THE STAR
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Less than four years out of college and settled in nicely and comfortably at the Pine Woods Apartments, Gerald Rusher stood looking through the ceiling-to-floor windows in the exclusively furnished living room, watching the skiers on the hill and feeling totally in control of his life.
He thought of the swank office on the main street in the center and hub of all the business of the hustling, bustling and extremely neat, clean, and well-planned town in which he now lived and his heart swelled with pride. No easy ride to success, his; ah no: hard work and sacrifice and do-without and grit. Plenty of grit. But he had done it; indeed he had. And he had "achieved his goal: The handsomely lettered sign on the door of his office bore bold testimony to this fact. He was no longer a nonentity; no longer merely Gerald Rusher; he was, instead, Gerald Rusher, Attorney At Law.

He turned from the window and surveyed the spacious apartment and its lavish furnishings. Who said he couldn't make it? His accumulation of costly material things was strong attestation to the contrary, almost shouting to those who cared to listen and to hear that he did make it, and that very well, too. And the nice thing about it was that everything he had was paid for.

He sometimes found it difficult to believe that this "Piece of Paradise" was his, as he called the condominium-apartment and its furnishings. But it was; the deed was kept securely and safely in the lock box at the bank where he did his banking.

In stocking feet, he crossed the thick, plush, off-white carpeting of the living room into the Great Room, where a carefully placed sky light flooded the room with light and brightness. Plants grew tall and lushly in their massive planters in the room, lending a tropical air to the brightly colored and boldly patterned sofas and chairs. Gerald liked this room especially much, for, on the coldest, snowiest days, he felt like he was in the tropics. It was always cheerful and bright in the Great Room. Always. His kitchen, too, where two sky lights added brightness to the carefully planned room and the stone fireplace from the Great Room came through into the kitchen.

He turned on the radio then seated himself in an overstuffed chair in the Great Room and opened the evening paper, feeling satisfaction over his achievements and his outstanding success. Already, he was known as a "sharp" attorney; a no-nonsense lawyer; one who usually always won his case and, as such, one who was much sought out and sought after.

He scanned the headlines, noticing the fearful increase of crime and murders and such. Christmas! he thought. Always, there seemed to be an upsurge of theft and crime and such at Christmas time. He turned the page. The paper was full of gift suggestions; ads for everything, it seemed.
He put the paper down in a mood of disgust. Why did they have to celebrate Christmas anyhow? he wondered. When he was younger he believed in what his folks told him about Christmas. But college and law school changed his beliefs radically and drastically.

He felt almost embarrassed now, to think that he one time believed the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus. And that story of the wise men from the east being guided by a star; how ridiculous! he thought, brushing aside the other part of him that tried to remind him of his one-time faith in God and his great love for his father and mother.

"Tales! Tales!" he cried aloud, as memory did a fast replay of Luke's beautifully vivid and descriptive account of the birth of Jesus and the shining angels saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men."

He reached for one of his law books and opened it randomly, not caring what he read so long as he could erase the thought of Christmas and its meaning as he had been taught for all the years that he lived at home. But try as he may to remove it from his thoughts and his mind, it remained. Not only did it remain but it seemed to play and replay its softly-sweet angel message to the shepherds upon the strings of his heart; his heart, once tender and open and receptive to the truths of God's Word, now filled with agnosticism and tainted with atheism.

He slammed the heavy book shut and placed it once more upon the ornate end table then got to his feet and hurried to the alcove off the kitchen where he kept his skiing equipment and clothes: he would go to the slopes; the brisk, brittle air would clear his thinking, he was sure, and the exercise would be profitable and beneficial. Lately, he had been quit sedentary; too absorbed and involved in his lucrative business to get out and exercise much.

He dressed warmly, recalling the weatherman's prediction of minus zero temperatures for the night and some blizzard like snow squalls with high winds. He knew how fierce and real these could be; on the high slopes especially. But he didn't mind: if anything, subzero temperatures and heavily falling snows challenged his strength and his stamina. Secretly, he prided himself in his "toughness"; his excellent physical fitness and endurance and
tolerance. Yes, he was in excellent health. And why not, he was still a young man; not even thirty. And an avowed bachelor, he feared. Oh sure, he had dated some during his college years. And he had had a special girl friend for a while; someone he really cared for. But he had cut the relationship off, deciding against marriage at the time, wanting, instead, to devote himself and his time to his studies.

Gerald's thoughts raced back to ShelliAnn now, as he made his way to the lift that would carry him up the steep slope. He recalled how, that, by the time he was ready to make contact with her again and pick up the relationship where they had left off, he heard that she was happily married to an old acquaintance of his. He remembered the sinking feeling he experienced upon hearing the news. But he knew that he was to blame for the loss.

