

Albert Payson Terhune



*A Dog Named Chips:
The Life and
Adventures
of a Mongrel Scamp*

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CHAPTER I

The Coming of Chips

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She had begun life, as far as any record can be found, tucked under the right arm of a mangy-looking man. The man stood on a New York street corner with her, when no policeman was in sight, and strolled along the busy shopping-block with an air of aloof preoccupation whenever a patrolman chanced to glance toward him.

Under the mangy man's left arm was tucked another fuzzy puppy. Both pups were scrubbed and combed to a fictitious state of clean fluffiness. Each of them was adorned with a huge scarlet neck-ribbon.

It was the little doglet under the vender's right arm that drew the bulk of such attention as passers-by bestowed. For she had the wistfulest eyes and the pudgiest body and the most appealingly lovable air imaginable.

Mrs. Johannes Crake was piloting her two children through the milling sidewalk throng, on the way to the Pennsylvania Station and thence to her suburban home, at the end of a nerve-frazzling day of shopping.

Suddenly Mrs. Crake found herself brought to anchor, through no volition of her own. This because both children had come to an abrupt halt. As Mrs. Crake was holding tightly to a hand of each of them, their halt entailed hers.

Oblivious of her absent-minded commands to get into motion again, Carlie and Stella Crake were staring upward in

rapt interest at the two pups under the mangy man's arms.

Without seeming to note their fascinated gaze, the man stopped directly in front of them and fell to rearranging the scarlet bow on the neck of the puppy under his right arm. It was on this wistfully lovable puppy that the children's round eyes were fixed.

With reluctance Mrs. Crake came out of a bothersomely engrossing set of calculations as to whether she had left the umbrella at the candy-shop lunchroom or at the department store before the department store whereat she had missed it.

It was her sister-in-law's umbrella, at that. She had borrowed it, early in the morning, when she started for New York, and without the formality of asking leave. She knew, wherever she had lost it, there was less than no use in going back to make inquiries.

Then it was that a dual clamor of admiration from the children brought her to reality. This and the fact that her hold on their hands prevented her from moving onward. Motherwise, a single glance at the pudgily fluffy pup told her the reason for the halt and for the clamor.

"No!" her incisive voice cut through her offsprings' pleadings. "No, dears. You CANNOT have him. Now, don't tease any more! Mamma has such a frightful headache and we must hurry for our train and——"

Carlie burst into a torrent of high-pitched pleading. The gist of his harangue was that if he could have that grand puppy for Stella and himself he wouldn't ask for a single other Christmas present; and that if he could not have it, then mamma might as well throw away any Yule gifts she

might be planning for him, for he wouldn't touch one of them.

Stella hit on an even more efficient method for winning her mother's consent to the buying of the fuzzy pup. Throwing herself face downward, in her best winter coat, on the sidewalk among the numberless tramping feet of the shoppers, she lifted her voice to high heaven in a series of hysterical screeches, keeping time to her vocal rhythm by banging her stubby patent-leather toes furiously upon the pavement.

"Your pretty little folks seems to have took a reel fancy to this dawg, mum," volunteered the mangy man as Mrs. Crake endeavored to haul Stella to her feet and to silence the double din, and as passers-by stopped to watch grinningly the embarrassing scene. "Seems 'most a shame not to buy it for 'em. Pure Saint Bernard, this pup, mum. I paid me a cool century for it, last month. But I'm kind of pressed for cash just now. It's yours for ten small round dollars, mum, and a sacrifice at that."

"Gee!" proclaimed a fat man in the fast-gathering crowd—a man who seemed to have lunched well and none too dryly—"Gee! If I had kids like that, and a ten-spot present would make them happy—why, me, I couldn't get the cash out of my pocket quick enough. Folks that can't bother to make children happy haven't any right to children, say I."

He addressed nobody in particular; but in this pre-holiday concourse his words evoked a wordless murmur of assent. A prim woman in black touched the horribly exasperated Mrs. Johannes Crake on the arm.

“It’s none of my business, madam,” she sighed, “but the day may come when you’ll look back more happily on having gotten your children a gift they cried for than on saving money by not doing it. I know what I’m talking about,” she finished, pointing with much pathos to the mourning she wore.

Again that wordless murmur from the ever-thickening knot of onlookers. Carlie and Stella ceased to wince at the echoes and peered longingly once more at the wistful pup. Something told them their case was in far abler hands than theirs.

