

Chris

by **Louis A. Colantuono**

It was one of those dog-kicking days people have now and again. I would never think of kicking my dog, so I was out kicking tires with my dog sitting there watching me with his head cocked to one side trying to understand what was wrong, what happened to my usually good-humored nature.

I guess he finally understood, or just got tired of my rage, because he took my shirt sleeve and pulled me over to where my horses were stabled. He sat down, then barked.

“You want me to ride on the beach with you, dog?” I asked. He barked an answer to my question, then ran over to bark at the gate leading to the beach. “Alright, dog. Wait until I saddle Prince.”

I carried the saddle and bridle. Smiley brought the saddle blanket to me in his big German shepherd teeth. We saddled Prince. Smiley ran ahead of me to open the gate, and then I let Prince Charming lope along near the tide line. Smiley always chased the waves in and out, like they were something living, threatening him.

It was too early in the morning to meet anyone out there, so I did not have to worry about the dog accidentally biting someone that might run up towards me. Smiley was trained not to bite children; to anyone else he was all teeth and growls. I let Prince have his rein and watched Smiley run after a wave going out, only to get soaked by the one behind. Smiley came out of the water shaking the excess off on the run. He would now leave the waves alone.

“Heel, dog,” I said. He obeyed, settling down to trot protectively along next to me and the horse.

Five miles down the beach, five miles back was our usual run. Prince Charming was feeling very spry, even shied at a land crab, but a tight rein, a rolling nudge from the spurs kept him going over the ground I wanted him on.

It's a chore to ride a stallion. They have their own minds made up to what they are going to do before you even get on them; then it's your

chore to make them do what *you* want them to do, especially if they are not ridden regularly.

Prince Charming was an Arabian stallion. He would soon be twenty-six years old but still thought he was a colt. He was one of the top studs in the area. I knew if I came upon a mare on the beach I would have a double handful of trouble: Prince always had his mind on ass, not grass. That's why I had the Spanish bit, which some people call cruel, in Prince's mouth, and the pointed, attention-getting spurs on my boot heels. It wouldn't be the first time Prince had taken me on an unexpected trip over a fence to get to a mare in heat. The year before, right in the middle of our town parade, he'd tried to top a mare with a rider on it. I'd barely won that round; now I kept him out of parades.

Coming around a little point of land, just before the beach gave back deep into the face of the cliff, Smiley came to a quick stop. I reined in the horse next to him.

"Stay, dog. Stand easy, horse." I watched a boy walking toward the sea stark from where he'd left his clothes for an early-morning dip. This was a nude beach, that is when the police were not trying to harass the general everyday nudies that came to sun and swim there.

The boy came out of the shaded sand by the cliff. He smiled at me against the brightening rays of the sun behind me.

"Hello," I said. "Sit, Smiley. Sit now," I commanded, because I wished to go over and investigate the boy. "You're out early today."

"Yes I am," he answered evenly, watching the dog and the nervous, prancing horse. "With the police hassle here every day like it's been, it's very hard for a person to express their freedom to do anything."

"Wow. You're a real hippie," I teased.

"Not really." He laughed more childishly than he talked. "My mother is a hippie. I was born in a commune and raised there until last year when the last of us left. Now you're going to tell me I have advanced intellect, I'm smart or something like that."

"Nope. I'm just very impressed with your ideas of personal expression, that's all." I got off my horse and gave the reins to Smiley to hold for me. "I also believe in freedom and personal expression, except when it comes to a person hurting someone because they want to hurt someone."

"You're a hippie too, huh?"

"No. I was in prison before the hippie movement got underway, when free styles of love was their way of life."

"What were you in prison for?" the boy asked, edging back into the

protection of the cliff-face.

“For expressing my free style of love.”

“Did you rape a woman or are you a child-molester?”

“A child lover, not molester. A molester takes what he wants. A child lover only uses what is offered him by his loves. More or less like in a mutual seduction of each other – with love, consideration and truly caring for each other.”

