

The Story of Stuckey

A political fable

by Joshua Siegal

Once there was a dog named stuckey. The hairs under his belly were exceptionally long, so that people always thought he was fat. This impression wasn't helped by the fact that, for a dog, he had a ravenous sweet tooth. Living in a populated area of the city as he did, he was constantly smelling the lusciously sweet morsels of chewing gum spat onto the sidewalks he walked daily with his owner. This, combined with his exceptionally long belly hair, meant that he had a steadily accumulating stratum of chewing gum goo between his four stubby legs. Before long, his owner noticed this, but, being a tender old lady, she lacked the resolve to trim his gum-laden belly fur as he whimpered in her arms and grimaced at the sight of the sharp, shiny scissors she wielded. So she let the fur go and the gum collection grow, until stuckey became a walking collection of sidewalk artifacts, all lodged in his gooey belly hairs.

Pretty soon he became a very well-read dog indeed. One could find him sitting under the bus bench where his owner napped, reading a snippet of the new york times movie review that had gotten stuck in his sticky trap. Before long he was informed on matters of world politics and social interest. He took a cracked glasses frame with only one lens that had found a home in the gum near his rear and began to wear this across his muzzle as a sign of his new acuity.

One day his owner had some well-to-do friends over for dinner. They marveled first that she let her dog on the armchair, and then again at the how adorable it was that she'd trained him to look as if he were studying the train schedule. Stuckey snuffled and rolled his eyes. He'd been taking himself to the dog park for weeks now, paying with neglected fare cards he swept up with his sticky belly fur. As he was becoming more astute, stuckey began to realize that he could target the collection of certain material. He had a fine terrarium hidden in the closet, with all manner of natural crystals and geodes. He loved to visit and sniff them. Being that he had a tremendous appetite for sweets, he was also accumulating a miniature fortress conglomeration of half-finished hard candy mints. Of these he had created a kind of sugary salt-lick that he visited every night before bed. That way he and his owner could both go to bed with minty breath, and of course he found that the mint aided his nighttime digestion greatly.

It was just after the dinner guests arrived that stuckey began to panic. He saw his owner politely removing their coats, and he realized that no one but him had been in the closet for several months. Stuckey quickly picked up a copy of the newspaper and pretended to read it very seriously, hiding his muzzle from the guests. He peeked out over the tips of the pages. "My, what a lovely little indoor greenhouse," one of the guests said.

"Goodness, what pretty rocks," said the other. "Whatever are they doing in the closet? Why you should let them out into the light!" And, to Stuckey's great surprise, they pulled out the terrarium and marveled at it. His owner graciously allowed them to place it on an end table in the living room, displacing a great stack of national geographic magazines and a dish of candy so ancient that even Stuckey had no interest in it. "Now that looks nice!" proclaimed the first guest. "I say," said the other guest, "I think these gems might look nice a little differently." To Stuckey's horror, she began to rearrange the crystals to make the shape of a very ugly flower.

"Now how about that," she said. Stuckey's owner was so flabbergasted by the original appearance of the terrarium from the closet and then by her guests' determined interest in it that she could do or say nothing but stand there with her hands clasped meekly in front of her and say "oh my." "Yes, quite," said the first guest, "striking." The newspaper Stuckey was holding before him began to tremble with his anger. Those were the rocks he had painstakingly collected from the curbs and lawns of the city! He had smelled each one out particularly and now they, like that foul guest's fingers, would smell only of cigarettes and cold crème. "You KNOW," the intrusive guest said, "this rock in particular would look lovely strung on a string." She held it up under her neck, as if a pendant. "oh dear," said Stuckey's owner. "It is lovely." At this treason Stuckey could contain himself no longer. He jumped from the armchair and stood on all fours, bristling and growling at the misunderstanding guest. RRRR! RRRRR! Stuckey had to defend his rocks! "Stuckey!" cried his owner. "What has gotten into you?! Bad dog!"

This embarrassment only made Stuckey angrier. He began to jump up and down, and as he did, items previously buried in his gooey belly fur began to drop onto the carpet: several half-finished lollipops, a Michael Jackson cassette tape, three dollars and fifty two cents in change, a dead mouse, a single-serving bottle of Jim Beam, receipts and wrappers, cigarette butts, part of a ripped "wet paint" sign that simply said "wet p", a pigeon foot, a taxi driver ID that said "Muhammed", a greasy comb, and a gold Rolex watch. Stuckey kept barking: get away from my rocks! "My goodness," said the guest, no stranger to dogs and clearly unafraid of Stuckey, whose demonstration had lost much effect among the pile of artifacts gathered around him. "Wow," said the other guest. "Oh my," said Stuckey's owner. "I must apologize. You see, it's this quite amazing collection of chewing gum that he's got on his belly. Stuckey. Roll over." Stuckey did not want to roll over amid this humiliation. "Why - I don't know what's gotten into him," his owner apologized. "Stuckey dear! Roll over." At which point, Stuckey turned and marched, quite slowly and defiantly back to the armchair. He leapt up onto it, picked a still-stuck scrap of a women's lingerie ad from his belly goo and held the tiny paper morsel between his two front paws and pretended very seriously to read it, even though there were few words and he found the subject matter rather disgusting anyway.

"Why that's incredible!" said the first guest. "That wasn't trained!" "No," said his owner, "I don't know where he picked up that behavior, sadly." She frowned at Stuckey. Stuckey wondered why people insisted on putting their things into strappy sacks all the time. "Well," said his owner, "I've been putting it off, but it's about time we got you properly shorn." Stuckey dropped his clipping. Shorn! He ran to his owner and began whimpering

and rubbing against her legs abashedly. Please don't shear me, I'll be good, I'll be good, don't take away my belly-based accretion device! But with all that penitent rubbing up, his owner's leg became caught in the edge of his gummy belly layer and when she tried to move away from her pleading pup, her leg was stuck and she lost her balance and fell over him, face to face with the dead and quite stinky mouse he'd been carrying in his sticky belly fur for several weeks (as part of a cat baiting experiment). At this she promptly fainted. When she awoke, stuckey, her guests, and the terrarium were all gone.

She never heard from stuckey again, but was surprised one day, when, happily knitting and petting her demure Pomeranian and watching the newscasts, she saw, way in the background, but clearly unmistakable, sitting patiently and dutifully by the black-slacks-clad legs of one of the presidential advisers, a very serious looking dog with a pair of crook-framed, single-lens glasses across his muzzle.

the end