

JILL WILBUR SMITH

PLAY, PLAYING, PLAYED

It was a Saturday morning like most in my sun-dappled childhood. My siblings and I had eaten our fill of Lucky Charms. The Road Runner was over and the Schoolhouse Rock gang had no more lessons to impart from the RCA console TV that was the centerpiece of our living room. So I imagine the five of us did what most kids did in those days before iPads and video games. We start a game of make believe.

My brother, Greg, seven years older than me, doesn't retreat to his bedroom, but stays to play with my three sisters and me. Dad is puttering in his workshop. Mom is out buying fresh eggs from the farmer just outside of town.

I am the Road Runner. Greg is Wile E. Coyote. I run circles through the living room into the dining room and around the drop-leaf table. He hides in the corners or under the table to try to stop me in my tracks. Shelly, the baby, giggles from the corner of the davenport where she hunkers to stay out of the way. Terri cheers me on. Patty, the oldest, reads her book in the corner, ignoring our antics.

I have the sugar-induced energy of a six-year-old. The activity escalates into one of near hysteria for which I have much more stamina than my brother. He wants to stop the game. But in that way of little sisters who know just where to poke, exactly the right way to aggravate and tease until someone breaks, I don't give up.

"Let's play. Let's play," I taunt, running circles around him. "Beep, beep."

"You are getting crazy, Jill," my brother states.

"Am not. Am not. Beep, beep."

"You need to calm down now."

"Do not. Do not. Beep, beep."

"This isn't fun anymore."

"Is too. Is too. Beep, beep."

"I'm going to call the loony bin on you if you don't stop."