

# Wagon Wheeler

*The change in Tommy's racer surprised everyone — even Tommy.*

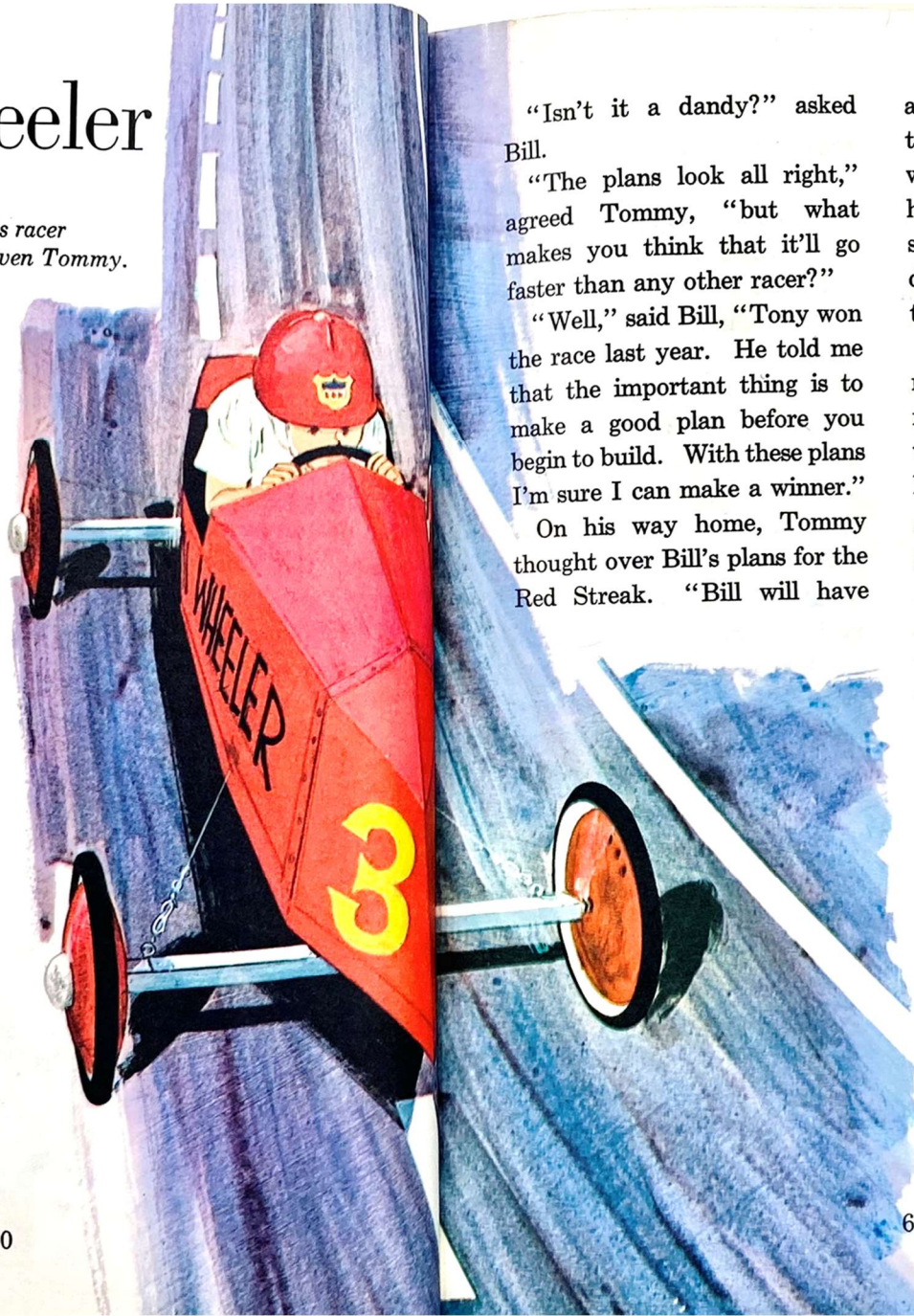
Bill Rogers was excited. "But, Tommy," he exclaimed, "think of the prizes and what fun it would be!"

