

victim of self-interested misrepresentation, and in the instinctive though concealed contempt in which he held certain of the Tierra Longans. For when, through those mysterious channels by which the Old Man kept himself informed of local affairs, and permitted as much or little of his own as served him to be known, report had represented Rickart's abandonment of the water steal as a mere turning of the back upon them, there had been toward young Brent a recrudescence of that suspicion with which they had viewed his earlier appearance among them.

For to all of them, whether they had hoped most or feared most from Rickart's ascendancy in the valley, there was left in the cup the dregs of disappointment. Life, business, chance and change, the excitement even of opposition, had again passed by them. They were dropped again into the humiliation of being too poor to steal from. It was n't that they did not fully realize their own failure to rise to Brent's lead; that was exactly what they did realize, and for that they could n't forgive him. They had fallen away from the Howkawanda Canal, a controlling interest in which had been so freely offered, so long as they thought of it as likely to "get them in wrong with Rickart," only to find that it was the one thing likely to have raised them in Rickart's estimation, putting them in possession of something Rickart had valued. Rickart's withdrawal had given to their vacillations an antic appearance which, in their invincible rurality, they visited on Kenneth.

Much of this state of theirs was hid from him by unfamiliarity; he saw only that they withdrew, and plunged protectively himself into silence. He went seldom to town, saw nobody but the household at Palomitas,