new strawberry bush. "Hello, Alex" he said to him, "do you know how many legs ~~you~~ I have? Nobody can tell me." Alexander rubbed his two front legs together and mumbled "I have 6 – that's all I know. I'm sorry. You have too many to count, I can only count up to 6." He scuttled away among the strawberry plants.



A big fat bumble bee came buzzing over from the row of yellow flowers. It took a quick look into a couple of bean plant flowers and grumbled to itself "Nothing much here, not worth stopping for. Bean plants are never much good for nectar." Then it saw Johnny and quickly said "I know, I know — I've been listening and I don't know either!" It buzzed away to work on some more flowers.



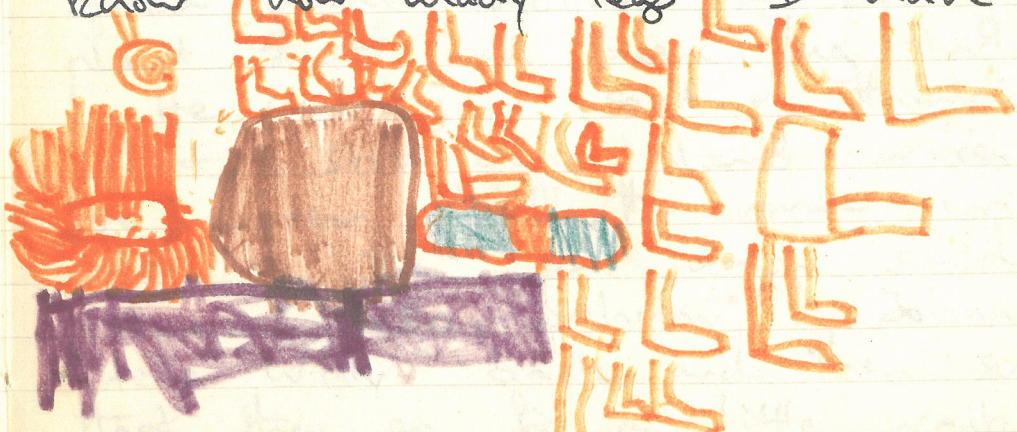
Johnny sighed "Will I ever find out, how many legs I have?". A cheeky little ground spider popped its head out of a hole in the soil and said "Why, don't you count them yourself?" and quickly scurried back into its hole.

Johnny thought for a while.

Then he had an idea. But he had to find somebody to help him, because Johnny couldn't count past 20. He crawled around the strawberry plants that had just been put in and suddenly met Tom the snail. Tom could not speak as he had no mouth. But he could wave his feelers about. Johnny said to him: "Tom, I need your help. Will you help me count how many legs I have – I'd like to find out." Tom waved his feelers "NO!" but Johnny said "I know what you want to say – that I move my legs too much to count them. But here is my idea. We go over to that nice clean flat rock, and I take off all my shoes. Then you count them and write down the number on this piece of paper."

So he took all his shoes off, and Tom did the counting. It took a

very long time. When he finished, he wrote it down on the piece of paper. Johnny crawled over to it and said to Tom "Thank you very much." Tom then slithered away and Johnny never saw him again. He was just going to look at the piece of paper, when, suddenly, Willy the earthworm wriggled past him, swallowed the paper together with a lump of soil, saying over his shoulder "It's not often there's a bit of paper mixed with the soil I have to chew". Johnny said to him "Now I'll never know how many legs I have!"



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