"Oh, the prizes are great, and I'd like to enter the race. But I can't spend money on new wheels and the other things I'd need to make a soap box racer," answered Tommy.

Bill looked disappointed. He wanted Tommy White to be in the Soap Box Derby. "We'll think of some way for you to make a racer," he said. "Come on over to my house now and look at my plans for the Red Streak."

Tommy was eleven years old and was old enough this year to enter the Soap Box Derby. Bill was thirteen. He had raced before.

Over at Bill's house, the boys looked at the plans for Bill's Red Streak.



"Isn't it a dandy?" asked Bill.

"The plans look all right," agreed Tommy, "but what makes you think that it'll go faster than any other racer?"

"Well," said Bill, "Tony won the race last year. He told me that the important thing is to make a good plan before you begin to build. With these plans I'm sure I can make a winner."

On his way home, Tommy thought over Bill's plans for the Red Streak. "Bill will have

a good-looking racer," he said to himself, "but I wonder if it will be fast. I don't think Bill has paid enough attention to streamlining. I'll bet I could draw plans for a faster racer than the Red Streak."

The next evening Tommy's mother looked up from her mending and said, "Tommy, what are you up to? You haven't said a word all evening. And what have you been putting on that paper?"

Tommy grinned. "Soap Box Derby comes next month," he answered. "Bill has plans for a racer, and I thought that I could make better plans than his. I know I can't build a racer, but I'd like to give it a try."

"Why can't you build a racer?" asked Mrs. White. "You're very good at making things."

"It would cost too much," answered Tommy. "The wheels cost a lot."

"Aren't there any old wheels in the cellar that you could use?" asked his mother.



"I suppose I could use the wheels off my old wagon," Tommy replied. "I know that wheels sold just for Soap Box Derby racers are much better, but those old wheels might be strong enough. I could call my car Wagon Wheeler."

"You'd enjoy making a racer," said his mother. "Why don't you try?"

For a few minutes Tommy just sat thinking. "I'll need some metal axles and a steering wheel," he said. "Maybe I could find them at Minelli's Junk Yard. I could use that heavy cardboard in the cellar for the outside."

"Mr. Minelli probably would let you work for him to pay for what you need," suggested Mrs. White.

"I think he would, at that," said Tommy. "His place needs a lot of straightening-up. I'll ask him tomorrow."

The idea turned out to be a good one, and soon Tommy was very busy building his racer. Several days later Bill was watching Tommy at work.

"What are you doing with those old wagon wheels?" asked Bill.

"Spinning them," was Tommy's short reply.

"What for?" continued Bill.

"I'm spinning them on the axles I'm going to use on my racer," answered Tommy. "The wheels were a little tight on the axles at first. But just look at them spin now. Of course, they still aren't as strong as the new regulation wheels that you bought. I guess they'll hold up for the race, though."

"Are you sure it's all right to use those wheels?" questioned Bill.

"Yes, these wheels are all right. I went down to the newspaper office and showed them to Mr. Lane. He is managing the race for the *News*. He said it wouldn't be against the rules to use them."

"That's O.K., then, if he says so," said Bill. He bent down and looked closely at the rim of a wheel. "Say! Why in the world did you drill little holes in that wheel?"

Tommy laughed. "I got that idea from the Soap Box Derby Rule Book. It says you can balance a wheel by drilling holes in it. This wheel was too heavy on one side. It always stopped with the same part down. Since I've drilled the holes in the heavy side, it spins evenly."

Tommy worked every evening on his racer until it was ready to try. Then he took it over to Granite Street hill.

"My Wagon Wheeler isn't much to look at," he thought as he pushed his racer along. "I hope none of the gang will be there. I know the boys would make fun of the cardboard covering."

