

Strange STORIES

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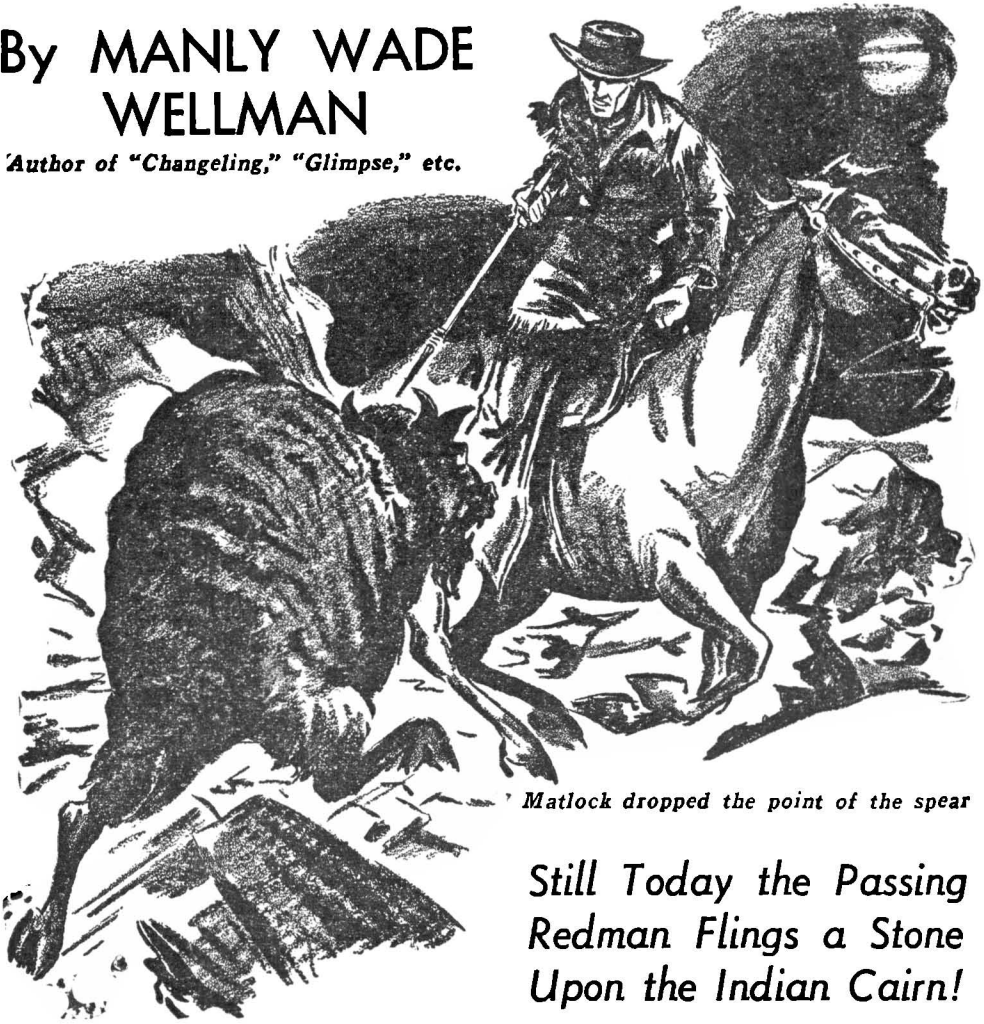
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HALF BULL

By MANLY WADE
WELLMAN

Author of "Changeling," "Glimpse," etc.



Matlock dropped the point of the spear

Still Today the Passing Redman Flings a Stone Upon the Indian Cairn!

IT STANDS not far from the Platte River, a landmark on the unrelieved level of the prairie—a rough pyramid of stones more than ten feet high, with the road curving widely around it. The town just behind was named after it, Indian Cairn. Oldsters there know, or pretend to know, all about the rock pile.