He realized, again, that he could have had the sweet, gentle mannered woman as his bride had he not placed business and money at the top of his priority list. Still, his fiercely intense drive to succeed and achieve had paid off, hadn't it? Yes, monetarily and materially it had given him all that he desired, and more. If only he had someone with whom to share it! He pushed the thought from his mind and took the lift to the top.

The wind was bitter cold and crystal of icy-cold snowflakes pelted him in the face as he alighted from the chair and began to ski along the top of the slope. He felt a surge of pure exhilaration and decided to see just how far he could go before it became too dark and too late. He thoroughly enjoyed skiing by moonlight, but he knew that this night he would not see the moon. Little matter, the slopes for miles around were perfect for skiing and he felt challenged to meet and greet mother nature on the slopes, fierce though her onslaughts may be at times.

With the agility of the young and the skill and expertise of the pro, Gerald glided along the top then turned and sped down the slope opposite his apartment-condominium complex, feeling almost like he was flying. He felt young and daring, almost dizzy with exhilaration and the feel of the wind on his back and the pelting snow in his face. It was wonderful, this feeling of being one with nature; of racing it; playing with it; challenging it.

On and on he went, farther and farther away, forgetting time and darkness, wind and blinding snow, lost completely in the thrill of speed and
the rhythmic motion of his body moving across the snow. Every part of his body felt charged and alive.

He glided into a ravine then sped uphill, and when he reached the top and the wind nearly knocked the breath out of him he realized that he was in one of the predicted blizzard-like squalls. He slowed down, trying to keep his balance, but the wind refused to cooperate and snow was falling like it was being dumped by loads out of the sky. Suddenly, he realized that it was dark. Very dark. Where was he? he wondered. And how far away from his apartment was he?

He stopped and stood still for a moment trying to get his bearings; but the howling wind and the rapidly, heavily falling snow warned him that he dare not stand still long; he'd freeze to death unless he moved on or found shelter.

Shelter? The mere thought mocked him now. There was no shelter on this vast wilderness of white. Turning, he pushed off down the slope, hoping he was heading back the way he had come.

The wind, which was on his back when he started out, now whipped and lashed the snow into his face with fierce intensity and impeded his progress. He could feel his body tiring but he knew he dare not stop to rest. His only thought now was to get home.

He pushed on, knowing he could be in for real trouble with the driving snow and the frigid temperature. He must get home, and that soon. But where was home? Which way? If only he had brought his compass. Compass? How could he see anything in this blizzard? He should have stayed home, he mused in silent fear, as the wind knocked its icy fist down his throat and made him gasp for breath.

Gerald tried in vain to squelch the fear that now throbbed inside his chest. He was lost and he knew it; knew it as certainly and as surely as he knew his name. He would die out here; die alone; freeze to death; and no one would know it. They would look for him -call his home when he didn't show up at the office for his appointments. But no one would find him; he would be buried beneath the snow. Maybe for years. It wasn't uncommon or unusual for the mountains to carry their snows throughout the summer months, he knew.
For the first time in his life, panic churned and boiled up inside of him. He felt so utterly alone, and so helpless. So powerless to do anything. He didn't know what to do. He thought of his law books now, and of all he had learned and been taught, and suddenly it dawned on him that nothing in his books nor in all he had been taught, could help him now. Nothing! He was hopelessly lost and totally incapable of knowing what to do. If only he could see some light. A star. . . .

A star! The thought nearly staggered him and his mind. He didn't believe that Biblical account anymore. Or did he? Quickly, like a flash out of the past, he saw his father's head bent over the Bible, reading the Word for family worship. He heard his parents' tearful entreaties for their son's salvation. And he heard the vivid account of the birth of Jesus, and of the wise men, guided by the star to where the young Child Jesus was. And instantly he believed. He knew in his heart that every word of the account was true. Yes, in spite of what he had been taught in college and law school, his early, Biblical training was truth: it was the Word of God.

Realizing, suddenly, that his was not a hopeless situation after all, and that he could call for help, Gerald began to pray. And to weep. He begged God's forgiveness for Jesus' sake, for turning his back upon Him and everything he had once believed. And he asked the Lord to save his soul. Nor was he ashamed. It seemed like such a natural thing to do and so very all right.

"I'm lost," he cried aloud. "Lost. My soul is lost. And I am lost in this wilderness of snow. Oh, to see Thy star, that will bring me to Thee, as it led and guided the wise men to Thyself, and then guide me safely homeward. Save me, O God! Save me, a sinner."

Above the roar of the storm came the words of the Savior; "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace."

Instantly, Gerald knew he was born again; forgiven; washed in the blood of Calvary's Lamb. Rejoicing, and weeping for joy, he raised his eyes upward. And then he saw it -- a star! One single star. It was shining brightly in spite of the storm. And it was moving. It was! It was!
Feeling the presence of angels, he moved ahead with the star, no longer a skeptic and an agnostic but now a believer. A born again, radically changed believer.