But at the top of the hill Tommy found three other boys with racers. One boy, Jack Daniels, was older than the other two. He had raced in the derby last year and had nearly won.

All the boys came over to look at Tommy's Wagon Wheeler.

"What's that supposed to be?" asked Jack.

Tommy kept quiet, but the



*"Since I've drilled the holes, it spins evenly."*

other two boys laughed.

"You aren't thinking of entering a thing like that in the derby, are you?" went on Jack. "Why, it wouldn't get to the bottom of the hill. Look at those wheels! And look how narrow the thing is! I'll bet you can hardly get into it!"

Still Tommy said nothing.

"I'll race you down the hill right now," said Jack, "and I'll give you a head start."

Tommy didn't want to race. He hadn't tried his racer, and he didn't know how fast it could go. However, he couldn't let





*Both cars began to roll.*

Jack think he was afraid. "I'll race you," he said, "but I don't need any head start. I can beat you without it."

Jack's racer, Silver Arrow, was beautiful. Tommy looked it over as he lined Wagon Wheeler up beside it.

Jack turned to the other boys. "Jimmy, you hold my car, and, George, you hold Tommy's car while we get in," he said. "Then I'll count three and say 'Go!' Both of you let go at the same time."

Tommy got in and grabbed his steering wheel tightly. Jack counted to three and shouted, "Go!" Both cars began to roll. Tommy looked over at the Silver Arrow. It was moving right along. In fact, it was moving much faster than Wagon

Wheeler. Tommy felt a lump come into his throat, but he swallowed hard and made up his mind to be a good sport and finish the race.

Jack was waiting for him at the foot of the hill.

"You put the right name on that old racer!" he shouted.

Tommy forced himself to grin. "I guess my old wheels just aren't fast enough," he managed to say. "Your Silver Arrow can really travel!"

For several days after that race Tommy moped around the house. He was discouraged. Nothing interested him. He had planned and planned on the Soap Box Derby. Now he wished he had never agreed to enter it.

His friend Bill did his best to cheer him up. "I'll race my Red Streak for both of us," he said.

"No," said Tommy. "I can't let you do that. I'll race my own car or stay out."

"Why don't you try to get regulation wheels for your racer?" Bill asked.

"I've thought of that," answered Tommy. "But even if I could afford to buy a new set, I wouldn't have time to break them in. The race is the day after tomorrow."

Bill shrugged his shoulders. Then he said something that started Tommy thinking. "Are you sure the trouble is with the wheels?" he asked. "Maybe something else is wrong."

Tommy looked thoughtful a moment. "That gives me an idea to work on," he said.

The day of the race was clear and sunny. Half the people in town seemed to be gathered at Granite Street hill. A special

starting ramp had been built, and the street had been marked off in three lanes for the racers.

When Tommy arrived, most of the cars belonging to boys in Class B — boys eleven and twelve — had already been checked and weighed with their drivers. Tommy watched the men go over his car. One of the men looked at Tommy. "That's quite a car you've built, son. Is it fast?"

"It wasn't a few days ago," answered Tommy, "but I made a little change last night that may help."

