

problem is, Truck also claims that the most recent five presidents of the United States have come secretly to his trailer in the dead of night to receive his tattoos. I might believe one or two, but not five.

Anyway, Tommy was sitting in the Mojave on a spring night, the sky winking with the Wise Eyes of Ancestors—or stars, if scientists are correct—when the creature with three heads appeared on the farther side of the campfire.

The human head never said a word, but the flanking coyote heads spoke English. They debated each other about whether Tommy's head was more desirable than the head already occupying the neck between them.

Coyote One liked Tommy's head, especially the proud nose. Coyote Two was insulting; he said Tommy was "more Italian than Indian."

Being something of a shaman, Tommy recognized that this creature was an unusual manifestation of the Trickster, a spirit common to the folklore of many Indian nations. As an offering, he produced three cigarettes of whatever he was smoking, and these were accepted.

With solemn satisfaction, the three heads smoked in silence. After tossing the butts in the campfire, the creature departed, allowing Tommy to keep his head.

Two words might explain Tommy's story: *peyote buttons*.

The following day, however, after resuming his

hike, Tommy came across the headless corpse of another hiker. The driver's license in the guy's wallet identified him as Curtis Hobart.

Nearby was a severed head, but it was the one that had been on the center neck between the coyotes. It looked nothing like Curtis Hobart in the driver's license photo.

Using his satellite phone, Tommy Cloudwalker called the sheriff. Shimmering like mirages in the spring heat, the authorities arrived both overland and by helicopter.

Later, the coroner declared that the head and the body did not belong together. They never located Curtis Hobart's head, and no body was ever found to go with the discarded head that had been dropped on the sand near Hobart's corpse.

As I hurried after Boo, along the passageway toward the cooling tower, I did not know why Tommy's unlikely story should rise out of my memory swamp at this time. It didn't seem germane to my current situation.

Later, all would clarify. Even on those occasions when I am as dumb as a duck run down by a truck, my busy *subconscious* is laboring overtime to save my butt.

Boo went to the cooling tower, and after unlocking the fire door with my universal key, I followed him inside, where the fluorescent lights were on.

We were at the bottom of the structure. It looked