

HOW CANADA'S LAST FRONTIER OUTLAW DIED

"THE Mounted Police said they were going to hang me for killing a steer. But they will never put a rope around my neck—I will die fighting them!"

These were the first words of Almighty Voice—the most desperate Indian the Canadian West has produced—as he entered his mother's tepee, panting and sweating, on the night of October 17, 1895. He had just escaped from the Mounted Police and completed his remarkable run and swim from Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, to One Arrow's Reserve, fifteen miles away.

In carrying out this vow he set a record unparalleled in the annals of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. He brought down seven "Mounties" and scouts during the succeeding two years, and culminated his career by standing off one thousand troops for three days, before the field guns which finally shelled him to death were brought on the scene. His only fort was a hole about the size of a bathtub, situated on the edge of a bluff less than the size of a city block.

Why did Almighty Voice choose to become a man-killing outlaw, rather than serve one month's imprisonment? Where was he during those two mysterious years in which the Mounted Police searched for him in every corner of the northern wilderness? How did his father keep in touch with him all this time? Why did he suddenly appear, purposely to show himself to the Mounted Police? These and many other questions centering on this last frontier outlaw, have always baffled the Mounted Police.

There are only two people living who can answer these questions: they are Almighty Voice's father and mother, Sounding Sky and Spotted Calf. They are still living in the camp in which, twenty-six years ago, Almighty Voice bade them his last farewell and rushed over to a bluff four miles away, to the Mounties. Although mentioned in history as being "wrinkled and old" twenty-six years ago, they are apparently as strong and active to-day as they were at fifty.

As I write, I am spending a week as the guest of these two old people. Their camp is situated on a beautiful stretch of bush-dotted prairie, twenty miles northeast of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan—a little more than three hundred miles north of the Montana border.

First Telling of the Story

WHEN I came here from Alberta last year, I found that, old as they are, they had just gone into the frozen North to spend the winter trapping. The Indian agent, half-breed son of the secretary of Riel's rebel government, told me that I was not likely to get the old people to talk of their son; as they had refused to open their mouths on this subject since he was killed in 1897. When queried about their son, he said, they would sit stolid-faced and still, as if unaware that they were being spoken to. Everyone, even their tribesmen, said the same; that they had never forgiven and were still distrustful.

But when I returned here a few days ago I was pleased to learn that the old people knew me through their son, Prosper, a fine, upstanding chap of six-foot-five, who had formerly visited my territory. I had not been here two days when the old mother asked me to exchange names with her and become her adopted son. Under these friendly relations, the old people, without my asking, volunteered to tell me the whole story of their son's career.

Observing that deliberateness of action which is dear to all Indians, we did not mention the subject of their son for some time afterwards. Then, one afternoon about four o'clock as we sat around a cheerful dinner of roast wild-duck, jerked moose cutlets, rabbit and bannock, we formally took up their son's career on the warpath, which for twenty-six years has not been mentioned in Sounding Sky's camp.

We were seated in the old people's tepee. Sounding Sky and Spotted Calf, the father and mother, sat facing me on my left. Near the door sat Almighty Voice's widow, described in "The Riders of the Plains" as "the beautiful young Indian wife" who so mysteriously disappeared in the wilderness with her husband, not to be seen

Real facts of Almighty Voice's last stand, when he fought 1,000 men for three days, told for the first time by

CHIEF

BUFFALO CHILD LONG LANCE



Almighty Voice, Jr., holding his little twin daughters, who were born to his young wife during the writer's visit in his camp.

again for two years. Next to her sat Almighty Voice, Jr., the dead warrior's son, who was born to his father and mother during their two years of refuge. Now 27 years old, this tall, powerfully-built chap is described as the hair and toe of his father. Three brothers of the dead brave and a sister, Bear Cane, completed the group.