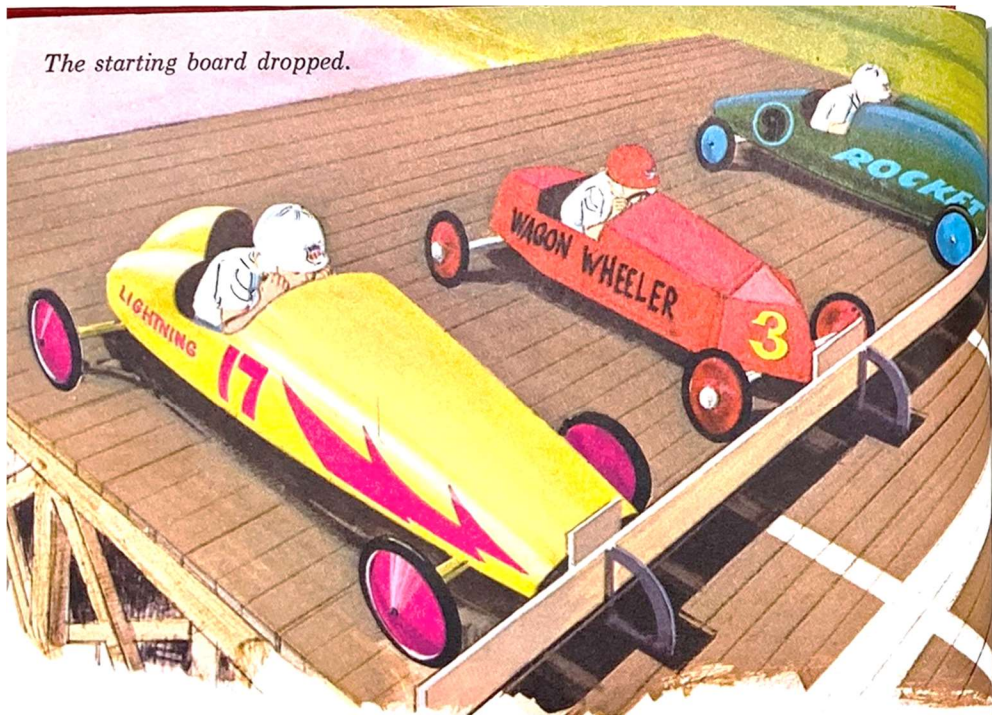
Tommy and his car weighed in at 249 pounds. "You're just one pound under the limit,



*Tommy and his car weighed in.*



The starting board dropped.



Tommy," said Mr. Lane of the *News*. "That's good planning."

There were six boys in Class B, but there were only three lanes. That meant that there would be two races of three boys each. The winners of the two heats would have to race each other to decide the Class B championship.

Tommy drew a place in the first heat. On the starting ramp he looked at the two cars his Wagon Wheeler was to race. One was low and flat. It looked

very fast and sporty. The other was a teardrop shape. It looked fast, too.

When the get-ready signal was given, Tommy gripped his wheel hard and pushed himself away down in his car. The Wagon Wheeler was so narrow that it wasn't very comfortable. But what was comfort compared to winning a race like this?

Suddenly the starting board dropped and the racers were off. At first Tommy kept his eyes right on his lane. He knew that

he must steer a straight course. As his car rolled down the track, he realized that it was picking up speed much faster than it had in the trial run against Jack Daniels. Tommy glanced quickly to the right. He was holding his own with the flat, low car. Then he gave a quick look to the left. The teardrop seemed to be dropping behind! Right then Tommy realized that his little change was a success. He settled down to watching his own lane.

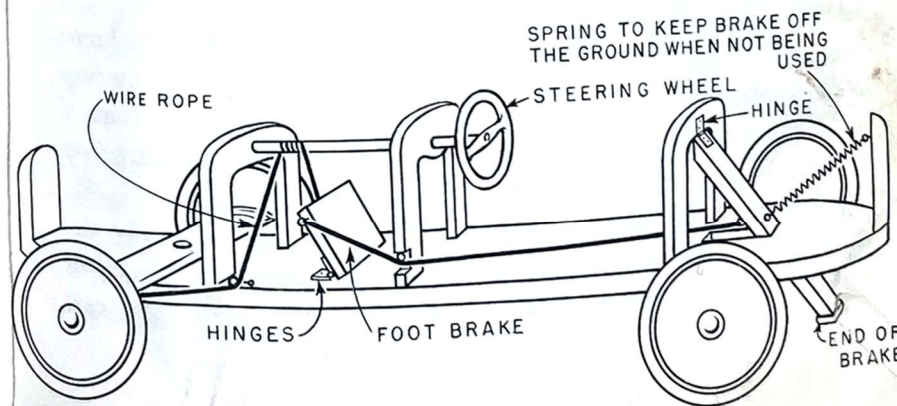
The next thing Tommy knew, he was over the finish line and pushing gently on his brake. Over the loud-speaker the announcer was saying, "Tommy White and Wagon Wheeler first by half a length!"

