

# The MOTOR BOYS

CHAPTER XVIII

A Leap for Life

by Clarence Young.  
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"HURRAH!" cried Andy the next morning, bursting into the room where the three chums had slept. "Hurrah! It's a fine day! Rain all stopped—sun shines—sorry to see you fellows go—come again!"

"Take it easy," advised Jerry. "We're very much obliged to you, Andy, for providing this fine shelter for us. Wish you were going along."

"So do I—can't though—got to stay here another week—help run the farm—maybe I'll be a farmer some day—whoop!"

In spite of the storm, which had been an unusually severe one, the roads were in fairly good shape. Now and then a stretch would be reached where speed had to be slackened but, by picking their way, the machines were pushed along at a good rate. Huntsville was reached in about two hours, and the boys left their machines in charge of a store keeper while they walked about the town viewing the sights.

There was not much to be seen, and they had come more for the sake of saying they had ridden the distance than from any other reason. Purchasing a few souvenirs for the folks at home, and buying some sandwiches in case they might not find a convenient eating place, the boys prepared for the return trip.

"We'll take a little different way on our back trip," said Jerry. "I know a road that goes past a fine waterfall that's worth seeing."

The falls were about 50 feet high, and, with the jagged rocks over which the water flowed, and the trees on either side, made a picture well worth beholding.

The boys stopped for half an hour, watching the leaping, falling water, which possessed a peculiar fascination. Then, as they still had most of their trip before them, Jerry suggested they had better start.

They had not yet turned into the road leading to Cresville, from which they had diverged in order to visit the falls, when riding along a rather lonely stretch of the highway, the boys came in sight of a white house, with no other residences near it. As they came opposite a man suddenly ran from the front door. He seemed greatly excited.

"Stop!" he called to the boys. "Stop, for heaven's sake!"

There was so much anguish in his tone that the boys knew something must have happened.

"What is it?" asked Jerry, riding up to the front gate and dismounting.

"It's my wife! She has just been taken very sick and I'm all alone here. I need a doctor, but I dare not leave her to get one, and I have no one to send. I saw you coming down the road and I thought maybe you would help me."

"Of course we will," replied Jerry, heartily. "Where does the doctor live? I'll ride after him."

"His house is about two miles from here," said the man. "It's the first one after you cross the white bridge. Oh! Hurry, and tell him to be quick! I'm afraid my wife is dying! Tell him to come to Mr. Johnson's! Oh! What shall I do?" and the unfortunate man showed so much distress that the hearts of the boys were touched.

"Don't worry," Jerry advised. "I'll make good time. Ned and Bob will stay with you. Maybe they will be of some help."

Springing into the saddle, Jerry started his machine and soon had it going at a good rate. Because of the condition of the roads, which were not in the best of shape, he dared not push the motor to the limit. Ned and Bob followed the man into the house, willing to do what they could.

Meanwhile Jerry rode on. A turn of the road soon hid the lonely farm house from sight. The grade was up hill for a way, and the machine did not make such good time.

"I must hurry," reasoned the boy. "I hope I find the doctor at home."

In a few minutes Jerry had come to the top of the hill. At the foot of the slope, which was about half a mile in extent, the boy saw a white bridge that spanned a narrow but swift running stream.

"Here goes!" cried Jerry. He was about to coast at half speed down the hill, when a voice suddenly called: "Stop!"



"I can't!" shouted back Jerry. "I'm hurrying for the doctor!"

The boy turned to see who had warned him, and saw a farmer hurrying across the field toward him. Something in his manner caused Jerry to dismount.

"You can't get across the bridge!" cried the man. "It's broken. If you ride down that hill you'll be killed! I stopped you just in time!"

Jerry felt his heart sink. "The rains made the creek rise," explained the man. "The farther span of the bridge was carried away last night. There's a sign just this side of it warning people, but if you rode down on that lickity split thing I knew you'd never see the sign until it was too late."

"I'm much obliged to you," said Jerry. "But I must cross that stream. A lady back there," pointing in the direction he had come, "is dying. I'm after the doctor."

"That's bad," said the man. "But I don't see how you're going to do it." "Is the missing span of the bridge too wide for me to jump across?" asked Jerry, a sudden idea coming into his head.

"It's 15 feet," replied the man. "That's too much for you I reckon. And if you didn't make it you'd be killed, for the current is very swift, and the creek is full of rocks."

"Can't we get planks and bridge the gap?" asked the boy in desperation. "Something must be done."

"I'm on my way to get men to mend the break now," the man said. "But it will take some time."

"Isn't there another bridge near here?"

"Not one within five miles either way," was the answer. "I'm very sorry, my boy. Is the sick woman any relation of yours?"

"No, her husband stopped me as I was riding past the house with my two chums, and begged us to hurry after a doctor."

"Well, I'll go after some planks," said the man, "but it may take two hours to get 'em here. I'll have to hunt for 'em."

Slowly Jerry rode his motor down to

the white structure that spanned the now swollen and swiftly running stream. As the man had said the last span of the bridge, on the side farthest from Jerry, had been carried away. It was the part which had extended from the shore to the stone abutment.