It was the grave of a savage hero, they say, a chief so respected and loved that this primitive monument was reared in his honor. True, one garrulous old fellow disagrees, and

claims to remember the days when the road was only an Indian trail. In those times, he stubbornly insists, it was believed bad luck to come too near the pile, and that explains in his mind the reason for the loop in the road.

It was also customary to throw a stone as one rode by—this does not sound like the Indian idea of honoring the illustrious dead—and sometimes passersby provided themselves with stones whole miles before reaching the spot.

Philip Matlock might have told the truth of it, but he was ever a close-mouthed man. And now he is dead and in a grave of his own, with his name cut upon the granite that marks where he lies. In death's sleep perhaps he has dreams, as Hamlet fancied might befall us; dreams of the wilderness that was not Nebraska in June of 1851—dreams of how he, a twenty-two-year-old free hunter, rode along the banks of the Platte. . . .

YOUNG Philip Matlock was beginning to be hungry. His bright blue eyes scanned the wide prairie as keenly and disappointedly as a castaway on a raft scans the empty waves. He sat a weary bay horse, and his old "eight-squar" Hawkens rifle lay across his arm. His lanky young body was clad in fringed buckskin, made dingy by the smoke of campfires, and he wore beaded moccasins and a wide felt hat. His young beard was small and cider-brown. He had not rested or eaten since the early morning, and it would soon be sunset.

Game had been wary all day, and the young man brightened hungrily when he spied cloven hoofprints. This buffalo must have been smallish, but more than a calf at that. Odd that it should be without herd-companions. Still one beast would be more than enough for his present needs, and indeed for his ride westward to a rendezvous of trapper friends. Glancing to the priming of his piece, Matlock advanced on the trail.

That trail led him away from the river, past a low line of sandy hills and into the prairie, sparsely grown up in grass and as flat and wide as the windless sea. Far ahead toward the horizon showed four little triangles—the teepees of Indians. The hoofprints led in this direction.

That mystified Matlock, for buffalo are normally shy of men. He continued his quest for five minutes more, and saw that the tracks led into a deep ravine.

Perhaps the lone buffalo had been frightened by the Indians, had taken cover. Matlock dismounted at the edge of the ravine, prepared to lead his horse down the bank, then paused.

The bottom was full of cottonwood scrub, and no hunter enters thickets blindly.

As he hesitated, rifle in hand and the reins caught in the crook of his arm, he was suddenly aware of a new aspect of the split-wedge marks before his moccasin toes.

A buffalo, like other bovines, makes a sloppy track pattern. The rear hoofs fall behind, touching but not covering the spots just quitted by the front ones, and the result is a doubled impression. But here on the brink of the gully, he realized, the marks were clear and single. All the way back, they were clear and single. Why?

"Maybe it's got only two feet," he mused pleasantly.

His musings came abruptly to an end as the cottonwood scrub stirred in its depths, then became agitated closer to him, closer, as something heavy and confident moved in his direction. Vaguely he saw a shape, dark, powerful and erect.

A brave man admits fear into his thoughts but not into his acts. Philip Matlock was a brave man, and he knew there was something present of which to be afraid. Planting his moccasin feet, he moved his Hawkens to the ready.

BUT his horse lacked his master's sternness of fiber. It snorted hysterically, jerked free and ran. And because no man could survive afoot here, Matlock hurried after it.

The beast was a good one, and he had trained it from a colt, but he had to whistle and coax for five minutes before he got the reins into his hand. Then, when he swung into the saddle and tried to approach the ravine once more, he found himself with an equine rebellion on his hands that would have done credit to the wildest mustang. Matlock swore, then took thought.

He dismissed his original fear. The thing in the ravine was probably a hunter from the Indian camp. No reason to pick a quarrel. Better seek refreshment at the lodges. Matlock prodded his horse's ribs, and headed for the camp.

Not many whites would have done that, but Matlock understood and

liked Indians to a depth almost mystical. Cantering closer, he saw by the make of teepees that these were Tsitsichah, or Cheyennes. No horses or sentinels were visible, but one or two human figures moved cautiously into view, regarding him fixedly. Matlock flung up his right hand in the universal peace sign, then trotted confidently in.