"Well," thought Tommy, "at least I have a chance to be Class B champion."

He watched the second heat for Class B eagerly. The winner was another eleven-year-old in a green racer. Tommy thought that his Wagon Wheeler could beat that green racer, and sure enough, it did when the two Class B winners raced down the hill. Tommy was Class B champion! If he could beat the Class A champion, he would be city champion!

There were three heats for the boys in Class A — boys thirteen to fifteen. Both Jack Daniels and Bill drew a place in the first Class A heat. Tommy waved at Bill and held up two crossed

### PLAN FOR A SOAP BOX RACER





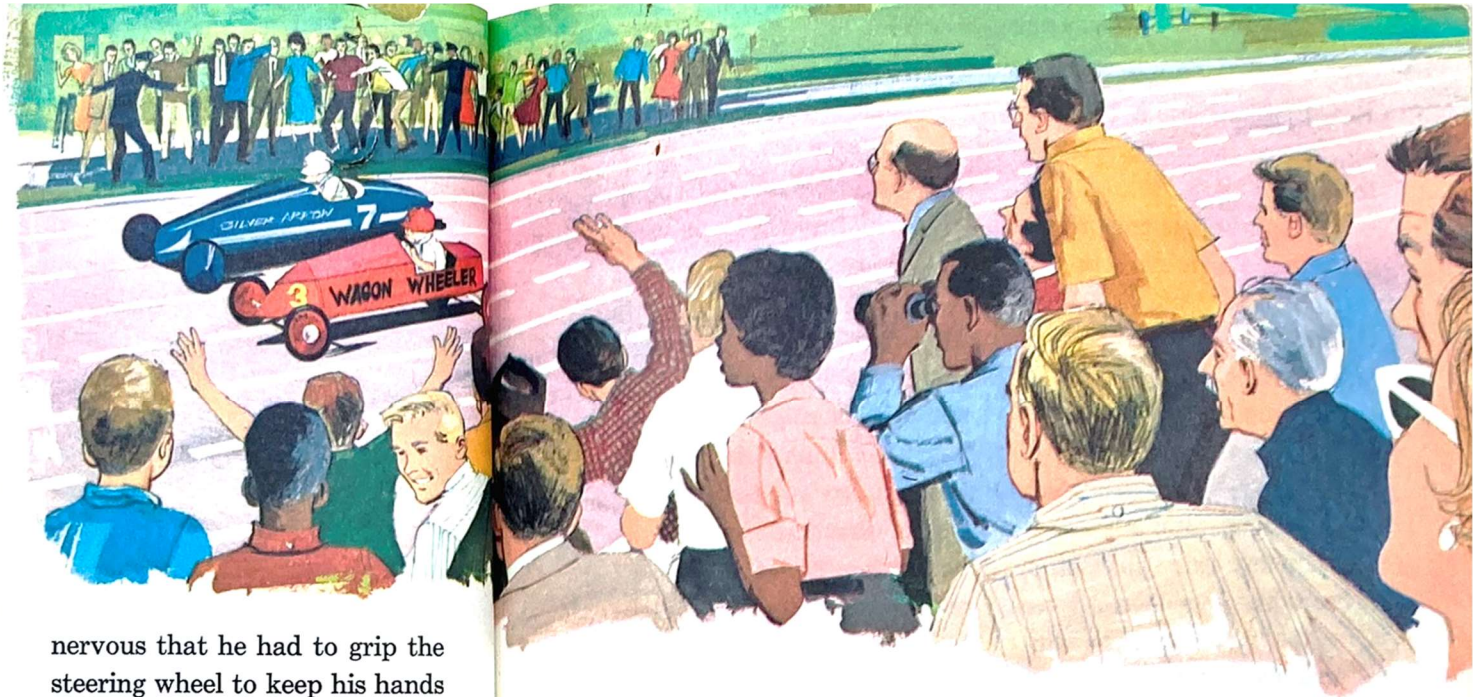
fingers. How he wished that Bill's car would beat Jack's!

