

BIN LADEN'S BALD SPOT
& OTHER STORIES

BRIAN DOYLE



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Bin Laden's Bald Spot & other stories

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BIN LADEN'S BALD SPOT

Only two men in this sweet bruised world know that Osama bin Laden, son of Alia Ghanem and Muhammad bin Laden, has under his turban a sprightly crewcut modeled on Van Johnson in the 1954 movie *The Last Time I Saw Paris*, which, as only a few other men know, is his favorite movie, or used to be before he had to give up electronics for various excellent reasons. I have also heard him say, more than once, as I cut his hair, that *The Caine Mutiny* with Van Johnson is his favorite movie, so I think we may conclude safely that his favorite movie is one in which Van Johnson is a featured player, although it may be that Osama, all due respect to the Vanster, has a thing for crewcuts rather than cinema.

Also I am here to tell you that Osama has a bald spot the size of a baby's fist on the back of his head, shaped *exactly* like Iceland, complete with the Vestfjarda Peninsula to the west. He does *not* like to speak of this and indeed we have only spoken of it once, when I said to him, sir, you have a bald spot back here shaped like Iceland, and he said I do *not*, and I said, yes sir, you do, it is the size of my fist and even has the little peninsula to the west, you know, like Iceland does, and he said I do *not* have a bald spot, and I said, yes sir, well sir, actually yes you do, sir, it's a big honking thing, too, and I remember learning the names of the towns in Iceland for extra credit when I was in school, many years ago, Borgarfjard-

KING OF THE LOSERS

My sister and her boyfriend have two kids, girls, ages four and one. The kids are total sweethearts and the big one is wicked smart and can read already. My sister is wicked smart too but she has major mental thunderstorms and the social service has come three times to check on the kids. The boyfriend is messed up too but his problem is simply that he is the biggest loser ever. The best job he ever had was delivering pizza which lasted two whole days before they fired him and docked all his pay, which tells you all you need to know. His job these days as far as I can tell is stealing money from countertops and mailboxes. My other sister and I used to leave dollar bills on the kitchen counter and bet how fast he would palm them. His all-time record was nineteen seconds. If there really was a God this guy would be working in a prison laundry but there's clearly no God or not much of one because my sister is always talking how much she loves the guy but we see him for what he is, which is king of the losers. I would beat him up but what's the point? My sister would just fawn over the bruises and he would be so mortified that a teenager hammered him that he would be even meaner to his kids, and I love those kids.

Anyway the point of my story is the fourth time the social services came to their house, which is a total pit. My sister isn't capable of maintaining the house and the loser is too lazy. They don't pay

rent or anything on the house. The loser got it from his uncle as a tax dodge. For a long time my mom and dad and other sister and I would go over on the weekends and clean up just to keep the kids from living in filth but my dad quit going over because he always ends up crying or my sister screaming at him and my mom is all busy with the courts trying to get custody of the kids, and my other sister moved away and got a crewcut and changed her name, so I am the only one going over there lately.

So the other day I drive over to clean the bathroom and kitchen, which are the absolute crucial places to clean, but when I get there the social service truck is parked in front of the house and I get the willies, because three times is the limit for social service and the fourth time is business.

I can hear the loser yelling and my sister hysterical, so I go around back and find the girls on the swings, the big one pushing the little one. I ask them how long the social service has been here and the older one says like only two minutes because she and her sister just came out and she remembered to buckle the baby into the swing like I showed her. I say that is excellent baby management and they can swing for exactly one minute while I check the score, and I lean in the back door and hear the calm reasonable voices of the social service and the loser yelling that they are his kids dammit and this is fascism and where's the warrant and he knows his rights and this is a police state and etc. I listen for my sister but now I don't hear her at all, which is a bad sign; when she's really flipped out she shuts down all systems and erects deflector shields and rocks herself in the closet.

So I realize this is doomsday, social service has come to take the kids, and while I totally support the idea of social service, and how the state is responsible for children from untenable homes, I also know these are sort of my kids too, so I gather up the girls and we cut across the neighbors' yards and slip into my car like secret agent spies, me carrying the baby like a football which she thinks is funny, and we drive away very quietly and go five towns before we stop and get some fries and try to think this puppy through.

AAA PLUS

One night my car broke down and died not a mile from the shop where I had just spent more than eight hundred dollars on a new starter and timing mechanism and assorted other holy mysteries, and after I coasted it choking and lurching to the side of the road, and sat there silently banging the steering wheel so hard that my wrist still hurts on rainy days, and stepped out squelching into the mud, and hitched home in the furious summer rain, cars swerving and honking and one guy even giving me the finger, I called AAA to get them to tow the car back to the shop, because I couldn't call my wife anymore, whereas she doesn't live with me and the kids anymore, but the tow truck guy refused to tow the car that far because my coverage was only AAA standard, not AAA Plus, which your AAA Plus allows us to tow cars anywhere in these United States, said the tow truck driver, you could tow a car from Alaska to Florida technically, but your AAA standard coverage limits your emergency towing capability to three miles or less, that's the way it is, he said, and he was about as big as a house, so I declined to argue, and he towed the car three miles down the road and was going to leave it there by the side of the highway in accordance with the AAA standard coverage limit, but I swore to high heaven that I would immediately purchase AAA Plus, even doing so retroactively if he thought that necessary, such was my good opinion of his profes-

sional judgment in this matter, and he took the compliment and took pity and took my car to my house, where my children poured out to watch his truck, which was indeed a majorly large truck, as one of my sons said.