“Yeah, but still...” He stopped, thinking better of what he'd been going to say, but then said it anyway: “Greek-style love died with the Greeks.”

“I know a lot of live Greeks,” I countered. “The country of Greece is still there. Besides, Greeks are not the only people that loved boys.”

“I know that,” he smiled. “We had very progressive teachers in the commune. They called a penis a penis, a vagina a vagina, and they told you you were fucking up if you were fucking up in class with just those words.”

His smile was steeped with the mellowness of his fond memories of the lost commune.

“That was a better life for you, then. There.”

“Yes, it was all of the life I ever knew until we had to move down here out of the hills.” He started, sort of undecided, toward the water with a far-away look in his eyes, then turned when the water washed over his feet. “Will I see you again?”

I sure hope so,” I said with regret that he was terminating our conversation so suddenly. “I live just down the beach where the cliff ends – or, if you're on the road, where the wide circular driveways are this side of the highway. Bye for now.”

Smiley tugged the horse over to me when the boy started to go further into the water. The dog put the reins in my open hand.

“I hope to see you sometime. Those are sure nice animals you have,” he said, letting the water wash up over his knees. “I love dogs and horses.” He dived into the next wave, cutting off any reply.

I swung up onto the saddle, then sat there a minute longer to watch him. With the wrong tide he could be in trouble swimming here alone. I eyed the combers; it would be safe without rip-tide or undertow today. He was a strong swimmer, so I left.

I got home still thinking about that sturdy young tanned body; the blond to white-white hair cut Dutch-boy or Buster Brown fashion; his long, firm, gracefully bicycle-muscled legs; the smoothness of his

prepubescent upper arms strongly pulling him through the surf; his firm, receptive-looking backside. His slim, very long-for-his-age penis had been hard as it would go without standing straight out in front of him from the moment I'd seen him until after I left. He'd fetched up in the shallow water again to watch me ride away, and I'd turned around in the saddle to look back at him, and we'd waved at each other.

Home, I kicked myself mentally for not asking his name. I unsaddled Prince, brushed him down, and then I filled the doggie tub to wash Smiley. My wife wouldn't let him in the house for a week looking like he did, with all of the wet sand in his seawater-saturated fur.

"Dad!" my step-daughter Di said, coming out of the house. "How come you didn't tell me you were going for a ride on that old horse. I could of rode my pony with you."

"I didn't know I was going riding until I went," I told her pacifistically. "Why don't you help me with washing this dog? That's doing something with me, too."

"Naw. That's work." She stuck her tongue out at me before she stormed into the house, leaving me angry enough to go back to kicking tires. Instead, I gave the dog an extra long washing, and when I was finished I saturated him with Skinny-dip strawberry splash-on cologne.

My disreputable self and the well-groomed dog entered the house to learn that I had to leave on a trip. I was not in the mood to go anywhere, because I'd just returned from a month away. Besides I was still angry about my last homecoming. I'd met with disrespect, a wall of coolness, with none of my lover-boys around.

It was nothing new to me to have my lover-boys grow up to leave me. They'd be out on the road with one of my trucks, or they'd just out-grown me and went back home to live their own lives. That was both a heartache and a joy to me. I shouldn't have been feeling so bad, but I'd not had a lover-boy in over three months and I'd been used to having herds of them wanting me, needing me, depending on me to be there for them. Even then I was getting calls from Richard and Larry about their dating problems, and I was happy to help them any way I could.

I suppose I could have got someone else to take that trip, but I went anyway, to get away from the Frigidaire and the mini-cooler, as I was beginning to call my wife and her daughter. I was gone for two weeks. When I got back it was early afternoon.

"I didn't expect you home until later tonight," my wife said, as though I should leave again until my expected time of arrival. "I hope you're not hungry, because I'm all involved in this soap opera."

“No, I'm not hungry. Is there any special messages?”