“Seeing that Christmas is coming on, mum,” wheedled the vender, “and seeing your two darling angels has took such a fondness to this grand little dog, I’ll let you have it for *eight* dollars, cash, mum. If you was my own daughter, I couldn’t do more for you than offer the puppy to you for that; grand-looking and pretty as you are. I——”

“Hey!” spake the bibulous fat man. “How about us taking up a little collection and getting the pup for the kids, if their mommer can’t afford to? I’ll lead off with a two-spot. I sure do hate to see a kid cry. Especially ’round Christmas-time. How about it?”

Throughout the crowd there was a semi-general movement toward cash pockets. The two children sought to smile in cherubic gratitude on the fat man. They succeeded in achieving a resemblance to two smugly hypocritical little gargoyles.

Mrs. Johannes Crake’s plump visage deepened from pink to red, from red to blackened purple. Devoutly she prayed

there might be no people from her own suburb in the tight-packed crowd about them.

It was bad enough to be made hideously conspicuous like this by her two spoiled children, right here in a public street, without having a collection taken up for their benefit. She went dizzy with the infuriating shame of it.

To cut short the nightmare experience in the quickest and easiest and cheapest way, she opened her wristbag, yanked therefrom a ten-dollar bill, thrust it loathingly at the vender, and permitted him to lower the fuzzy little wisp of doghood into the avidly upstretched arms of Carlie and Stella—who well-nigh dismembered the luckless puppy by struggling with each other for the bliss of carrying him.

On the way to the station there was a scarce less vehement struggle, verbal, this time, between the youngsters, as to what the puppy should be named. Carlie wanted to call it Lindbergh. But Stella held out for Evangeline, which, to her, was the most sonorously fascinating of names.

They called on mamma to arbitrate. But mamma was past speech. She was conserving such few energies as she still had, for the ensuing clash with Johannes Crake over her mushiness in letting herself be whipsawed into buying a pedigreeless she-dog.

For this and for the task of explaining to her sister-in-law how she had chanced to borrow an eleven-dollar umbrella without asking leave, and then how she had been so abominably careless as to lose it somewhere.

This was no time for merry badinage with her loving children as to the naming of a hated beast.

Left to themselves, Carlie and Stella blundered upon a compromise which satisfied them both. On a magazine cover, as they were hurried through the Pennsylvania Station on the way to their train, they beheld a photograph. Under it, in letters large and plain enough for both of them to read as they ran, was the name, "BABE RUTH."

Stella thought it a lovely name for the dog. It suggested fluffiness and dainty beauty. Carlie, more sophisticated, knew it stood for a hero whom he admired as much as he admired Lindbergh himself. So, without a dissenting vote, the new-bought puppy became Babe Ruth. "Ruth" for short.

This is not a super-realistic war chronicle, nor the day-by-day tale of rancorous internecine strife. Hence the homecoming of Mrs. Johannes Crake and of her son and daughter and of Babe Ruth can be slurred over mercifully and with no damage to the general plot.

The wrath of Mrs. Crake's sister-in-law over the misappropriated umbrella; the mockery-streaked diatribe of Johannes Crake as to the wasting of ten good dollars in these hard times on the purchase of a fifteen-cent mongrel pup, and his freely expressed opinion of his whimpering wife's attributes as a child-trainer and a salary-saver—are they not written, or smeared, into the slimy chronicles of a myriad households like the Crakes'?

Suppose we let it go at that, except to say that the blameless storm-center of the wholesale family squabble was a bewildered and hungry and thirsty and frightened and homesick baby female puppy, a puppy alternately mauled and neglected by its two juvenile owners, and scorned by everyone else under the Crake roof.

A pure-bred dog of the same age would have died from the neglect or would have developed running fits from the mauling. But most mongrels are uncannily hardy, even as the best of them are uncannily clever.

This is one reason why Babe Ruth not only lived, but changed swiftly from pudgy appealingness to scrawnily wiry adolescence. The other reason for her survival is that the cook of the house next door to the Crakes' had a heart the size and softness of three overripe watermelons.

This cook saw the grievous plight of the unwanted and ill-treated Babe Ruth. Surreptitiously she sneaked huge nourishing platefuls of table scraps, daily, to the puppy's packing-box kennel behind the Crake home.