So next day I purchase AAA Plus, which takes effect immediately upon issuance of your major credit card, says the operator politely, so we seal the deal and when I hang up the phone I am a member of AAA Plus.

I actually felt different, no joke. I felt taller.

So I call the tow truck guy again and he comes back to tow my car back to the shop where I got the new starter and timing mechanism and such. He's cheerful as a jaybird now that I have AAA Plus. He can tow me from here to kingdom fecking come, he says. He can tow me from sea to fecking sea. His name is Denny too, he says, and he is a towing fool. *You Blow, We Tow* is written in letters a foot high on the side of his truck.

I've towed everything with an engine, he says. They all break down in the end. Cars, trucks, boats, ski-doo's, even a biplane one time, this old guy dressed like fecking Charles A. Lindbergh landed his plane in a supermarket parking lot and hit a shopping cart and wrecked his plane and I had to tow him home. Guy was wearing a scarf and goggles and everything. The whole nine yards. Must have been eighty years old if he was a day. I tell you, the things I seen! One time I towed a car with a naked guy. Guy was driving around naked when his car blew. I made him stay in the car when I towed it. Which is illegal, but I didn't want a naked guy in my cab. I'd like to see the cop who'd give me a ticket for *that*. Another time I towed a guy who I found out later he just robbed a diner but his car died after like three blocks, but he called for a tow, is that hilarious or what? Guy had AAA Plus too. Another time I towed a guy who when he opened his trunk looking for a jack or something I see his trunk was full of guns. I didn't say anything to anyone about that. You rat a guy like that he comes and shoots you in the face. I don't need trouble. I got enough trouble. We all got troubles. You got troubles?

I got troubles, I say.

People think when you drive a tow truck you must get the girls, says Denny, because you have to tow women of course, I mean half the world is women, right, and their cars are always breaking down because they don't change the oil, they just don't, I don't know why, and a little smoke coming out of the hood freaks them out totally, but you take a guy, a guy would drive with fecking *flames* shooting out of his car, he would probably think that was cool, you know what I'm saying?

A guy, I say, would *speed up* to make the flames look cooler.

That's exactly correct, says Denny. That's absolutely fecking so.

At that point the guy from the repair shop comes out to tell me that my car will need another thousand bucks worth of repairs now, even though they just got finished fixing it, or *saying* they fixed it, and he says what do you want to do? and I say I don't want to *do* anything, you owe me a car I can drive away from this crime scene after the *last* five hundred bucks I spent here, and he says it's not their fault it's a piece of shit car that hasn't been properly maintained, and I say hey, I am not paying another cent for repairs that don't repair, and he says okay, fine, they'll junk it, and I say okay, fine, junk it then, it's junk now anyway since you guys mangled it, and he stomps off, so there I am, up a creek and carless.

Denny gives me a ride home to the kids, whereas I have AAA Plus now and am golden, and he says in fact he can tow the car from the repair shop to my house if I want, whereas I have AAA Plus, and it's a shame to leave a perfectly good car someplace ratty like that, which is true, so the next day he comes and gets me and we get the car and he tows it back to my house. That was a Saturday and the kids were going bonkers because I was supposed to take them up the mountain skiing and now we couldn't go. But Denny, who turned out to be a good guy, says hell, you got AAA Plus, man, you are golden, I can tow you from here to fecking kingdom come, which includes of course the mountain.

The kids thought this was hilarious and they throw their stuff in the trunk and pile in the car and get in a huge argument about who gets to sit behind the steering wheel and who gets to ride shotgun and who is the total loser in the back seat. I ride in the truck

THE BOYFRIENDS BUS

My wife had, by her count, eleven boyfriends before she married me twenty years ago. The way she tells the story it starts with a hockey player in high school who groped her at the prom, and it ends with the guy she lived with for five years before me, and includes such guys as the guy who she was dating who made a pass at a friend of hers, and a guy she dated for four days in Texas, and a guy who used to take her to the beach and photograph her naked there for artistic purposes, and a guy who dumped her for a girl in his Bible class, and a guy who ran a steam shovel, and a guy she went out with because she liked his mustache, and a guy who turned out to have another girlfriend the whole time she was dating him, and some other guys. She doesn't count guys she had crushes on who didn't have crushes on her, of which there were several, and I don't think she is counting guys with whom she made out once in the movies or in a basement for an hour, but I don't ask about that, because who am I to ask, and there are certain levels of detail you don't actually want to be up on, so to speak, you know what I mean?

Anyway over the years she has told plenty of stories about her boyfriends, many of them funny stories, although some of the stories, especially the ones she tells a lot, are not so much funny as cathartic and ultimately self-explanatory, the sort of stories you tell about other people when you are really trying to tell a story about