“Nothing important. I will talk to you about it later.”

In my shower by myself I felt very small, lost. I'd built that shower big enough to shower six or even eight – or whatever amount of company. I had to make it comfy for me and my loves. I dried off, then threw myself nude upon the bed for a short nap.

When the show ended my wife came in to give me my messages and news. “There were two calls that T.C. took care of, and Chuck phoned with his truck broke down, so I sent him a com-check to get it fixed. And then this little boy came by looking for you, last week and this week again. His name is Chris. He is a very cute little boy that I've never seen before. He didn't even know your name. He said he met you while you were horseback riding on the beach. I think that's about all, unless you want me to phone in for you to tell the broker you're home.”

“He knows I'm home, and he knows I want at least the weekend off.”

The next morning I was up early as always. I asked Di if she wanted to ride on the beach with me. She did not. Her little friend Annie came over while I was saddling up. Di wouldn't go even when Annie said she would like to. Di just didn't want to ride a horse that day.

I called the dog and we went down the beach. Prince Charming did his best to unseat me until he settled into a ground-eating lope that made Smiley forget about chasing waves in order to keep up.

I let the dog hold the horse at the place where I first met Chris, but the boy didn't show up to swim that day, so when other people started appearing I left.

At home I brushed the dog, did three horses, then the pony who was very shabby-looking that time of year like all of the other Shetlands around. I talked to Freddie-horse about how I thought his mistress was ignoring him.

“Don't talk to that dumb horse,” Di said, coming out of the house with Annie. “He bucked me off twice.”

“Have you ridden him recently?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Before he bucked me off I rode him.”

“How many times have you ridden him this month?”

“Once.”

“Annie, do you want a cute little pony?”

“Sure. Where can I get one?”

“Take this one, since Di thinks he's too small for her. He's exactly the right size for you.” I gave Di's little friend the Shetland, then gave Di the mare with the warning that if she did not care for it she wouldn't ever have another horse.

The two girls rode on the beach for the rest of the day while I washed up and went to bed.

The next day found me up bright and early and riding the beach on Prince Charming in the cool morning air, hoping to see the boy again. I didn't see him. Returning, my lady told me that he'd left a phone number she's just found on my desk. I picked up the telephone, trying not to show how interested I was. I waited five full minutes, getting funny looks before I hung up. And then the thing rang in my hand again: it was my dispatcher. I wouldn't go out again until late Tuesday night for an early-morning pick-up in Lodi. It was then only Sunday mid-morning.

The dog barking in front of the house got my attention. He only barked when people were close to the pool fence, not if they were on my beach or the public beach next to us. I didn't mind people using my beach as long as they picked up after themselves. A lot of teens used my beach because they knew my loves and they knew it was a safe place to have their fun. These teens were even known to return the next morning after a beach party with their girls to make sure they did not leave beer cans or trash there the night before. I got to see some of my lover-boys there, like Richard and Larry, who were then into the dating scene. Of course, they knew they were welcome to come to use the pool and the built-in Bar-B-Q. I went to the gate.

“Hi!” Chris said. “I just came down the beach to see if you were home yet. I didn't really think so, because you didn't call.”

“I just got your message to call, Chris. Who are these people with you this fine day?”

“This is my mom, her friend and his daughter.”

“Well, Mom, friend, daughter and Chris, you are all welcome to come in the gate and join me on the patio or use the pool. Would you like to spend the day and have some hamburgers with us later, Chris?”

“Can we stay, Mom?”

“Yes, we can stay,” she said.

“Good. This is the man that told me about his being in prison for expressing his own free style of love,” Chris said boldly. “He calls himself a child lover. He's the man with the dancing horse.”

She looked at me no different than if her son had told her I was a

stamp collector or a jogger or just did something that most people did that was in fashion these days.