Yes, and when the Crakes were absent the cook would tiptoe over to the kennel and gather the unhappy pup into her ample arms and croon to her and pet her and feed her red bits of steak-end and the like.

(For which—somewhere a trillion miles beyond the frontier of the stars—Some One snatched up a rainbow-tipped celestial pen and drew swift obliterating lines across the Judgment Book's black page which contained that same cook's life record; canceling a long list of such sins as petty pilfering and gin-guzzling and lying and lesser and greater evils, and writing in a bold hand at the bottom of the once-damnatory sheet: "*She helped the helpless. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me.'*")

So matters went on for the greater part of a year. The once-fluffy and appealing bunch of puppyhood was a leggy cur. It would have taken a clairvoyant, rather than a dog

expert, to tell what breeds had gone into the make-up of Babe Ruth's cosmos. Without doubt, the blood of fifty champions ran in her non-azure veins. But if there were fifty such champions, they belonged to at least fifty breeds.

Yet she was gentle and friendly and wise and, in her own way, beautiful. Her wistful dark eyes mirrored a soul.

A professional dog-fancier would have sneered at her, as did Johannes Crake. A man or woman in whose brain was the understanding of dog-nature would have welcomed her eagerly as a pal and would have developed the latent wisdom and loveliness of her nature and would have made her supremely happy.

But there was no such understander of dog-souls in or near the Crake domicile, except the cook next door. And the cook could only feed the lanky body and soothe the ever-tormented feelings of Babe Ruth.

Then, one evening, when Johannes Crake came home from a month's trip on the road for the firm which hired him, he took a long and comprehensive look at Babe Ruth, and came to a Napoleonic decision. To his wife he said, disgustedly:

"Here's where I do what you've been at me to do. I'd have done it long ago if it wasn't that the brats both bawled so every time I hinted at it. I knew if I got rid of her, they wouldn't give us any peace till we got them another. And the other, most likely, would have been no better than this one when it grew up. But I've been watching both of them for quite a while. And I had a talk with them tonight before they went to bed. They're sick and tired of the mutt. They want a couple of rabbits instead. They told me so. They

promised to give up Babe Ruth if I'd promise to bring them home the rabbits from New York tomorrow night. They——”

“Yes, they told me the same thing, last week. I——”

“It was bad enough to have this cur on our hands, and having folks laugh at us for owning such a dog. But in another few days there'll be a full half-dozen more mutts, just like her or maybe worse, if we don't get rid of her. I'm taking her for a ride. Don't sit up for me.”

A few minutes later Johannes Crake crossed from the garage to Babe Ruth's kennel-box in the back yard. With no gentleness at all, but with no undue roughness, he picked up the sleeping mongrel by the scruff of the neck and carried her bodily to where his battered motor-coupé stood with engine running.

He lifted her aboard and climbed into the machine, closing its door behind him and stepping on the gas.

Babe Ruth came out of dreamland to find her owner carrying her toward the car. From the fact that he swung her by the scruff she augured a beating, perhaps a series of kicks.

But, to her relieved surprise, he merely laid her on the seat of the coupé and got into it beside her and started off toward the dark country beyond.

This was Babe Ruth's first experience at motoring. Like nine dogs in ten, she thrilled to it. In gratitude for the outing and for the unhoped-for immunity from a beating, she sat up and strove to lick the man's face.

He thrust her aside, but with less than his wonted aversion, and with almost no roughness at all.

She cuddled back onto the springy car-seat; and gave herself over to the joy of the brand-new experience of spinning through miles of darkness through no effort at all. Drowsily, happily, she cuddled against Crake's side, reveling in the ride and in his absence of hostility.

Perhaps he and she were going to be dear friends, after all. Again she sought to lick his face. Again he pushed her away; but not roughly.

For perhaps twenty miles the ancient coupé chugged on through the night; at first over smooth roads, but, later, on narrower and bumpier byways. Then Johannes Crake brought the car to a standstill midway across a bridge which spanned a narrow river. Stooping down to the floor, he lifted a clock weight, to which was tied a stout cord.

This cord he wound about Babe Ruth's neck; tying it firmly. Apparently it was some new game he was teaching her. The dog tried to play her part in it by patting friskily at his hands and by wagging her tail with much vehemence. He slapped her into cringing movelessness.