The boy carefully examined the ruined bridge. There were planks on the floor, but they were firmly spiked down, and none of them seemed long enough. To leap the gap was a feat beyond Jerry's ability, though a professional jumper might have done it.

"If the stream wasn't so swift I could swim it," the boy murmured. "But it's too risky. Besides, even if I got over, I wonder how the doctor is to come back? Though I guess I can manage that. He can bring some planks with him, and walk over on them. That part will be all right if I can only get across."

But Jerry had to admit that the problem was a difficult one to solve. He looked at the bridge with sorrow in his heart as he thought of the man waiting anxiously for the doctor.

"I simply must get across!" exclaimed the boy.

As he walked to the edge of the structure, looking in vain for a plank that would serve, Jerry noticed a strange trick that the water had played. In tearing away the far span the timbers that remained resting on the stone abutment had been loosened. This caused the middle of what was left of the bridge to sag or dip down to a considerable degree.

All at once a daring thought came to Jerry. He looked at the sagging bridge, at the gap where the span was missing, and at the angry waters that swirled between him and the other shore. Then he turned and looked back at the hill which came to an end right at the bridge.

"I have it!" cried the boy, his eyes shining with excitement. "If I only dare do it! I will do it!"

He hurried back to where he had left his motorcycle. He started it in motion and rode slowly back up the hill which he had just descended. Any one seeing him and not knowing his plan might have thought he had given

up in despair. But Jerry was not that kind of a boy.

When he looked at the broken and sagging bridge he had suddenly thought of a trick he had seen performed in a circus that had exhibited in Cresville. This was where a man on a bicycle had started down a steep, incline of boards to accomplish what was billed as "a leap for life." The incline was broken about three-quarters of the way down, making a gap. Just before the gap was reached there was a dip or curve in the incline. Across the gap the incline was continued at a slight angle.

The principle on which the feat was performed was that the man on the bicycle, rushing down the incline, would get momentum enough to shoot across the gap. To prevent the wheel and rider from falling from the attraction of gravitation while it was flying across the space, the end of the incline was curved upward. This served to shoot the machine and man into the air and overcame, for the time necessary to speed across the gap, the pull of the earth.

And in a crude way Jerry saw before him all the elements that went to make up the trick as it is performed in many circuses.

The hill made the incline. The sag in the middle of the bridge and the little rise at the further abutment gave the necessary upward curve that would throw Jerry and his motor far enough into the air to prevent him tumbling into the stream. The missing span was the gap corresponding to the one in the inclined plane of boards, and the road on the farther shore would make him a good landing place.

"I guess I can do it as well as that man in the circus," exclaimed Jerry. "It's a risk, I know; but I can't stay here and wait two hours for that man to bring the planks."

He was soon at the top of the hill. He looked around to see if any one was in sight to aid him if he failed; but the roads were deserted.

"I must put on full speed," thought the boy. "I'll need all the momentum I can get."

He turned his machine to face down the slope. For a moment he hesitated as he looked at what was before him. But, steeling his heart and uttering a short prayer, he leaped into the saddle.

"Here I go," thought Jerry. He turned the motor to full speed and soon was racing down the hill at a fearful pace. "There's no stopping now," he murmured.

How the wind sang in his ears! The motor fairly hummed beneath him and the big tires threw up a shower of mud. On and on rushed the boy. Nearer and nearer he came to the broken bridge. He heard a shout behind him, but he dared not turn to see who it was.

He was 20 feet from the spot where the road ended and the bridge began. He wanted to shut his eyes, but he knew he must guide the motor with a firm and steady hand. He gripped the steering bars with all his might. There was a whizz as the rubber tires struck the wooden planking of the bridge. Jerry felt himself going down as he reached the sagging middle of the broken structure.

Then, like a stone fired from some ancient catapult, he felt his machine rise under him, shoot up into the air and sail across the gap.

For one instant Jerry looked down at the black swirling waters below him. Then with a terrific thud he felt himself land on the road across the missing span.

He had made the leap for life and succeeded!

So swiftly was the machine going that even the shock of the landing in the road beyond the broken bridge did not check it. On and on it rushed until Jerry, whose breath had been almost shaken from him by the concussion, turned off the power.

"But I must not stop!" cried the boy. "I'm safely across, and I've got to get the doctor!"

So, turning on the power again, he sent the motor flying down the road. Three-quarters of a mile further he came to the first house. There was a sign on it:

"Dr. John Rand."  
"Is the doctor in?" gasped Jerry, barely able to stand as he leaped from his machine and rang the bell, which was answered by a woman.

"Yes; right in his office," was the answer.

"Tell him he's wanted at once! Mrs. Johnson is dying!"

"But I can't get across the bridge; it is broken," said Doctor Rand, who had come from his office in time to hear Jerry's message.

"I got across," exclaimed the boy. "Quick, doctor! You must hurry! Take a long plank along and you can get over the gap!"

"But if I did get across, how am I to get my horse over? He can't walk a plank," objected the medicine man. "It will take a long time for me to walk to Mrs. Johnson's."

Once more it looked as if Jerry had failed.

(To Be Continued Next Week.)