“Chris has been talking about you ever since he met you on the beach.” she said, holding out her hand. “He is very impressed with your forwardness. He is a very forward and direct person himself, so he thinks he has something in common with you.”

“That’s very flattering,” I said, taking her offered hand. We walked into the patio. “Yes, Chris even discussed his very open commune teacher with me.”

“He did?” She laughed. “I was his teacher. We tried to teach the children about everything but not in absolutes, because we found that nothing is absolute. Just look at the human movement again... the birth of the fifties brought in the beatniks after the zoot-suiters went out. Then came the growing of the religious cults, then us hippies, and now the religious are trying to rule as they have always tried to rule by telling everyone it’s fine to hate others who are different. As long as you love god and personal glory and support their lies you will be one of the saved. Look at this nude beach here. It’s been raided every day for no reason. There is no one but the few who live here that can see us over by the cliff, unless they walk into the water or look down there with binoculars. All of the people who live in this area seem to be younger progressive people like yourself, and yet we have the raids. I have seen teenage boys here playing in the pool naked and swimming naked out to that sailboat, too. The only reason they were not hassled is because your house is in the middle of your property and the area around here offers you privacy.”

“Whose boat is that?” the little girl asked.

“It’s mine,” I told her.

Di came out because she knew the little girl. The two of them went off playing while Chris and we three adults got into a deep discussion on different theories of the few who use something to control the masses.

“What they cannot regulate or tax they outlaw or call immoral,” I said at last.

“Can I visit here, Mom?” Chris said. “Now you know him, is it alright to just come over and visit?”

“Yes, if you’re not in the way,” she told him. But she left me no indication if it was or was not alright to try to form a relationship with her son. I gave Chris my phone number, with a verbal schedule of when I should be home.

The next afternoon, about ten minutes after Di came home from school, Chris showed up. My wife sent him in to my room where I was working on my books.

“Where *were* you this morning?” he asked as soon as he saw we were alone. “I was almost late for school because I swam too long out there waiting for you to ride up.”

“I didn't know you'd be there.”

“I swim every day before I go to school. I feel so weird in school if I cannot have my early morning's freedom first. Does that sound weird to you?”

“Not at all. What brings you over?”

“I thought maybe I could help you do something, or just visit with you. Really to just visit. Would you like that?”

“Love it. Do you want to visit in here or out by the pool?”

“Is the pool still warm like it was yesterday?”

“It sure is. It's solar heated. It stays warm all of the time, day and night.”

“Too bad I didn't bring my swim suit.”

“You can skinny dip, or I can lend you a bathing suit. But personally I like watching naked boys splashing and playing naked in my pool.”

“One naked boy cannot splash and play very well in a pool this size by himself.” He smiled boldly.

I raced him out of my clothes. We hit the water together on the run. We got out the other side, throwing in the sea duckie, floaties and my raft. Then we dived in again. I went to pull myself up onto my raft and found that Chris was pulling himself up on the other side. We almost hit heads together fighting to be first. We got on it both together at the same time.

“Go over there and get your own raftie,” I said, pointing at the Sears tool house. “This raftie's mine.”

“Ours,” Chris said, not yielding an inch. “It's big enough for two. I saw that picture in your room of three of you on this raft.”

“It's not the same raftie. We sunk that other one permanently. This one can hold *two* friendly people, if you want to float on it with me.”

“Of course.” He grinned. “I'm a friendly person.” A bold smile. “A very friendly person.”

We lay down side by side floating in the very middle of the pool, talking. We talked almost to dinnertime, and then we hand-paddled to the steps, where Chris dressed, telling me to ride on the beach in the morning, got his bicycle from the gate and went home.

When Chris heard the muffled clip-clopping of Prince Charming's hooves on the sand, he walked out naked from beside the cliff. I dismounted, gave the reins to the dog to hold.

"I hope you're not swimming today, Chris. There's a strong rip-tide running."

"I was thinking of it." He smiled. "Will you wait and watch me?"

