

### (13) A CALL LOAN

[十三]一諾千金±

In those days the cattlemen were the anointed. They were the grandees of the grass, kings of the kine, lords of the lean, barons of beef and bones. They might have ridden in golden chariots had their tastes so inclined. The cattleman was caught in a stampede of dollars. It seemed to him that he had more money than was decent. But when he had bought a watch with precious stones set in the case so large that they hurt his ribs, and a California saddle with silver nails and Angora skin suaderos, and ordered everybody up to the bar for whisky -- what else was there for him to spend money for?

那時候，牛人是天之驕子。他們是牧草大亨，牲畜之王，牧原之主，牛骨肉的男爵。願意的話，他們可以乘金馬車。錢多得四處流竄。多得有點那個。他的錶鑲的鑽石大到連肋骨都要發痛，從加州買來銀釘安哥拉軟皮馬鞍，在酒吧裏沒事就全盤請客--他的錢還有其他地方花嗎？

Not so circumscribed in expedient for the reduction of surplus wealth were those lairds of the lariat who had womenfolks to their name. In the breast of the rib-sprung sex the genius of purse lightening may slumber through years of inopportunity, but never, my brothers, does it become extinct.

結了婚的就不會這麼沒命地花。但是，儘管安靜下來，那種揮霍的脾氣也不可能完全消聲匿跡。

So, out of the chaparral came Long Bill Longley from the Bar Circle Ranch on the Frio -- a wife-driven man -- to taste the urban joys of success. Something like half a million dollars he had, with an income steadily increasing.

就這樣，長腿龍比爾從冷河一槓圓圈牧場還俗--一個怕太太的--來嚐嚐城市的成功之味。他大概有五十萬左右吧，而且收入不斷增加。

Long Bill was a graduate of the camp and trail. Luck and thrift, a cool head, and a telescopic eye for mavericks had raised him from cowboy to be a cowman. Then came the boom in cattle, and Fortune, stepping gingerly among the cactus thorns, came and emptied her cornucopia at the doorstep of the ranch.

長腿比爾由牧牛營和長途跋涉地趕牛生涯畢業。也是運氣，也是儉省，加上冷靜的大腦，觀察小牛獨具的慧眼，他由牧童搖身一變為牛人。緊接著，畜牧業大景氣，善財童女特地碎步金蓮在那些仙人掌叢上面，拿起財神爺爺的荷包，紅紅綠綠地就往長腿比爾的牧場裏倒。

In the little frontier city of Chaparosa, Longley built a costly residence. Here he became a captive, bound to the chariot of social existence. He was doomed to become a leading citizen. He

struggled for a time like a mustang in his first corral, and then he hung up his quirt and spurs. Time hung heavily on his hands. He organized the First National Bank of Chaparosa, and was elected its president.

在美國西部開拓邊緣這個叫萊芭樂的小鎮，比爾蓋了一棟昂貴的房子。住在這兒好比囚犯一樣，來去不得自由，為社會的枷索束縛。他是非當個領導人物不可的。好比剛從原野套回來的野馬一般，在馬圈裏蹦了一會子，不久也只好解下馬釘，掛起馬刷子。他的一雙手還是這麼地勞動。他隨後組織了萊芭樂的第一國家銀行，榮任總裁。

One day a dyspeptic man, wearing double-magnifying glasses, inserted an official-looking card between the bars of the cashier's window of the first National Bank. Five minutes later the bank force was dancing at the beck and call of a national bank examiner.

有一天，一個看起來在拉肚子的，戴著厚厚的眼鏡，把一張官模官樣的名片塞進第一銀行出納員的鐵窗。還不到五分鐘，整個銀行像被黃鼠狼驚動的雞籠子一樣，上上下下任憑這個國家銀行稽查員指揮。

This examiner, Mr. J. Edgar Todd, proved to be a thorough one.

這位稽查員，杜一格先生，果然查得透徹。

At the end of it all the examiner put on his hat, and called the president, Mr. William R. Longley, into the private office.

最後嘛，稽查員戴上帽子，把總裁龍威廉先生叫進辦公室裏。

'Well, how do you find things?' asked Longley, in his slow, deep tones. 'Any brands in the round-up you didn't like the looks of?'

