Mike awoke suddenly out of a sound sleep and sat up. Something had awakened him, but what? Rubbing his eyes with his hands, he tried to pinpoint the cause of his sudden wakefulness but the only sounds he heard were those of the willow whipping its long, lean branches against the corner of the house and the whining, whistling wind tearing: madly through the trees. He jumped out of bed and rushed to the window, peering out into the inky-black of the night. Then he heard it--the sound of ice beating a steady staccato against the window pane. Quickly, he dressed in warm clothes then
tiptoed down the stairs. Grabbing a heavy sheep-wool-lined coat off the hook in the closet, he slipped into his boots and pulled a wool cap over his ears. Quietly, he let himself out the door into the darkness of the night.

The wind was wicked, violently-fierce even. Mike struggled against its force. With his head buried deep in the folds of the warm, upturned collar, he pushed head-on into the storm, his one and only objective to get to the corral where, only a few short hours ago, he had left Ginger munching peacefully and contentedly on the succulent alfalfa hay he'd given her. He should have put her in the small lean-to he'd built for her, he thought, trying to run. But the evening had been so calm and nice and he hadn't given the faintest thought to a storm. The air had been so still—a weather breeder his dad called it ..... The thought of the mare in the storm gave impetus to speed; Mike pushed doggedly onward. The wind hammered his back with its powerful gusts and smashed its angry fists down his throat. Needles of ice stung his face like raging hornets. He stumbled and fell, but he picked himself up and pushed forward, slipping and sliding on the ice-covered ground. He must get to Ginger; he must!

A great lump popped up into his throat at thought of the beautiful mare, He loved her; yes, he did. Hadn't he prayed and asked the Lord for her? And God had answered his prayer that day when he went with his father and two older brothers to round up the strays.

"If you can lasso a stray," his father told him that day, "and bring it back to the ranch, it will be yours, Mike. There's a bunch of wild horses around here. So . . ."

His father had deliberately let the sentence go unfinished. Mike knew why: a magnificent stallion led the string of wild horses. He was king of the territory around Owl's Canyon, with a herd of prized beauties following him, too.

Mike had seen the stallion on several occasions while he was riding the range with his father, checking on the cattle. They were near a water hole when he spotted the mare that day. She stood proudly and majestically beside the stallion's jet-black, sleek, shiny coat.
Something within Mike's being told him the mare could be his if he really wanted her badly enough. From that day on, he prayed that he would be able to capture Ginger. And when he had gone to help round up the strays that particular day, and had spotted the stallion and his mighty following, Mike's burning desire for conquest came to the fore. What he led home to his father would be no mere stray; rather, it would be the beautiful wild mare.

He remembered his strategy and the carefully laid plans; the many hours of riding across the hot, dusty ground with the sun beating mercilessly down upon his perspiration-soaked body and, finally, his triumph of capturing Ginger and of leading her into the corral. The first thing he did upon arriving home was to go to the hay shed and have a prayer meeting of praise and thanks to God for giving him the mare.

Mike pressed onward into the storm, remembering his father's praise of the accomplished feat and the mingled look of amazement and pride in his older brothers' eyes and on their faces when they saw the mare.

Thinking of Ginger, Mike ran, panting and slipping and sliding, toward the corral. He knew before he got there even that something was wrong. His inner self told him so.

Stumbling toward the gate, he saw that it was open. Ginger was gone. Gone!

In spite of the open gate, he hurried inside, calling her name; but the only sound he heard was the shrill, high-pitched whine of the wind and the rattly, beady sound of the sleet pelting the earth with its icy fingers.

A numbness as cold as the ice balls coming from the skies above him, crept slowly over him. It gripped the very core of his heart and seemed to squeeze him until he could scarcely breathe.

"Gin-ger!" he called mournfully into the icy-black night. But the storm seemed only to mock the plaintive call and add even more grief and sorrow to the forlorn heart.