There were about a dozen Cheyennes, men and women, and they stared with a concentrated suspicion that another man would think baleful. Matlock greeted them in their own tongue, dismounted, and held the edge of his hand to his stomach, signifying hunger.

"The Cheyennes hunger, too," said the oldest and tallest man, in the deep tones reserved by Indians for formal discourse.

"Why does not my father hunt?" asked Matlock, studying the faces around him. They were very gaunt.

"Our horses ran away," replied the old Indian, and again Matlock was aware of the lack of mounts. The younger men were studying his own bay with yearning, and Matlock balanced his rifle ostentatiously at the ready, making an offer.

"I have no meat. My hunt was unlucky. But in my saddlebags are coffee and sugar, and upon my blanket roll my Cheyenne brothers will see a sack of flour. Let me sleep here as a guest, and we will all eat."

The old Indian did not grow cheerful. "Hunger returns in the morning. Our horses are gone. We will starve."

"Tomorrow," continued Matlock, "I shall ride out and find my brothers' horses."

AT THAT the old man jerked his chin in approval, and the horse-coveters subsided. Matlock knew himself safe, and unlashed from his saddle the limp sack that held ten pounds or so of flour. The circle of Indians watched him intently, but no graven face betrayed eagerness.

"Bring water," Matlock called, and two women, one old and one young, went at the tall leader's gesture into a teepee. They returned with earthen pots. "Is it enough?" the younger

woman asked. "The Cheyennes have no more."

"Is there not a spring?" demanded Matlock, stirring up a batter.

She shook her head. "The spring is running low. There is nothing but mud."

"Fire," said Matlock, and the young woman who had spoken threw wood on a heap of dying embers. She moved gracefully, the white man thought, and her fine-boned face between its glossy black braids had primitive beauty. He set his griddle upon two propping stones—he was young enough on the frontier to retain such traps of civilization. Rubbing it with old bacon rinds, he made flapjacks as long as the batter lasted. Meanwhile the woman brewed all his coffee and sugar together in a kettle. Everyone in the camp had food and drink, Matlock eating beside the old chief, Lost Wolf.

"We hunted here because the Pawnees fear the country," Lost Wolf condescended to explain at last. "The spirits protect the buffalo herds. We did not believe at first; but, twenty days ago, we shot one buffalo and camped here. That night the Half Bull drove away our horses."

Matlock was startled. The memory of the hoofprints had come back to him. Yet he had heard the name before in his wanderings.

"While you slept? What is this Half Bull?" Matlock asked in low tones.

"One of our women saw—my daughter, Rain Feather. Let her speak."

At his gesture, the graceful young woman who had built the fire came forward.

"All had eaten heavily but I," she began, her eyes lowering shyly before Matlock's interested gaze. "I was sick in the throat—a dryness—and took only hot water. So, when others slept, I felt hungry. I got up and hunted for a piece of cooked meat. As I did so, I heard the horses."

"Running away?" prompted Matlock.

"Yes. I went to the door of the lodge—they had dragged their picket pins, and were running north." She pointed the direction, Indian fashion,

with open palm outward. Matlock noticed that her hands and wrists had the slender grace of a Spanish lady's. "As I watched," she went on, "the Half Bull turned from driving them, turned back toward our camp."

"What does my sister mean by a Half Bull?" asked Matlock, trying to bring to the surface the bits of Indian spiritism his plainsman's life had stored in his mind.

Rain Feather made gestures with her fingers, as though to outline the creature in the air. "It was like the forepart of a buffalo. A hump, shoulders, horns—and black wool over all. This stood on two feet, and looked."

Matlock nodded. He was remembering the tracks, and the thing that had lurked, as though in ambush, among the scrub of the ravine. He remembered, too, certain legends that were of his own race and not of the Indians—satyrs, demons and such. Yet he sought for a more rational explanation.