[怎麼樣，事情看起來好嗎？]龍這麼慢條斯禮地說。[趕攏了的牛群你看到那隻烙的印子不順眼？]

'The bank checks up all right, Mr. Longley,' said Todd; 'and I find your loans in very good shape -- with one exception. You are carrying one very bad bit of paper -- one that is so bad that I have been thinking that you surely do not realize the serious position it places you in. I refer to a call loan of \$10,000 made to Thomas Merwin. Not only is the amount in excess of the maximum sum the bank can loan any individual legally, but it is absolutely without endorsement or security. Thus you have doubly violated the national banking laws, and have laid yourself open to criminal prosecution by the Government. A report of the matter to the Comptroller of the Currency -- which I am bound to make -- would, I am sure, result in the matter being turned over to the Department of Justice for action. You see what a serious thing it is.'

[銀行查起來還可以，龍先生，]杜稽查說；[貸款也很結實 -- 只是一件。你有一紙相當不

好的文件 -- 這一紙文件這麼差，我想你一定不知道它會把你弄到甚麼嚴重的地步。我是說一項憑口說借給馬湯姆一萬塊錢的貸款。它不但超出可以合法貸給個人的貸款數額，而且毫無擔保。這麼一來，你是雙重觸犯國家銀行法，足以導致政府的刑事處份。一份給國幣局的報告 -- 我是非寫不可 -- 就足以把你交給司法單位處分。你看這有多嚴重。]

Bill Longley was leaning his lengthy, slowly moving frame back in his swivel chair. His hands were clasped behind his head, and he turned a little to look the examiner in the face. The examiner was surprised to see a smile creep about he rugged mouth of the banker, and a kindly twinkle in his light-blue eyes. If he saw the seriousness of the affair, it did not show in his countenance.

龍比爾正要把長長的身軀慢慢地往他的旋轉椅的椅背靠。兩手插在腦袋後頭，他微微轉過頭釘著稽查的臉看。稽查看到他嘴角翹翹笑了笑，淺藍眼睛仁慈地閃光，果然吃了一驚。假如他知道事情有多嚴重，一點也沒露聲色。

‘Of course, you don’t know Tom Merwin,’ said Longley, almost genially. ‘Yes, I know about that loan. It hasn’t any security except Tom Merwin’s word. Somehow, I’ve found that when a man’s word is good, it’s the best security there is. Oh, yes, I know the Government doesn’t think so. I guess I’ll see Tom about that note.’

[當然，你不認識馬湯姆，]龍几乎是快樂地說。[是的，我知道那件貸款。除了馬湯姆一句話之外沒任何擔保。我總是認為一諾千金的人，只一句話比甚麼擔保都功效。噢，是的，我知道政府不這麼想。我想我會找湯姆談談。]

Mr. Todd’s dyspepsia seems to grow worse. He looked at the chaparral banker through his double-magnifying glasses in amazement.

杜先生拉肚子好像更嚴重了似的。他透過鼻子上戴的雙料放大鏡的眼鏡看這為萊芭樂樹叢滾過來的銀行總裁。

‘You see,’ said Longley, easily explaining the thing away, ‘Tom heard of 2,000 head of two-year-olds down near Rocky Ford on the Rio Grande that could be had for \$8 a head. I reckon ‘twas one of the old Leandro Garcia’s outfit that he had smuggled over, and he wanted to make a quick turn on ‘em. Those cattle are worth \$15 on the hoof in Kansas City. Tom knew it and I knew it. He had \$6,000, and I let him have the \$10,000 to make the deal with. His brother Ed took ‘em on to market three weeks ago. He ought to be beak ‘most any day now with the money. When he comes Tom’ll pay that note.’