As the starting board dropped, Bill's car edged ahead of Jack's Silver Arrow. Tommy's heart beat rapidly. But slowly the streamlining of the beautiful Silver Arrow proved its worth. The Silver Arrow gained steadily on the Red Streak and then passed it. The third car in the race was behind both of them. As the Silver Arrow flashed across the finish line, it was nearly a full length in front.

Tommy's heart sank. Would he have to race Jack Daniels? Perhaps one of the winners of the next two heats would be Class A champion. But if someone beat the Silver Arrow, that racer would be even faster than Jack's.

Jack was sure of himself and his racer, and he might well have been, for the final race for Class A made Jack Class A champion.

All too soon the Silver Arrow and the Wagon Wheeler were in position for the final race — the race to decide who would be the city champion. Tommy was so



nervous that he had to grip the steering wheel to keep his hands from shaking. Jack Daniels looked very calm and sure of himself.

Just then Tommy caught sight of Bill. Bill shouted something at him, but there was so much noise that Tommy couldn't hear what it was.

"He probably wants to know what I did to speed up my old Wagon Wheeler," Tommy thought. "He'll be surprised when he finds out."

There was the get-ready signal! Tommy crouched down in the cockpit of his car.

Down went the starting board. Both cars moved off together.

Tommy could feel the air rushing by him. He was really moving. "I'm traveling faster than ever," he thought.

He glanced at the Silver Arrow. Wagon Wheeler seemed to be just about even with it. "That Silver Arrow is some racer," thought Tommy. "But I think mine has speed, even if it isn't so fancy."

Tommy crouched still lower, trying to cut down any wind resistance his head and shoul-

*Tommy was really moving.*

ders might be making. He looked again at Jack, and noticed now that the Wagon Wheeler seemed to be pulling away from the Silver Arrow.

"Come on, Wagon Wheeler," he thought. "You can beat Silver Arrow!"

From then on Tommy kept his eyes right on his lane. The finish line was not far away now.



He sat low and still in the cockpit, leaving the rest of the race to his car.

Not until he was crossing the finish line did he dare to look over at Jack again. He was amazed to see that the Silver Arrow had dropped a whole length behind him.

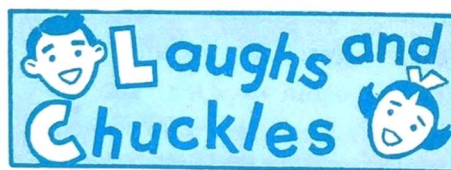
"Why, I've won!" gasped Tommy. "I've beaten Jack Daniels!"

As Tommy came to a stop, he heard the announcer's voice above the cheering: "The winner and city champion, ladies and gentlemen, is Tommy White and his Wagon Wheeler."

That night Bill went over to Tommy's house to talk about the race. "What did you do to that old broken-down racer to make it run so fast?" Bill asked.

"A little simple doctoring," answered Tommy. "When you asked me if something besides the wheels might be wrong, I began to think. I remembered that my car started off all right in my first race against Jack, but it didn't pick up speed fast enough. I figured that it needed to weigh more. I got a good big piece of metal and bolted it behind the seat. That really made the Wagon Wheeler roll."

THE END



TINY: Smarty, why were you late for school this morning?

SMARTY: Well, you see, there are eight people in our family . . .

TINY: Yes?

SMARTY: And the alarm was set for seven.

SILLY: Why did the man call his old car "baby"?

SILLIER: I don't know. Why?

