

YOUNG READER'S EDITION

**THE
HIDING
PLACE**

CORRIE TEN BOOM

WITH ELIZABETH & JOHN SHERRILL

ABRIDGED BY LONNIE HULL DUPONT

ILLUSTRATED BY TIM FOLEY



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CONTENTS

1. The One Hundredth Birthday Party 7
 2. Full Table 19
 3. Karel 26
 4. The Watch Shop 38
 5. Invasion 48
 6. The Secret Room 60
 7. Eusie 75
 8. Storm Clouds Gather 91
 9. The Raid 106
 10. Scheveningen 117
 11. The Lieutenant 134
 12. Vught 145
 13. Ravensbruck 162
 14. The Blue Sweater 179
 15. The Three Visions 189
- Since Then 203

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1



THE ONE HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY PARTY

I jumped out of bed that morning with one question in my mind—sun or fog? Usually it was fog in January in Holland. I leaned as far as I could from the single window in my bedroom in our building, called the Beje (*bay-yeah*); it was always hard to see the sky from there. Brick walls looked back at me in this crowded center of Haarlem. But I could see a patch of pale sky.

Father's bedroom was directly under mine, but at 77 he slept soundly. *You are not growing younger yourself*, I reminded my reflection in the mirror. I was 45 years old and unmarried. My sister Betsie, seven years older than I and also unmarried, still had that slender grace that made people turn and look after her in the street. Heaven knows it was not her clothes; our little watch shop had never made much money.

THE HIDING PLACE

Below me down on the street, the doorbell rang. I opened my door and plunged down the steep twisting stairway. Actually, the Beje was two houses. The one in front was a typical old-Haarlem structure, three stories high, two rooms deep,

and only one room wide. At some point its rear wall had been knocked through to join it with the even thinner, steeper house in back of it—which had only three rooms, one on top of the other—and this narrow corkscrew staircase squeezed between the two.



Betsie was at the door ahead of me. An enormous spray of flowers filled the doorway. We searched the bouquet for the card. “Pickwick!” we shouted together.

Pickwick was a wealthy customer who not only bought the very finest watches but often came upstairs to the family part of the house above the shop. His real name was Herman Sluring; Pickwick was the name Betsie and I used between ourselves because he looked like the illustrator’s drawing in our copy of Dickens. Herman Sluring was short, bald, and immensely fat, and his eyes were such that you were never quite sure whether he was looking at you or someone else. He was as kind as he was fearsome to look at.

The flowers had come to the side door, the door the family used, opening onto a tiny alleyway, and Betsie and I carried them into the shop. First was the workroom, where watches

and clocks were repaired. There was the high bench over which Father had bent for so many years, doing the delicate, painstaking work that was known as the finest in Holland. In the center of the room was my bench, next to mine Hans the apprentice's, and against the wall old Christoffels'.

Beyond the workroom was the customers' part of the shop, with its glass case full of watches. All the wall clocks were striking 7:00 as Betsie and I carried the flowers in. Ever since childhood, I had loved to step into this room where a hundred ticking voices welcomed me. I unlocked the street door and stepped out into the Barteljorisstraat. The other shops up and down the narrow street were still shuttered: the optician's next door, the dress shop, the baker's, Weil's Furriers across the street.

I folded back our shutters and admired the window display. It held a collection of clocks and pocketwatches all at least a hundred years old, all borrowed for the occasion. For today was the shop's one hundredth birthday. In January 1837, Father's father had placed in this window a sign:

Ten Boom
Watches

The doorbell on the alley rang again; more flowers. So it went for an hour, large bouquets and small ones, elaborate pieces and home-grown plants in clay pots. For although the party was for the shop, the affection was for Father. "Haarlem's Grand Old Man" they called him.

When the shop and the workroom would not hold another bouquet, Betsie and I carried them upstairs to the two rooms



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above the shop. Though it was twenty years since her death, these were still “Tante Jans’ rooms.” Tante Jans was Mother’s older sister, and her presence lingered in the massive dark furniture she had left behind.

At 7:45 Hans, the apprentice, arrived, and at 8:00 Toos, our saleslady-bookkeeper. Toos was a sour-faced individual whose unpleasant personality had made it impossible for her to keep a job until—ten years ago—she had come to work for Father. Father’s gentle courtesy had mellowed her, and though she would never have admitted it, she loved him as fiercely as she disliked the rest of the world. We left Hans and Toos to answer the doorbell and went upstairs to get breakfast.

I set out three plates. The dining room was in the house at the rear, five steps higher than the shop but lower than Tante Jans’ rooms. This room with its single window looking into the alley was the heart of the home. We used only a corner of the table now, Father, Betsie, and I, but to me the rest of the family was still there. There was Mama’s chair, and the three aunts’ chairs (not only Tante Jans but Mama’s other two sisters had also lived with us). Next to me had sat my other sister, Nollie, and Willem, the only boy.