Like one in total shock and moving like some automated toy, he stumbled toward the barn where his father's horses were sheltered, chiding himself for not keeping Ginger inside with them as his father had suggested
he could do. But he had been so proud of the chestnut-brown mare, and she had been so special to him that he had asked permission to build her a lean-to shed all her own. She loved her private corral and seemed totally happy with the lean-to, also. But there had been a restlessness about her lately, Mike conceded sadly, recalling having seen Midnight over the hill a few nights earlier.

Suddenly, he knew what had awakened him; it all came back like a record on the stereo: It was the loud, unmistakeable call of the mustang and Ginger's answering whinny. That was it! The mustang came back for the mare and somehow... somehow!... one or the other of the horses had opened the gate. They had to have done it; he knew he had closed it securely before he left her only hours earlier.

His father's horses whinnied softly as Mike approached the barn, feeling dead and numb inside and out. Once inside, he turned the light switch on then settled himself on a bale of hay and let the tears flow at will. All the pent-up feelings and the numbness flowed outward with the gushing tears. Then, manlike, he stood to his feet and reached for a saddle and a halter. He would take Chestnut, he decided, and go after Ginger. But where would he look? he wondered, and in this storm, too!

Again he settled back on the bale of hay, thinking, planning, wondering when a voice spoke clearly to his soul.

"Don't you think it's time to turn loose of what you want, Mike?" the Voice asked pointedly. "Always, you must have what you want. This is why you aren't sanctified as yet. I cannot sanctify and cleanse that which you want to hold on to, that which you cling to. Turn loose, Son, and give Me the reins to your life."

Mike swallowed hard, but the lump inside his throat didn't move. In spite of the cold, he discovered that he was perspiring.

"Let Ginger go," the same Voice advised kindly, "and confess that pride you've harbored in your heart all these weeks over having captured her from the wild herd. Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall. Your pride must go... be utterly slain... before I can sanctify your heart."
Mike clutched the bale of hay with his fingers. Let Ginger go! The thought was preposterous. He felt like he was suffocating.

"If any man love houses and lands . . . more than Me, he is not worthy of me."

The call was as unmistakeable as was the Voice, and Mike, thinking and listening, trembled under its impact. The price would never get cheaper, he realized; when God laid down terms, it was for time and eternity. This was one of His Divine attributes, the young man knew . . . His immutability or unchangeableness. God was not like man, that He changed His mind about a thing; but He remained forever just the same . . . changeless and unchanged.

Sudden tears filled Mike's eyes; they chased each other down his cheeks in a rain-like stream. The bale of hay became an instant altar as he confessed his carnal pride and begged God to utterly slay and crucify it, along with all the other carnal traits. "I turn loose of Ginger, dear Lord, along with all other known and unknown 'Gingers' in my heart," he cried with upraised hands and arms. "King of my life, I crown Thee now . . ."

A cleansing wave washed over his heart, filling, thrilling and flooding his entire being with a rush of holy and divine love. He was sanctified. Truly and wholly and entirely sanctified; his heart was purified and cleansed from all inbred sin and he was made perfect in love. It was glorious, blissfully and wonderfully glorious.

Getting to his feet, he paced back and forth, shouting the praises of God. The call of the wild . . . for freedom to roam.., was too great for Ginger, and she, upon hearing the call of the stallion, had followed the lead of her heart.

He would not go in search of her, Mike decided quickly; Ginger would have her freedom. It was his reward to her for the freedom he had obtained from God the Holy Spirit by giving her up, by turning loose of her in his heart. She had been his idol. Yes, his idol! The thought was shockingly true and Mike, now fully delivered and free in his soul, began singing tearfully,

"Whatever idol I have known...
Whate'er that idol be...
Lord, help me tear it from it's throne
And worship only Thee."

He stood for a while after that with head bowed. Then he walked jubilantly to the light switch and pushed the button, plunging the barn into darkness again. With a song in his heart, he walked out into the storm and the stinging ice. But he scarcely noticed; His soul was warm and flowing over with divine love.