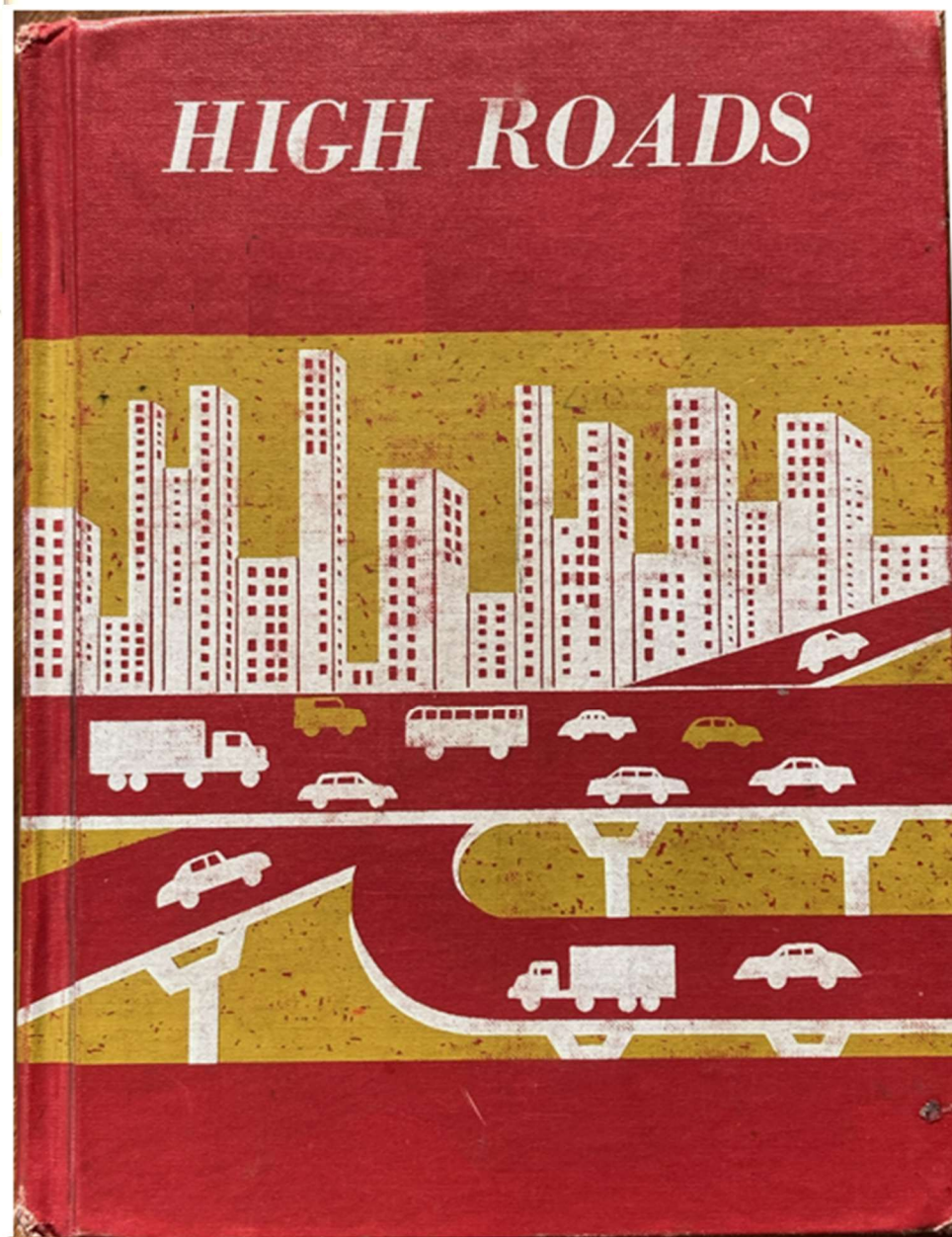
SILLY: Because it never went anywhere without a rattle.

★

SILLY: Now tell me what keeps a forest from ever being silent.

SILLIER: That's too hard for me. What's the answer?

SILLY: The bark of the trees.





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