"Perhaps," he offered, "it was a man dressed in a buffalo robe."

A GAIN Rain Feather shook her pretty head.

"I have seen men dressed so, for the hunters' dances. Not so this one. This was a spirit, with eyes that gleamed like fire. And it laughed a bad laugh."

She shuddered. It was the first time Matlock had ever seen a grown Indian do that.

"I called my father, Lost Wolf. The spirit was gone when he came."

Her recital finished, she backed away and sat with the other women. She had been remarkably pretty and mannerly, and eloquent as well. Her story brought more strongly into shape the monsters Matlock had remembered from old legends—if they were legends.

He reviewed them before his mind's eye. The Minotaur, compounded of man and bull, that ate human flesh and was destroyed by Theseus; the tauranthropoid statues found among Assyrian and Chaldean ruins; Pan, the half-animal god of Grecian wilds, who brought fear upon those who ventured too near him—wasn't there some clue to the word "panic" in his name?

And then there was the popular conception of the very Prince of Darkness, as a hairy hulk with great horns and cloven hoofs, whose approach meant dire destruction. All these things, part man and part beast, by that mixture embodied a fearful power and malevolence beyond anything mortal. Matlock remembered the hoofprints. He was troubled.

A younger man was volunteering more information:

"The Pawnees say that the Half Bull was born of a woman, whose husband was a spirit. It can do harm, but cannot itself be killed."

"Such births happen," said Matlock, and his bearded young face was illumined by a grave smile. "Among white people, a child was born thus. It is so stated in the Book the missionaries bring. The child was wise and good, becoming chief and prophet over many peoples."

"Of that great chief I have heard," said Lost Wolf.

The girl, Rain Feather, bent forward to listen, and others showed interest.

Had Matlock been of the missionary type, he might have made converts then in the sunset. As it was, he told them something about Jesus Christ, in terms that the Cheyennes understood. To illustrate, he drew his hunting knife and cut in the earth the sign of the cross. The crucifixion episode gave the conversation another turn, for Lost Wolf spoke of famous torture-events, and the varying degrees of courage and stoicism displayed by the victims.

After several had remarked appropriately, Lost Wolf produced a red stone pipe with a long stem. He filled it with a mixture of tobacco and kinnikinnik, lighted it with a splinter from the cooking fire, and passed it to Matlock. The white man drew a grateful puff; this pipe made him warmly welcome. The chief then passed it to the other men. Each drew smoke, thereby accepting Matlock as guest and friend.

Then, and not until then, Matlock told of his afternoon's adventure. All listened courteously, interrupting only with an occasional guttural "Wagh!", and none suggested amaze-

ment or disbelief. To these savages a ghost or demon was as real as a deer or coyote. When Matlock finished, the chief again spoke:

"That, assuredly, was the Half Bull. It spies upon us. For twenty days we have been without horses, eating as little as possible. Yesterday we finished the last of the one buffalo we killed, and today the water of the spring gave out."

"Has not my father sent out hunters on foot?" asked Matlock.

"It would have been useless. There is no game. The Half Bull told it to leave us, so it did. We must starve."

Matlock remembered his own fruitless hunt. "I do not understand the why of this," he said.

"The Half Bull feeds on men's ghosts," was the grim reply. "When we die, it will come and eat our ghosts as they leave our bodies. No single one will reach the Shining Lodge."

Matlock was aware of horror among the listeners. They did not flinch or change expression, but beneath their steadfast poses their hearts quailed—and Cheyennes are almost impossible to daunt.

Matlock digested this latest aspect of the Half Bull story, wherein the monster seized and engulfed the very souls of doomed dead men. He remembered another thing, a picture he had seen in St. Louis. It was an engraved copy of a mural painting in a cathedral of France—a wretched horde in a fire-lighted cavern, and a towering thing with a hideous horned brow, thrusting one struggling wretch into its fanged jaws. *Satan devouring lost souls.* . . .

He found it necessary to tell himself, once again, that he was not afraid.

