

# A Four-Legged Sleuth

By V. Chute

*Muggs was a friendly, happy dog — until his master was murdered. Then his age-old animal instinct led him to a clue which the law overlooked.*

**M**UGGS was shaggy, affectionate, intelligent—the friendliest dog in the outskirts of the small town of Birley. But tonight Muggs was worried. In fact, following the sound of the shot and the smell of burnt powder in the one-room shack, there were a lot of things he didn't understand.

From his corner, Muggs cocked his head and listened to the wind beating rain against the window. Then he lay back on his blanket, his black nose pointed across the lamp-lit room where his master, Old Jack Blakely, lay silent across the bed, a pistol still gripped in his calloused fingers.

Muggs' brown eyes had a strange liquid glow in the flickering lamplight. He listened into the night again, gave a little whine and moved cautiously to the bed. Licking the hand which hung over the edge, he waited in vain for it to rise and scratch his throat or rub his long, shaggy ears. He whined again, puzzled.

From beyond the storm-swept door came a sound not of the wind and rain. Muggs leaped to the center of the room and set up a furious barking. That was what he was supposed to do, until Blakely's voice would order him back to the blanket in the corner.

Now there was no one to tell him to stop barking. Not until the door opened. Then a tall, lean-faced man slouched inside, cursed him and sent him retreating to his corner.

After that, Frank Dill, the intruder, hardly glanced at Muggs. Nor did he look

at the still form on the bed. He was much too busy calling outside to the cab driver.

Dill's actions seemed very odd to Muggs; especially since the man had spent the evening here in the cabin with his master. In fact, Dill had been absent little more than an hour. Now he appeared excited as he talked to the cab driver, and he seemed surprised at seeing the gun, which he himself had placed in Blakely's hand an hour before.



Somewhere in the scheme of things there had been a musty, leather bag. Muggs wondered what had become of it. It had been fun worrying that bag; it was much like a bone with a long-buried smell. Then the men had taken the bag away from him and refilled it with the little packs of paper.

**P**OLICEMEN came—the same uniformed men who helped children across the street. Muggs knew all about them, for he had had the run of the neighborhood while his master was away to work. But these officers didn't talk to

Blakely now; they just shook their heads and took him away in a black automobile.

Muggs wanted to go in that black car, too. But Blakely wouldn't have liked that. He had told him to stay close to his blanket, and that's where Muggs was going to stay.

The men went away, but Dill remained. A curious pleased smile was on his thin lips until he saw Muggs. Then he scowled. Muggs bristled. A deep, rumbling growl came from his throat.

Dill pulled up, startled. And he had a right to be startled. No one had ever heard a growl like that come from the throat of Muggs.

What bothered Muggs more than Dill's curses was that thin smile. Somehow he couldn't associate that kind of a smile with the joyful celebration of a few hours earlier. Nor with the moldy buckskin sack of money Blakely and Dill had found in a house they were tearing down for a wrecking concern.

Muggs tried hard to understand. But it was no use. That troublesome growl came into his throat every time he saw Dill move toward him. There was nothing to do but wait until Blakely came back home. Then everything would be all right.

Dill, as the deceased's best friend, was allowed to take care of Blakely's things. He stopped in the next day, rubbing his thin hands together in a pleased gesture. Then Muggs' sinister growl of warning came from the corner to strike fear into Dill's heart.

Muggs sensed that fear of Dill's. As it increased so did Muggs' nervousness and oftener came that deep-throated growl. And to the lean-faced man, the eyes of the dog in the semidarkness of the cabin were suddenly accusing, even revengeful.

In the next few days Muggs hardly left his blanket. Yet his delicate nose was constantly sniffing into the air. Muggs was

getting hungry.

Dill craftily put food before him. But the food smelled strange to Muggs. Not that he would have accepted it; he wouldn't have. In fact, there were only two persons from whom he would take food, his master and a lady who lived at the far end of the suburban street. Muggs had often gone there for a handout. Blakely had said it was all right.

But Dill didn't remember about that. Muggs' refusal of the poisoned food was misinterpreted, as was everything else he did. Dill ran from the house that night, muttering to himself.

**T**HE thing that Frank Dill didn't know was that he was directly the cause of Muggs' nervousness and uncertainty. Muggs was always happy when those around him smiled or laughed and he was as quick to feel their opposite emotions, especially that of fear. That was probably the reason that he felt excited when Dill came the next day. But Muggs soon found that Dill's joy was caused, not by Jack Blakely coming back home, but by a far different reason. Blakely's belongings were to be moved.

Some of the furniture was taken to Dill's place by the moving men. Included was Muggs' blanket. But Muggs, as friendly as ever to all except the absent Dill, was not to be left behind. Blakely had told him to stay close to that blanket, which was his. Unnoticed, he followed the small truck to Dill's house.

That night began a new game for Muggs. And for Dill, too. A fearful, sinister game. Yet it didn't occur to Dill, as he listened into the night, that Muggs was whining for his blanket which had been taken inside. To Dill's fearful mind, it was something much worse than that. Muggs was haunting him, perhaps lying in wait to leap at his throat if he ventured

outside.

While Muggs sniffed around the house all night, Dill lay awake inside with a shotgun on his lap. At dawn he could stand the strain no longer. The light gave him courage to slip through the door.

But there was no signs of Muggs. Dill's hands shook from the let-down of steeling himself for no purpose. If he had seen Muggs in that instant he would probably have missed. A turn around the sparsely settled block didn't help his nerves any, and he didn't find Muggs.

Dill was muttering when he returned to the cabin. Near the corner of his shack he nearly fell over a small mound of up-turned earth. He stared wildly into a newly dug hole. The money—the buckskin sack! That was where he had hidden it. Now it was gone!

Dill stumbled around the house and through the doorway. Then his eyes did bulge. His shotgun clattered to the floor. The jarring impact discharged the weapon, and a blast of a shot ripped his arm. Dill bleated like a sheep.

Muggs growled from the corner where he had dragged his blanket. His feet were

yellow with the fresh dirt into which he had been digging. He barked sharply at the fear-crazed man.

Dill screamed, ran into the yard, clutching his shot-torn arm. He was still screaming his incoherent fear of death when officers arrived to make a final check-up before closing the case of Jack Blakely.

But when the officers went away they took with them the murderer of Jack Blakely. Dill, unnerved, and thinking the wound was fatal, had sobbed out his confession. The police found the sack of money under Muggs' blanket. Muggs watched from the doorway. The sun shining against the steel circlets on Frank Dill's wrist hurt his eyes.

For a time he sat on his haunches in the sunshine wondering, perhaps, why the men had made such a fuss over him. Then he gave a low whine and looked toward the lady's house where his master said he might eat. He started for it.

But Muggs didn't go far. He came leaping back, straight into the cabin. When he came outside again he was dragging his blanket with him.