Nollie and Willem had homes of their own now, and Mama and the aunts were dead, but still I seemed to see them here. Their chairs had not stayed empty long. Father could never bear a house without children, and whenever he heard of a child in need of a home a new face appeared at the table. Out of his watch shop that never made much money, he fed and cared for eleven more children after his own four were grown. Now these, too, had grown up and married or gone off to work, and so I laid three plates on the table.

Betsie brought the coffee in from the tiny kitchen off the dining room, and we heard Father's step coming down the staircase. He went slowly now on the stairs; but still as punctual as one of his own watches, he entered the dining room, as he had every morning since I could remember, at 8:10.

Father's hair and beard were now as white as the tablecloth. But his blue eyes behind the thick round spectacles were as mild and merry as ever. He gazed from one of us to the other.

"Corrie, dear! My dear Betsie! How lovely you both look!"

He bowed his head and said the blessing.

How could we have guessed as we sat there—two middle-aged sisters and an old man—that we were about to be given adventures such as we had never dreamed of? Adventure and anguish, horror and heaven were just around the corner. In that room on that day, we did not know.

Father took the big Bible from its shelf as Toos and Hans came in. Scripture reading at 8:30 each morning for all who were in the house was another of the points around which life in the Beje revolved. Father turned to the gospel of Luke, where we had left off yesterday. He looked up.

"Where is Christoffels?"

Christoffels was the third and only other employee in the shop, a little man who looked older than Father, though actually he was ten years younger. I remembered the day years earlier when he first came into the shop, so ragged that I had assumed he was a street beggar. I was about to send him up to the kitchen, where Betsie kept a pot of soup simmering, when he announced with great dignity that he was considering permanent employment and was offering his services first to us.

We learned Christoffels belonged to an almost vanished trade, the clockmender who trudged on foot throughout the land, regulating and repairing the tall pendulum clocks that were the pride of every Dutch farmhouse. Father hired him on the spot. "They're the finest clockmen anywhere," he told me later, "these wandering clocksmiths. There's not a repair job they haven't handled with just the tools in their sack."

People all over Haarlem brought their clocks to Christoffels. What he did with his wages we never knew; he had remained as threadbare as ever, though Christoffels' most notable quality was his pride.

Now, for the first time ever, Christoffels was late.

Father polished his glasses with his napkin and started to read, his deep voice lingering over the words. Eventually we heard Christoffels' shuffling steps on the stairs. The door opened and all of us gaped. Christoffels was resplendent in a new black suit, checkered vest, white shirt, tie and stiff starched collar.

"Christoffels, my dear associate," Father murmured in his formal way, "what joy to see you." And he resumed his Bible reading.

Soon the doorbells were ringing, both the shop bell on the street and the bell in the alley. Toos and I hurried to the doors. Before long a steady stream of guests climbed the narrow staircase to Tante Jans' rooms, where Father sat almost lost in a thicket of flowers. As I helped one of the older guests up the steep stairs, Betsie seized my arm.

"We need Nollie's cups right away!"

"I'll go get them!"

Our sister, Nollie, and her husband were coming as soon as their six children got home from school. I dashed down

the stairs, took my coat and my bicycle from inside the alley door, and set out over the bumpy brick streets. Nollie and her husband lived about a mile and a half from the Beje, outside the center of the city. I pedaled there often.

How could I foresee, as I zipped around corners, that one day I would stand on Nollie's street with my heart thudding in my throat, daring to go no closer to her house for fear of what was taking place there?

Today I careened onto the sidewalk and burst through the door with never a knock. "Nollie, we need the cups right now!"

Nollie came out of the kitchen, her pretty face flushed with baking. "They're all packed by the door. I wish I could go with you—but I've got more still to bake."

"You're *all* coming, aren't you?"

"Yes, Corrie, Peter will be there."

I loved all my nieces and nephews. But Peter . . . well, was Peter. At thirteen he was a musical prodigy and a rascal and the pride of my life.

The Beje was even more crowded when I got back. The mayor of Haarlem was there. And the postman and the trolley morman and half a dozen policemen from the Haarlem Police Headquarters just around the corner.