The Cheyennes were. It was plain that the story of the Half Bull was part of their spiritual life and consciousness. They feared not for their physical selves but for the annihilation of their souls that hungered for the Shining Lodge.

"Perhaps," Matlock said encouragingly, "I can hunt this buffalo spirit and kill it."

But the Indians shook their heads. The young man who had offered the

Pawnee legend of the monster's spirit-origin again spoke:

"The Half Bull cannot be killed. Spirits and witches have enchantment that turns away arrows or bullets."

Night had well fallen, and the women stirred up the fire. Matlock rummaged for his pipe, an odorous old briar, and alternated puffs with Lost Wolf. Finally the white man mentioned his long journey and his weariness.

"My son will share my lodge," said the chief at once. He motioned for Rain Feather to conduct the guest. Others also rose and sought their shelters.

Matlock tossed his blankets and saddle-bags just inside the door of the lodge to which Rain Feather demurely led him. Near this doorway he tethered his horse, driving the picket pin well into the earth. Then he decided that, guest or no guest, he would take no chances. From his saddle-bag he took a coil of leather cord, thin but strong, and looped it around the horse's neck. The other end he carried into the lodge with him.

LOST WOLF, Rain Feather and an older squaw were all preparing for bed in the darkness, through which glowed only the red coal of the chief's final pipe. Matlock doffed his own fringed hunting shirt, leggings and moccasins, retaining a breech-clout similar to those worn by the Indians. As he lay down, his rifle ready loaded at his right elbow, he fastened the end of the leather cord to his left wrist. A thief or enemy, pulling up the picket pin, would miss this second line in the darkness; the horse would tug its master into wakefulness.

He had been asleep for not more than two hours, when it happened.

Just such a tug upon his left arm whipped him awake, even as it fetched him out of the blankets. His clutching right hand brought along the rifle. Next moment he was outside the lodge, jerked erect and bracing his bare feet hard to hold the plunging, fighting horse. His eyes cleared of sleep, and he saw what was happening.

Something was shoving and scrambling against the animal's flank. The

thing looked misshapenly human, blacker than the surrounding dim night, and it rounded its horned head against the horse as though raking it. A whinny of pain rang out. The tortured beast, springing away to the full length of the line, threw the attacker clear for the moment. Matlock saw that attacker plain.

Beneath the horns gleamed a wet-looking muzzle, bearded darkly, and set with eyes that shone. The head was thrust down and forward, with a shaggy bunch of back above.

Standing thus, on two wide-set legs, the thing was almost as tall as a man, and powerfully thick. Matlock saw no upper limbs, but he thought it had them. All this he took in with his trained hunter's eyes, in a trifle of time, and remembered Rain Feather's words—the forepart of a buffalo. Thus, indeed, would a buffalo look, if it were shorn away behind the withers, and lived. He had seen this creature's hoofprints!

Still fighting left-handedly to conquer the panic-whelmed horse, Matlock fetched up his rifle with his right.

It was a long gun but well balanced, and Matlock held it steady. The horned head dipped and the creature hurtled itself at him just as he fired. There was a reeling halt in mid-charge, a planting of deformed-looking feet, then it closed in.

Matlock, leaning strongly against the drag of the line, flung up his rifle to use as a club. But the monster had paused again, almost within reach. It glared and panted, and he could see foam on its beard. Then it swiveled like a vane in a high wind, and darted away behind a lodge. As it fled, Matlock saw one thing more—its pumping legs did not bend forward as with knees, but backward as with elbows. There, at least, it was the hinder part of an animal.

But it was gone, and Matlock, hampered by his frightened horse and with only an empty gun, could not follow.

THE Cheyennes were out of their beds, in various stages of undress. Several hunters ran out and helped

quiet the horse. The others clustered around Matlock, even the stark Lost Wolf betraying apprehension.

There was more talk than one is apt to get from Indians. Full half a dozen, waking and rising at the sound of Matlock's shot, had seen the visitor, and none was for taking the trail. Matlock, examining his horse, found its flank ripped, as though by horns.