[你看，]龍輕描淡寫地說，[湯姆聽說大河岩石渡的地方有兩千頭兩歲大的小牛要賣，每頭八塊錢。我猜那是老賈廉多走私過來的，要快快脫手。這些牛在堪薩斯城十五塊錢一頭。湯姆明白，我也明白。他有六千塊錢，我借給他一萬，足夠這筆買賣的了。他的老弟艾德三星期前把牛隻趕到市場去賣。應該隨時都會帶錢回來了才是。他一回來，湯姆就會付貸款錢。]

The bank examiner was shocked. It was, perhaps, his duty to step out to the telegraph office and wire the situation to the Comptroller. But he did not. He talked pointedly and effectively to Longley for three minutes. He succeeded in making the banker understand that he stood upon the border of a catastrophe. And then he offered a tiny loophole of escape.

稽查員這一驚可是不小。身為稽查，以他的職責來講，他似乎該馬上到電報間打電報給財政部檢查署才是。他卻沒這麼做。他和龍簡單扼要地談了三分鐘。果然讓這位銀行總裁明白他正面臨大難的邊緣。然後，他提出了一個小小的下臺階。

‘I am going to Hilldale’s to-night,’ he told Longley, ‘to examine a bank there. I will pass through Chaparosa on my way back. At twelve tomorrow I shall call at this bank. If this loan has been cleared out of the way by that time it will not be mentioned in my report. If no -- I will have to my duty.’

[我今天晚上要去西戴里，]他告訴龍，[去查一家銀行。回來的時候我會路經萊芭樂。明天中午十二點，我會登門造訪。假如這項貸款在明天中午之前還清的話，我隻字不提。要不然--我必須盡我的職責。]

With that the examiner bowed and departed.

稽查員就這麼低頭致意後離去。

The president of the First National lounged in his chair half an hour longer, and then he lit a mild cigar, and went over to Tom Merwin’s house. Merwin, a ranchman in brown duck, with a contemplative eye, sat with his feet upon a table, plaiting a rawhide quirt.

這位國一銀總裁在椅子上逗留的半把鐘頭，點了一根淡味雪茄，出得門去找馬湯姆。牧人老馬穿著一身棕鴨色，目光若有所思，把兩條二郎腿高高抬在桌子上，一面編他的生牛皮馬刷子。

‘Tom,’ said Longley, leaning against the table, ‘you hard anything from Ed yet?’

[湯姆，]龍說，一面靠在桌邊，[有艾德的消息嗎？]

‘Not yet,’ said Merwin, continuing his plaiting. ‘I guess Ed’ll be along back now in a few days.’

[還沒，]馬說，一邊編著他的馬刷子。[我猜他過几天就回來了。]

‘There was a bank examiner,’ said Longley, ‘nosing around our place today, and he bucked a sight about that note of yours. You know I know it’s all right, but the thing is against the banking laws. I was pretty sure you’d have paid it off before the bank was examined again, but the son-of-a-gun slipped in on us, Tom. Now, I’m short of cash myself just now, or I’d let you have the money to take it up with. I’ve got till twelve o’clock tomorrow, and then I’ve got to show the

cash in place of that note or --'

[有個銀行稽查員，]龍說，[今天在我那邊多管閒事，看到你那張字條。你也知道我知道沒有關係，問題是這件事觸了銀行法。我相信下次稽查之前你一定會付清，但是這混蛋逮住了我們，湯姆。我現在現金不夠，要不然我會讓你有足夠的錢來支付。我到明天中午之前，就必須有錢來抵消那張字條，否則--]

'Or what, Bill?' asked Merwin, as Longley hesitated.

[否則怎麼，比爾?]龍遲疑的時候馬這麼問。

'Well, I suppose it means be jumped on with both of Uncle Sam's feet.'

[噯，我想意思是讓山姆叔叔好好修理一頓。]

'I'll try to raise the money for you on time,' said Merwin, interested in his plaiting.

[我會想辦法及時替你找到這筆錢，]馬說，一面織他的馬刷。

'All right, Tom,' concluded Longley, as he turned toward the door; 'I knew you would if you could.'

[好吧，湯姆，]龍講完準備要走；[我知道你能的話一定會這麼做的。]

Merwin threw down his whip and went to the only other bank in town, a private one, run by Cooper & Craig.

