

But only for a moment. Shirley jumped to her feet and headed for the telephone. Father collected himself from his sprawling kneel and stood, momentarily aimless, in the middle of the floor. Then he shuffled into the kitchen and began rummaging in the freezer for the ice cream. I flipped on the TV just as my favorite gunfighter embraced his hard-won love, who had been one of the screaming ladies.

Relieved of that particular worry, I suddenly realized that I was alone in the room with Mother. Even when the news came on I didn't turn, knowing the disappointment in her face would be more than I could bear. I knew she was sitting there, perfectly still, perfectly quiet.

I recalled her words, and I felt ashamed: "What comes first? A western, or your prayers?"

Father took forever dishing his ice cream.