He made a dressing for the wound out of the empty flour sack, remembered the scarcity of water, and sought the failing spring. It was a mere pit in the ground near the lodges, a sunken funnel of sticky mud, and he had a hard time finding water. Lying flat in the muck, he reached the sack down at arm's length into the funnel and wrung it out in the dregs of the spring.

Returning to place the wet cloth on the wounded flank, he found the women building up the fire with wood and buffalo chips. As the flames rose in grateful red light, Lost Wolf's sharp eyes focused on something that lay on the trampled earth.

"Wagh!" he grunted, and stooped for it—a leaden bullet, flattened as though it had struck a stone.

"It is from my gun," said Matlock, peering. "You are right. The Half Bull cannot be wounded. It is strange that he did not kill me."

"Here, perhaps," said the soft, grave voice of Rain Feather, "is why he did not do that—the white man's medicine, of which you told us."

She knelt, blanket-wrapped, and touched with a diffident hand the cross which Matlock had cut in the earth to illustrate his tale of the evening before. It had certainly lain between him and the apparition, and close to its edge were two deep hoofmarks.

"It feared your medicine," said Rain Feather.

"If it fears, it can be fought," said Matlock, feeling a stirring of hope among his doubts.

The Cheyennes gathered around him, silent but tense. Matlock spoke:

"If this is a spirit, it must be fought with spirit weapons." Through his mind raced more of the legends he had heard as a boy. Witch, werewolf, goblin, demon—terrible, but not all-

powerful. How to destroy them, then? The legend had an answer to that—silver bullet. Yet on this score Matlock was inclined to be skeptical. It did not seem logical that a physical thing could avail against the non-physical. Still, a sensible man tried all things.

"This is an evil, and its wish is to do harm," he said earnestly. "Unlike men, who do wrong to win possessions, it does wrong for wrong's own sake. Wrong is sweet in its mouth. Now, is there silver among you? A bead or a thimble, to load into my gun?"

Lost Wolf shook his head, but Rain Feather silently held out her arm. Its wrist wore a narrow, open bracelet, hammered probably from coins. Matlock extended his hand, and Rain Feather laid the ornament upon it.

THERE was no time to cast bullets, but Matlock was resourceful. Using his rifle barrel as a lever, he pried the bracelet out of its curve, then, pressing it upon his knee with both hands, bent it into something like a rod. Next he sought two stones, one flat for an anvil, the other small and heavy for a hammer. All watched in awe as he wrapped one end of his silver bar in buckskin rags and heated the other tip in the fire. It glowed, and he pounded it carefully between the stones. After several heatings and poundings, it developed a point. He cooled it in the mud of the spring, then tried it gingerly on his fingertip. True, it was a blade now and not a bullet, but it was of silver.

"Now a long stick," he requested, and Lost Wolf's old squaw brought him one. He split the tip and with a piece of his halter cord he bound the improvised skewer into it. The completed stabbing-spear he hefted experimentally, then turned from the fire and stared into the darkness. He had a sense of being watched from that black hiding.

"What will my son do?" asked Lost Wolf, and Rain Feather looked with big, worried eyes.

"I hunt the Half Bull," replied Matlock. He drew his hunting knife. It was of French make, with a cross-hilt.

"Wagh!" agreed Lost Wolf deeply, and others grunted in corroboration.

"If I conquer him, I will return before dawn," Matlock said, his voice still quieter.

"And if you do not return?" Rain Feather made bold to ask.

For answer, he gave her the hunting knife. "Keep this. The white man's medicine is best in a maiden's hands. If the Half Bull comes, show him the knife—no, not the point. Hold the hilt straight up. Yes, like that. He will see the cross. Perhaps he will fear again, if in truth he feared the first time."

"But when we have starved to death—" began Lost Wolf.