馬丟下做了一半的馬鞭子，到鎮上唯一的另一家銀行，這是家私人銀行，由古柏和葛雷經營。

'Cooper,' he said, to the partner by that name, 'I've got to have \$10,000 today or tomorrow. I've got a house and lot here that's worth about \$6,000 and that's all the actual collateral. But I've got a cattle deal on that's sure to bring me in more than that much profit within a few days.'

[古柏，]他徑叫那位合夥人名子，[我今天或明天必須有一萬塊錢。我有一棟房子連地一起，值六千塊，那是所有的擔保。可是我有一宗牛隻買賣一定能在几天之內替我賺上比那個還多的利潤。]

Copper began to cough.

古柏不聽還好，一聽咳嗽起來。

'Now, for God's sake don't say no.' said Merwin. 'I owe that much money on a call loan. It's

been called, and the man that called it is a man I've laid on the same blanket with in cow-camps and ranger-camps for ten years. He can call anything I've got. He can call the blood out of my veins and it'll come. He's got to have the money. He's in a devil of a -- Well, he needs the money, and I've got to get it for him. You know my word's good, Cooper.'

[噯唷，我的天，別說不，]馬說。[我爲一筆口說貸款欠了那麼多的錢。現在人家要了，那個要的人是我在牧牛營和養牛場同睡一張毯子過了十年的老相好。他要我脈裏的血我也得拿出來給他。他必須有這筆錢。他正面臨一項鬼打架的--。反正，他須要這筆錢，我也必須給他拿到這筆錢。你知道我說話算數，古柏。]

'No doubt of it,' assented Cooper, urbanely, 'but I've a partner, you know. I'm not free in making loans. And even if you had the best security in your hands, Merwin, We couldn't accommodate you in less than a week. We're just making a shipment of \$15,000 to Myer Brothers in Rockdell, to buy cotton with. It goes down on the narrow gauge to-night. That leaves our cash quite short at present. Sorry we can't arrange it for you.'

[毫無疑問地，]古柏斯文地贊同，[可是我有個同夥，你知道。我不能自由貸款給人。可是呢，即使你手頭有最好的擔保，馬，我們也不可能在一星期之內給你。我們剛運出一萬五去向鄒克的梅爾兄弟買棉花。今天晚上由那條窄軌火車交出去。這麼一來，弄得我們的現金很有限。很抱歉我們不能替你安排。]

Merwin went back to his little bar office and plaited at his quirt again. About four o'clock in the afternoon he went to the First National and leaned over the railing of Longley's desk.

馬回到他自家裏的小辦公室，繼續編他的馬刷。大約四點的時候，他到第一國銀，一隻手靠著龍的辦公桌站在那裏。

'I'll try to get that money for you to-night -- I mean to-morrow, Bill.'

[我今天晚上--我是說明天去替你借錢，比爾。]

'All right, Tom,' said Longley, quietly.

[好吧，湯姆，]龍靜靜地說。

At nine o'clock that night Tom Merwin stepped cautiously out of the small frame house in which he lived. It was near the edge of the little town, and few citizens were in the neighborhood at that hour. Merwin wore two six-shooters in a belt and a slouch hat. He moved swiftly down a lonely street, and then followed the sandy road that ran parallel to the narrow-gauge track until he reach the water-tank, two miles below the town. There Tom Merwin stopped, tied a black silk handkerchief about the lower part of his face, and pulled his hat down low.

那天晚上九點的時候，馬湯姆悄悄地走出他住的那棟小平房。房子在鎮的邊上，那時候沒

几個人會看得到他。馬在皮帶上插了兩支左輪槍，戴著一頂大大的西部牛仔帽。他很快地走過一條冷冷清清的街，然後沿著一條和窄軌火車道平行的沙子路一直走到給火車加水的水桶那裏，出了鎮外大約兩哩左右。馬湯姆停了下來，把一條絲巾綁在臉上，然後拉低帽子。

In ten minutes the night train for Rockdell pulled up at the tank, having come from Chaparosa.