Then, Crake lifted her once more by the scruff of the neck, the clock weight bumping against her hindlegs and its taut cord almost choking her. But she forbore to make any protest. Perhaps this still was part of some game.

Stepping out onto the bridge, Crake raised her on high; and tossed her over the rail, into the fast-running river below.

With a mighty splash Babe Ruth and the clock weight smote the water. The dog never had swum a stroke. But nature teaches dogs how to swim, without lessons. She

struck out, dazed and scared and chilled, for the unseen shore.

But the clock weight dragged her far below the surface, struggle as she would.

Johannes Crake climbed into his car and drove placidly homeward. His work was done, and done far from home. Tomorrow a pair of pink-eyed white rabbits with wiggly noses would take the place of Babe Ruth as official torture victims in the gentle Crake household. Not being wiry mongrels, their ordeal would be over the sooner.

To the river bottom, fighting gamely for release at every inch, swirled poor Babe Ruth. Struggle as she would, the lump of iron forced her inexorably down.

A freak of nature once had flung Babe Ruth into the world, and now another freak of nature gave her a one-in-fifty chance to battle her way back into it.

The heavy rains of early spring had swollen the narrow river to a torrent, days before. Though the flood had subsided, it had left a high and fairly solid sand-riffle where until now the channel had flowed deep.

On the upsloping side of this sand-bar the clock weight came to a sullen rest. Into the sand Babe Ruth drove her frantic claws.

Her head was more than fifteen inches under water. But she did not thrash about deliriously until she was exhausted. The instinct and calculating wit of the best type of mongrel came to her aid.

Clawing desperately, she strove to mount the sandspit's slope. She may have taken that direction by mere chance, instead of following the steeper downward pitch to death.

The clock weight dragged heavily upon her clawing advance. But the gallant little dog threw every atom of her wiry strength into her climb. She was strangling. She was in increasing anguish. But she clawed onward.

Presently her courage-scourged forces were all but spent. A last brave forward lunge was followed by a back-jerk of her straining neck as the iron weight tugged against her.

The jerk threw her head high—and her mouth and nostrils were above the surface.

For the first time in all her pathetic life—except in her friendship with the fat cook next door—fate was giving Babe Ruth a break. Deep she drew the chilly night air into her tormented lungs.

The long breaths were agony. But they were life. Her foreface still above water, she lunged onward. Another three plunges brought her head and shoulders clear of the river.

Then it was that her mongrel wit came again to her help. Wheeling, she felt for the taut cord which held her to that impeding clock weight. She caught it in her mouth and scissored it between her sharp front teeth until it fell back limply into the water.

Babe Ruth was free, free to huddle there on the summit of the submerged sand-riffle. She was stomach-deep in water and she was shivering and she was in pain. But her heart was flame-brave and her keen brain was working.

Never before had she swum. But between her and the river-bank was forty feet of fast-running water. She could not stay where she was.

Fearlessly she launched herself from the abrupt end of the riffle and toward the shore. High and awkwardly she

splashed, after the manner of dogs on their first essay at swimming. And she was heavy and unwieldy and suffering.

But she made progress. True, the current carried her downstream and once or twice its eddies all but sucked her under. But she swam on, ever aiming for the elusive bank.

And now her groping forefeet touched the pebbly bottom. A final spurt landed her, spent and panting and dizzy, on dry land. Yes, fate had given Babe Ruth a break, at long last, such as it was.

Worn out, she lay grunting and gasping on the shore. But, as her strength crept reluctantly back to her, an all-encompassing need spurred her to new activity. Age-old instinct shouted to her that she must find a lair for herself, and that right speedily.

She staggered drunkenly to the by-road and jogged along it, wavering; whimpering to herself as she went.

From side to side she peered. After a few hundred feet of painful journeying she saw outlined against the sky a low building of some kind. Up the bank from the road she toiled pantingly toward it.

It was a shed, whose door sagged a quarter-way open. Behind and beyond it, a small clump of other buildings showed dimly against the glum clouds. But there was no time to investigate these.

Into the shed Babe Ruth nosed timidly. It was warm in there, for a cow with a new-born calf occupied a shut-off stall at one side of it. In an opposite corner was a thick scatter of bedding. To this snugly soft refuge the suffering dog gratefully made her way.

Her Hour was upon her.