



My mother spent most of her time ironing clothes and cooking, which were activities she could do while watching soap operas. Watching soap operas seemed to me like a good use of a mother's time. There was one that I liked myself. Every afternoon, I, who could barely tell time, would somehow know that the best way to occupy myself at that moment was to go inside and sit on the floor between the ironing board and the television set to watch *The Secret Storm*. After several weeks of this, my mother remarked, "I believe you must like Kip." I agreed that I did. As soon as I'd said it, I felt embarrassed. For some reason I did not want to talk about my interest in the strangely magnetic young man on the television screen. One day when I took my seat in front of the ironing board, I got confused. There was a new character on the show. All the other characters kept calling him Kip, but he was not Kip. I asked my mother what had happened, and she said that a new actor was now playing the role of Kip. This new actor was not strangely magnetic. I returned to *The Secret Storm* every afternoon for a week before I finally accepted that the old Kip was not coming back. I abandoned the new Kip to the old Kip's problems and went back outside to play. Doing that gave me a certain sense of relief, as I had begun to sense even then that it was somehow not okay to show too much interest in a handsome soap opera character.

The same did not apply to the Rifleman. It was okay to watch *The Rifleman* because he carried a gun—and not just

any gun. While the other gunslingers would whip out a paltry pistol from their holsters in the gun duels that climaxed every episode, Lucas McCain would haul out a rifle that he had specially modified so that he could aim it while keeping it slung low, down by his narrow hips. He could cock and fire the rifle in one smooth, swift motion of his hand and never failed to fill his guest stars with bullets. I was in love, all the more so because Lucas McCain was also a single father. Every week just before the credit roll, he would sit his boy, Mark, on his knee and together they would rejoice that the Rifleman had lived another day to sit with his boy on his knee.



I did not know that I was gay when I was born, but I am sure that I was. God makes homosexuals as surely as he makes everything else. One has to believe this unless one tricks oneself into believing that homosexuals snuck into creation through some back door in the universe that God forgot to lock on his way out. I once tested the “nurture” side of the “nature or nurture” debate about the origins of homosexuality by blaming my sexual orientation on my parents. I was unable to sustain that fantasy for more than a few days. It simply crumpled under the weight of evidence to the contrary. My first crush happened long before my parents recognized what was happening or could do anything to aid and abet or quash it. I did not know it was a crush at the time, of course. All I knew was that if I whined and pleaded and carried on long enough,

THE THOUSAND-PETALED LOTUS

I could have any comic book that featured J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter. The Martian Manhunter was green and bald and had big muscles, most of which were fully revealed by a costume that was nothing more than a blue cape and boots, a blue bikini bottom and two red straps that crisscrossed his manly chest. There was nothing that magnetized me more than the sight of that green beefcake flying across the cover of a comic book. I wanted to be more like Jesus, the way everyone told me I should be, but what I really wanted was a blue cape, a set of red straps across my chest, and permission to fly around the world hunting for men with J'onn J'onzz. I had the good sense to keep this fantasy to myself, somehow sensing, even at that young age, that these strange feelings for the Martian Manhunter were of a rare and pure kind that would only be trampled upon in Sunday school.



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