

*The*  
**Happening**

**NICKEL MINES SCHOOL TRAGEDY**

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# My Home

Looking back, I still marvel at the absolute beauty of that Monday morning in October. I remember standing outside on our back porch, pegging clothes onto the pulley wash line, the early morning sunshine streaming through the maple trees in our yard and bathing everything with gold.

I heard the sparrows chattering out in the barnyard, squabbling about some important matter like they always do. Somewhere in a high branch a robin sang cheerily, then stopped to scold when a barn cat crept around the corner of the shed.

“Rebecca Sue! Are you finished?” Mom called through the open window.

I bent hastily and grabbed another towel. “Almost,” I replied.

*The Happening*

I could hear the clattering of plates as my ten-year-old sister, Sadie Mae, set the table for breakfast, sprinting around the kitchen table on her quick bare feet.

I gave the clothesline a tug, moving the clothes farther up the incline toward the top of the distant pole Dad had erected to anchor the pulley. Looking out across the fields, I could see someone hanging out wash at the John Beiler place. Maybe it was Hannah, my good friend and schoolmate. I waved my arm to see if anyone was looking my way, but I couldn't see well enough to know who was there. Their clothesline was filling up fast, as was mine. I could picture my friend lifting clean clothes from her wash basket and hanging them up to dry. I would ask her in school if she had seen me.

"Rebecca Sue! Where are you?" Mom's voice—and the hint of impatience in it—jerked me back from my daydreams.

I jumped guiltily. "I'm almost done," I answered.

I know it's sometimes hard on Mom that I get distracted so easily. Mom is so quick and efficient in everything she does. She gets the work done in a hurry. I am slow by nature, and I have to confess that I have a tendency to daydream. I forced my attention back to the laundry, wishing I could be more like Sadie Mae, who, like Mom, could do a lot in a little time.

"Rebecca Sue! Where are you?"

“Elam!” I jumped and whirled around to face my brother. “You scared me!” Elam is two years older than I, and a wonderful tease.

With a nimble leap, he landed on the back porch beside me. Grabbing the last towel from the wash basket, he snapped it toward me. I jumped back, trying to escape the damp towel. I ran around the picnic table to evade my teasing brother.

A giggle from the doorway distracted me. “Rosebud! Are you up already?” I ran toward my three-year-old sister, who was laughing at our antics. But Sadie Mae, dashing out the side door, grabbed her first and ran off the porch, carrying our squealing sister with her, the two laughing with glee.

I darted after them, my bare toes digging into the grass. Suddenly I felt the snap of a towel on my back.

“Elam! Stop that!” I yelled, turning to face his laughter.

Desperate to be in on the fun, Sadie Mae attacked Elam from the back, shoving him and sending him sprawling on the grass.

Rosie had been hastily set down. Now, seeing her big brother lying on the lawn in front of her, she ran over to him and sat on his stomach. Sadie Mae was throwing handfuls of grass onto Elam while dodging his flailing arms. Roxie, our Jack Russell puppy, joined right in, barking shrilly and bouncing up and down on her short legs.

*The Happening*

“Children!” Mom called from the window, “I see Dad and Benuel coming in from the barn. Hurry! Get ready for breakfast!”

Soon all seven of us were gathered around the breakfast table eating our bacon and eggs. It seemed like just another normal day. I have read that sometimes people sense when something terrible is about to happen. Later they look back and realize there were signs warning them of a disaster. But for me, there was nothing. I guess I’m still too young to recognize signs like that.

The picture of that morning is carved into my mind—our family gathered around the table in the big kitchen, talking about everyday things, surrounded by the farmhouse—our home. Framed around that was our farm, including the addition where Mommi and Dawdi, Dad’s parents, lived. Out beyond the frame of this picture was the community in which we lived. Beyond that, the world stretched out into unknown and seemingly endless places.

I wonder how long this picture will remain etched in my mind—the picture of when life was normal and everything was just as it should be.

“Is everyone finished eating?” Dad asked as he folded his arms and looked around the table. “Then quiet.” Silence fell as we bowed our heads and closed our eyes for the prayer that followed every meal.