

Not for mere poetizing has the ancient word for countryman come to be the word for unbeliever, for Christianity is a religion of togetherness, and, pagan to the soul, the ranchers of Tierra Longa preferred to trust to the partial gods of their own boundaries, the secret stroke of fortune.

That week saw the end of the Rains. They blew in on the coast winds through the vent by which the river found its way to the sea, ran halfway up the Saltillos and broke over the Torr' in a succession of quick, steady showers followed by warm, bright days of surpassing clearness. As though it had been loosed on them from the superheated air, dry discontent settled over Tierra Longa. Young Brent, working from ranch to ranch in search of signers for the Land and Water Holders' Agreement, felt it come like a dust-storm at the turn of the season; a sense of rasping tension, and then an imperceptible curdling of the air, and suddenly they were lost in it out of sight and sound of one another.

It began with the givers of options. Many of them had wanted badly to sell. Men who had bought into the valley under the stimulus of one or another of the rumors of local development, men who begrudge the tying-up of their capital in profitless fields, began to see themselves, by the success of Kenneth's defensive operations, done out of a sale. For it was plain that if Rickart was forced to surrender his scheme of taking the water away, their property would be thrown back on their hands. And after six months of him, Tierra Longa missed Elwood. He was the enemy, no doubt, but he was also Illusion, the satisfaction of that incurable desire of men to be played upon, to be handled. What were all young Brent's sober