"Before you die," directed Matlock, drawing upon his own simple faith, "come all together and touch each of you the cross of the knife with the mouth—thus." Bowing, he kissed the hilt in Rain Feather's hands. "That will give your ghosts strength to avoid their enemy. He cannot catch and eat them, as you fear. Your ghosts will come safe to the Shining Lodge."

Matlock had doubts of his right thus to define and award the office of absolution among heathens, but Rain Feather gazed at him with honest veneration, and the men voiced guttural wags of gratitude. The white man drew on his buckskins and saddled his horse, cinching it loosely over the wounds.

"I ride now," he said in parting. "If I do not come back, Lost Wolf, divide my rifle and other things among my Cheyenne brothers and sisters."

HE headed his horse straight into the night. After a few moments he glanced back. The fire seemed dim and small, and the figures around it frail. Meanwhile, somewhere in the night lurked the horned buffalo-thing that walked on two hoofs and was proof against lead shot. Matlock gripped his lance tightly, as if it might get away; that was as close as he let himself come to admitting uneasiness. Riding on for a space, he suddenly lifted his voice:

"Half Bull!" he yelled his loudest. "I am the white man, come after you!"

An echo, faint and far, seemed to answer him. That was strange, in this mountainless country. He tried again:

"You ran from me—now I run after you! Come, fight like a warrior!"

He had spoken in Cheyenne, and after a moment he repeated his challenge in Pawnee. Once more nothing save that unaccountable echo. Matlock began to vaunt, like a young Indian warrior goading an enemy:

"*Wagh!* I am a mighty fighter, a bad man. I would rather fight than eat. The blows of enemies are like a woman's caresses to me. Come out and fight, Half Bull, or I will shout your cowardice up to the gates of the Shining Lodge!"

His trotting horse suddenly pitched, telescoped itself and reared, almost unseating him. Lying along its neck to keep in the saddle, Matlock found himself looking forward and down into the wide, burning eyes of the horned demon he had come to fight.

Prancing and wheeling on its hind feet, his horse came down again and bolted. At the same time the monster ran in, fastening in some strange way upon his leg—perhaps with its teeth, though Matlock could never be sure.

He was conscious of foulness in that touch, even through his buckskin. Unable to thrust at such close quarters, he battered futilely at the horned head with the butt of his lance. Only a quick grab at the saddle-horn kept him from being dragged down.

"No, you don't!" he yelled in English, and the pitching of his horse, together with his own frantic kicking and hammering, broke the hold upon him. The Half Bull roared, not like a real bull but with a high, human voice. The thing still ran along beside him, its two hoofs as swift as the horse's four.

In holding on, Matlock lost his bridle. He cursed his mount for fleeing yet again from the creature he would face, twisting in his saddle to see the attack that was coming. It came. Swerving in as it ran at his side, the thing emitted something like a throaty, mocking chortle. It was trying to seize his leg again. Matlock dipped the silver point of his lance and met the rush, as a picador

in the bull-ring meets the broadside charge of his mighty opponent.

HIS ears rang with a short, fierce scream. Next moment the weapon pushed back hard against his grip, again he clutched the saddle-horn. That was too much for the loose girth, and the saddle slid around on the far side of the running horse.

Matlock shot through the air. He fell heavily, but was up again, shaken yet conscious. The bay had sped away and the Half Bull was chivvying it along with sidelong rakes of its horns.

Matlock still held the spear. He saw something in the almost-dark—his silver point, that he had held full against the monster, was bent almost double.

He ran. Silver would not avail, either—the Half Bull was a demon beyond the knowledge and defense of white men's spiritual enemies. As Matlock raced, he heard behind him a rattle of hoofs. Two hoofs, hard and swift and rhythmic, *pit-pat, pit-pat*.

He was heading for the camp and the fire. It grew larger, brighter, before his eyes. His pursuer was drawing closer, closer, with every leap. He fancied he felt its breath, like a furnace-blast of deadly hate. He knew, without looking back, that its head was down, its horns point-blanked against the target of his fleeting back. He must dodge to one side—too late for that.