"If you insist on swimming I will."

Chris walked into the water up to his knees, while I took my rope off the cante. I made a loop, then set the rope coils over my arm for a free feed. Then I roped the little varmint.

"I caught ya," I said, letting him adjust the loop so he wouldn't get rope burn. "Just keep this rope on you in case, Chris."

"Now that you caught me, what are you going to do to me?" Chris laughed, jumping a bad wave. The undertow pulled his feet right out from under him. I held the rope tight to help pull him out. "What are you going to do to me?" he yelled again.

"I'm going to plant a lot of big kisses all over your bod. What do you think of that?"

"Okay," he taunted. I helped him take the safety line off, then walked back with him into the cliff face where his clothes were. The dog would warn me if people were coming; so it was safe.

Chris took the rope out of my hand, fashioned a loop that he put over both of us, then gently tightened it around our waists to hold/us together. Then he turned up his wet face for me to kiss.

"Wasn't it nice to do that out here?" Chris asked me afterwards. "When you first told me you loved boys I thought you were going to love me right then, but you just turned and rode off into the sunrise. I was very disappointed in your erratic behavior."

"Why didn't you give me more encouragement, professor?"

"More? You mean you couldn't see that I was horny from the minute I saw you?"

"I saw the angle of your dangle, but I figured it was from the cold morning's air or something. Get dressed. We'll get your bicycle and I will take you to school."

"Too late. I'd be over two hours late, so it's all right if I skip school today. Hey, let's think of doing something ridiculous..." – he laughed – "...absolutely ridiculous today, like riding to your house naked like we are. I forgot to tell you, I purposely didn't ride my bike today."

That sounded great to me. I mounted Prince, wearing only my boots with their spurs to control the horse. I put Chris up into the saddle in front of me, then we cantered off down the beach.

“Run the horse down there at the tide line where the people in the cars on the highway can see us,” Chris shouted back at me. “Then we can give them something to look at when they make the curve!”

We did, too, because it was late enough in the morning for people to park for the view up the railroad right of way. We whooped and hollered noisily as we charged up the beach.

At home I took Chris into my shower to wash off the sand, then we loved it up in my bedroom, while my mechanic T.C. groomed the horse and washed the dog for me, because he saw I was going to have a busy day with Chris. T.C.'s only reaction to our riding into the yard like we did was a smile of admiration and a glint in his eyes that said he wished he was me.

“Hey, you old fag,” I teased, coming out of the house with Chris close on my heels, both of us in our swimmys, “any time you want to ride naked on the beach, you're welcome to use a horse.”

“You're kidding!” T.C. said, acting very fem. “That horse won't let anyone ride him but you and you know it.”

“I didn't say ride Prince. One of the two others.”

“Will you lend me Chris, too?”

“Hell, no! You go find your own lover-boy.”

Chris and I smiled lovingly at each other, then ran for the pool to play more games and love.

When the sun started to get low Chris' mother came after him. She knew he would be there. She caught us kissing on the raftie, but that didn't faze her.

“Chris tells me everything,” she said with a smile.

Chris immediately put on a risqué tease for his mother.

“Every... thing?” I asked.

“Yes.” She smiled down at us. “Everything. All of my children tell me everything they do or want to do. Chris told me he was out to love you this morning, after he got all the facts on Greek love from me. What I did not know, young man, was that you were going to get so involved with Lou that you would miss school today.”

“There's no school next week,” Chris told her. “So?”

“Sew buttons,” she teased.

“That's what Mom says every time we say 'so' to her. But my mom's a great mother.”

He hugged her tightly when she helped him off the raft.

We often ride in the early morning mists here on the coast in just cowboy hats and our boots. We love each other dearly, deeply; we have our inner warmth together; we have our freedom and we indulge ourselves in our mutual personal expressions. We often skinny-dip in the surf and the pool or layout in the cool of the night at our spot by the cliff playing grunion in the moonlight.