才過十分鐘，由萊芭樂往鄒克的列車停在水桶加水。

With a gun in each hand Merwin raised himself from behind a clump of chaparral and started for the engine. But before he had taken three steps, two long, strong arms clasped him from behind, and he was lifted from his feet and thrown, face downward, upon the grass. There was a heavy knee pressing against his back, and an iron hand grasping each of his wrists. He was held thus, like a child, until the engine had taken water, and until the train had moved, with accelerating speed, out of sight. Then he was released, and rose to his feet to face Bill Longley.

一隻手拿一支槍，馬從躲著的萊芭樂叢後面出來，快快向火車頭跑去。可是還沒跑上三步，就被兩隻長而有力的手臂從後面給挾住，整個人被提起來，然後像狗吃屎的一樣臉朝下，五體投地地被平擺在草地上。一隻重重的膝蓋壓著他的背，鐵一樣硬的手掐著他的手腕。他就這樣像小孩子一樣被壓在那裏，一直等到火車加了水，開始移動，慢慢加速到看不見的時候。這時候，他被放開，站起來一看原來是龍比爾。

‘The case never needed t be fixed up this way, Tom,’ said Longley. ‘I saw Cooper this evening, and he told me what you and him talked about. Then I went down to your house to-night and saw you come out with your guns on, and I followed you. Let’s go back, Tom.’

[這案子用不著這麼解決，湯姆，]龍說。[我今天晚上去找古柏，他把你跟他講的話跟我說了。後來我去你家找你，看到你戴了槍出來，於是跟蹤到這裏。我們回去吧，湯姆。]

They waled away together, side by side.

他們肩並肩地一起走回去。

‘‘Twas the only change I saw,’ said Merwin, presently. ‘You called your loan, and I tried to answer you. Now, what’ll you do, Bill, if they sock it to you?’

[那是我看得到唯一的機會，]馬很快地說。[你要你的貸款，我試著還你。現在怎麼辦呢，比爾，假如他們給你一票的話？]

‘What would you have done if they’d socked it to you?’ was the answer Longley made.

[假如他們給你一票的話你會怎麼做呢？]龍這麼回答。

'I never thought I'd lay in a bush to stick up a train,' remarked Merwin; 'but a call loan's different. A call's a call with me. We've got twelve hours yet, Bill, before his spy jumps onto you. We've got to raise them spondulicks somehow. Maybe we can -- Great Sam Houston! Do you hear that?'

[我從來沒想到要躲在樹叢後面來搶劫火車，]馬說；[可是口說貸款不一樣。一句話就是一句話。那個間諜拿你之前我們還有十二小時，比爾。我們必得想辦法拿到那筆錢才是。我們也許可以--我的山姆修士頓大老爺！你聽到了嗎？]

Merwin broke into a run, and Longley kept with him, hearing only a rather pleasing whistle somewhere in the night rendering the lugubrious air of 'The cowboy's Lament.'

馬開始跑起來，龍跟著他也跑起來，只聽得晚間甚麼地方飄來一陣快樂的口哨，吹著那首[傷心牧牛郎]。

'It's the only tune he knows,' shouted Merwin, as he ran. 'I'll bet --'

[他總共就會這麼一首歌，]馬一邊跑一邊大聲說。[我敢打賭--]

They were at the door of Merwin's house. He kicked it open and fell over an old valise lying in the middle of the floor. A sunburned, firmjawed youth, stained by travel, lay upon the bed puffing at a brown cigarette.

他們跑到馬的房子。馬一腳把們踢開，被放在地板中間的一支舊皮包拌了一跤。一個被太陽晒得黑黑，下巴長得結實，風塵撲撲的年輕人躺在床上抽菸。

'What's the word, Ed?' gasped Merwin.

[怎麼樣啊，艾德？]馬憋著氣說。

'So, so,' drawled that capable youngster. 'Just got in on the 9.30. Sold the bunch for fifteen, straight. Now, buddy, you want to quit kickin' a valise around that's got \$29,000 in green backs in its in'ards.'

[還好，]年輕有為的男子拿鼻音慢慢地說。[剛剛搭九點半的火車回來。把那群牛每頭十五塊賣了。怎麼樣，老哥，能不能麻煩少拿尊腿踢那支皮袋當皮球耍子，有兩萬九千塊錢藏在它肚子裏。]