Ahead of him the ground looked darker than the dark. The spring was in his way, a marshy funnel full six feet across. He sprang out over it with all his strength, gained the far brink, and whirled away to one side. As he did so, he realized, too late, that the Half Bull would blunder on into the camp, among the helpless Indians.

But no form hurtled past him. He spun around as he ran, to see where it lurked to charge him again. He saw only the dark blotch of the sunken spring, but darker. The Half Bull had charged, unseeing, full into it. Now it was struggling violently and vainly. Erect, of great weight, supported upon two small sharp hoofs, it had struck deep into the mud. It fitted tightly into that crumble-walled

tube. It had no arms, and it could not get out.

What Matlock did then was bravely terrible. Unarmed, on foot, he ran at the half-mired grotesque figure. Only its humped shoulders, its shaggy head with the tossing horns, showed above the level of the prairie. And, as he came up to it, Matlock sprang into the air. With all the weight of his body he came down upon it, one moccasin upon the curve of its hump, the other planted firmly between its horns. There was a loud, groaning expulsion of air from great lungs, and the bulk sank deeper into the mud. Then the head jerked upward, and Matlock flew away from it, as though he were a garment in the breeze.

But he was back at it again in a thrice. With his feet he spurned great clods and divots of the damp earth around the spring, spurned them upon and against his trapped enemy. He bent, scooped mud with his hands. Once again he saw that wrathful black face, the night making it indistinct even so close, yet full of hate and sin and strange knowledge; then he hurled his mud upon it, blotting it away.

Somebody had run close to his side, and he sprang instinctively away; but it was Rain Feather. She had spied him, and approaching, saw what he was doing. She, too, threw earth and mud upon the half-buried demon. Others of the camp came, understood, and helped.

"Cover it up," directed Matlock, gasping with his own efforts. "Deeper, deeper. Make a grave for it. We may not kill it, but we can imprison it—forever—under the weight of earth. The Cheyenne must have no further room for the Half Bull in their hearts!"

DAWN came up in timid gray streaks as the Indians finished their mound. It was five feet high and a dozen feet in diameter, completely obliterating the spring and the captive underneath. Upon it they heaped all the stones they could find.

"Bring firewood," now ordered Lost Wolf. "All the fuel we have. Burn it upon this mound, to dry and harden

the mud. And let each of us say a prayer to his own spirit, that the earth never be opened."

An old woman whimpered in sudden nervousness. Great dark shapes were approaching in the growing light. But Matlock recognized those shapes, and laughed, and went forward with two of the men. They came back leading horses. Behind them ambled still others, the herd that had been missing for twenty days and now returned as though to a reassuring summons.

"Wagh!" spoke Lost Wolf. "This shows that the power of the Half Bull is at an end." He gazed at the tomb.

"Hereafter, when we hunt in this country, each of us will throw more stones upon the mound," continued Lost Wolf. "This will make greater the weight that holds the earth down. Others will learn the custom from us, and do likewise. Half Bull will not break from under that pile. If he truly cannot die, at least he will not hurt anybody again. He will stay and dream of the evil he cannot do—dream until the end of time."

"Until the end of time," repeated Matlock.

In the early dawn, pronghorn antelopes were visible in the distance that had so long been empty of game. The Cheyenne hunters rode out to kill and butcher five. After eating heartily, Matlock accepted a supply of choice meat, said solemn farewells all around and mounted his own recaptured horse. He rode past the silent, earth-gasped mound, and yet again his beast seemed to scent a frightening odor and sidled away. But Matlock serenely cast an apple-sized stone upon the pile, observing the custom which Lost Wolf had decreed. His heart was at rest about the matter.

He glanced back once, and saw Rain Feather standing apart from her people. Her eyes were following him, and her slim hand clutched his hunting knife, crucifix fashion, to her young breast.

This then is the story of the Indian Cairn. And still today, the passing redman, eyeing it, flings a stone upon it, even though he has forgotten the reason for doing so.