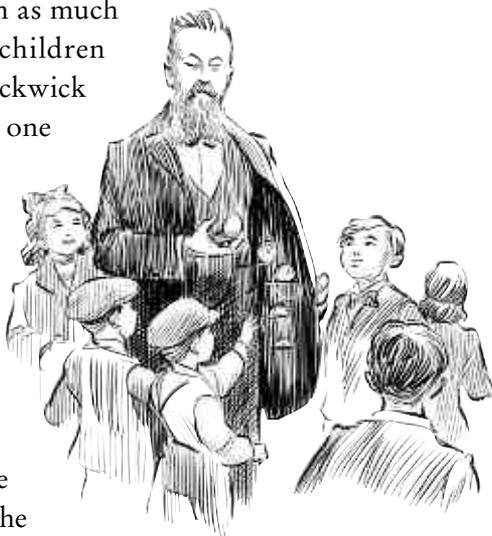
After lunch the children started coming, and as children always did, they went straight to Father. The older ones sat on the floor around him; the smallest ones climbed into his lap. In addition to his twinkling eyes, Father ticked. Watches lying on a shelf run differently from watches carried about, so Father always wore the ones he was regulating. His suit jackets had inside pockets fitted with hooks for a dozen watches, so wherever he went the hum of hundreds of little wheels went

with him. Now with a child on each knee and ten more crowded close, he drew from another pocket his heavy cross-shaped winding key, each of the four ends shaped for a different size clock. With a flick of his finger, he made it spin, gleaming, glinting. . . .

A shriek below told me that Pickwick had arrived. We sometimes forgot, we who loved him, what a shock the first sight of him could be to a stranger. I hurried down to the door and got him upstairs. He sank his bulk into a chair beside Father, fixed one eye on me, the other on the ceiling, and said, "Five lumps, please."

Pickwick loved children as much as Father did, but while children took to Father on sight, Pickwick had to win them. He had one trick that never failed. I brought him his cup of coffee, thick with sugar, and watched him look around in mock consternation. "But, my dear Cornelia!" he cried, "there's no table to set it on!" He glanced out of one wide-set eye to make sure the children were watching. "Well, it's a lucky thing I brought my own!"

With that he set cup and saucer on his own protruding paunch. I never knew a child who could resist it; soon a respectful circle had gathered round him.



Now Nollie and her family arrived. “Tante Corrie!” Peter greeted me innocently. “You don’t *look* one hundred years old!” Before I could swat him, he was sitting at Tante Jans’ upright piano, filling the house with melody. People called out requests, and soon the whole room was singing.

The workroom and shop were even more crowded with well-wishers than the upstairs rooms, as all through the afternoon they kept coming, the people who counted themselves Father’s friends. Young and old, poor and rich, scholarly gentlemen and illiterate servant girls—only to Father did it seem that they were all alike. That was Father’s secret: not that he overlooked the differences in people, but that he did not know they were there.

I said good-bye to some guests at the door and stood for a moment gazing up and down the Barteljorisstraat, wondering what was keeping Willem and his family. I still had a great deal of little-sister worship for this big brother, five years older than I, a minister and the only Ten Boom who had ever been to college. Willem saw things. He knew what was going on in the world.

Much that he saw was frightening. Ten years ago, he had written in his doctoral thesis, done in Germany, that a terrible evil was taking root in that land. Right at the university, he said, seeds were being planted of a contempt for human life such as the world had never seen. Those who read his paper had laughed.

Now people were not laughing about Germany. Most of the good clocks came from there, and recently firms with whom we had dealt for years were simply and mysteriously “out of business.” Willem believed it was part of a deliberate and large-scale move against Jews; every one of the closed businesses was Jewish.

In Hilversum, Willem scrimped and saved enough money to build a home for elderly Jews and the elderly of all faiths. But in the last few months, the home had been deluged with younger arrivals—all Jews and all from Germany. These frightened people brought with them tales of a mounting madness.

I picked up a fresh pot of coffee in the kitchen and continued with it upstairs to Tante Jans' rooms. As I set down the pot, I asked a group of men, "This man in Germany, does he want war?"

I knew it was poor talk for a party. A chill of silence fell over the table.

At that moment Willem entered the room. Behind him came Tine, his wife, and their four children. But every eye in the room settled on the figure whose arm Willem held. The man was a Jew in his thirties in a broad-brimmed black hat and long black coat. His face had been burned. In front of his right ear dangled a gray and frazzled ringlet. The rest of his beard was gone, leaving only a raw wound.

"This is Herr Gutlieber," Willem announced in German. "He just arrived in Hilversum this morning. Herr Gutlieber, my father." Willem continued rapidly in Dutch. "Teenaged boys in Munich set fire to his beard."

Father rose from his chair and eagerly shook the newcomer's hand. I brought him a cup of coffee and a plate of cookies. How grateful I was now for Father's insistence that his children speak German and English almost as soon as Dutch.

Herr Gutlieber sat down stiffly on the edge of a chair and fixed his eyes on the cup in his lap. I pulled up a chair beside him and talked about the weather, and around us conversation began again.

THE HIDING PLACE

And so the shadow fell across us that afternoon in 1937, but it rested lightly. Nobody dreamed that this tiny cloud would grow and that in this darkness each of us would be called to play a role: Father and Betsie and Willem—even the funny old Beje.

That evening, I climbed the stairs to my room. Childhood scenes rushed at me, strangely close and urgent. Today I know that such memories are the key not to the past, but to the future. I know that the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious preparation for the work He will give us to do. But I did not know that then.