We ate silently for a few minutes after the old father had uttered a deep nasal "Ha-anh-h," indicating that he was now going to talk. Then he lighted his pipe, took a few thoughtful puffs, and, casting his gaze over towards the Almighty Voice Bluff, which could be seen through the opening of the tepee, he began in Cree:

"When our son first got into trouble, we were camping right where we are now. My wife and I had left Almighty Voice here to look after his young brothers while we took over a small camp to dig Seneca root, about two miles east of Wawaw. We were gone several days and Almighty Voice ran out of meat and became hungry. So he killed a yearling steer for food until we got back. I had a herd of cattle and he thought he had killed one of mine, but by mistake it was one from the herd that the govern-

ment had put on the Reserve. Francois Croyle, a half-breed living at Batoche, reported the killing of this steer to Louis Marion, who had charge of the cattle for the government.

"We did not know anything about this happening until a Mounted Policeman rode up to where we were digging roots the next day, with his gun pointing at me. He said: 'I arrest you; you will come with me.' I went with him, and my wife followed. They took me to the Detachment and kept me a prisoner for eight days. My son had been arrested before they came after me, and it was while I was still in prison that he escaped and killed Sergeant Colebrook. My wife will tell you what happened when he escaped and came home the next morning; for I was in prison then."

The Escape

IT MIGHT be explained that Almighty Voice was taken to Duck Lake, tried for cattle killing and sentenced to one month's imprisonment at Prince Albert. But on the night following his trial he made his escape.

That night in the Mounted Police jail at Duck Lake, Almighty Voice had rolled up in his blanket on the floor of the guard room and apparently had gone to sleep. During the night a relief constable came on duty, but he promptly went to sleep sitting at a table.

Almighty Voice's mother tells what happened. He said to her when he reached home after escaping:

"I had not been asleep at all; I had been lying there watching things through the corners of my eyes. The Mounted Police told me last night that I was going to be hanged for killing that steer. But I have made up my mind that the Mounted Police will never hang me; I will die fighting them. (One of the Mounties in charge laughingly admitted that he had told Almighty Voice this, to put a little scare into him. And it was this little joke that changed him from a contented prisoner to the most dangerous outlaw the force has ever encountered.) So," said Almighty Voice, "I had been waiting and watching for my chance to get away; and to-night it came."

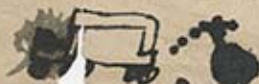
"When that fellow came on duty about midnight he came over and looked at me—I was lying still with my eyes half-shut—and then he went over to the table and leaned over it and went to sleep. When I saw that he was sleeping well, I raised myself to my feet and crept over to the table. I lifted the keys lying beside him and unlocked my chains."

Having been known throughout the north country as a marvelous runner, Almighty Voice knew that once his feet were free he would be safe; for there was not a man in the country who could beat him in the annual Indian races at Prince Albert. He told his mother that he dashed out of the door of the barrack room and leaped over the fence enclosing the prison yard, without touching it. He sped on like an antelope for eight miles until he came to the Saskatchewan River. He threw off his blanket and scant

Indian clothing, placed them on a hastily constructed triangular raft, to keep them dry; and pushing this raft in front of him, swam the broad, swift current to the shore beyond. Covering another six miles at top speed, he reached home long before dawn, and awoke his mother. His first words were, "I want to see my father; where's he?" She told him that he was in prison. She then gave him something to eat and put him to bed.

Hidden Insecurely—But Safely

EARLY the next morning the Mounted Police came to the camp and searched every inch of the place—but one—for the escaped prisoner. In a corner of the main living quarters was a pile of provisions covered over with buffalo robes. It is a strange fact that the Mounted Police never approached this spot nearer than five or six feet, although they diligently searched every other part of the premises. It is generally believed at Duck Lake to-day that the police knew what was under those robes, besides provisions; but they also knew what it would have



meant to approach it, and exercised their discretion.

After the Mounties had departed, Almighty Voice crawled out of his hiding place and left the camp with one of his wives for the Kenistino Reserve in the North, taking with him his muzzle-loader and a couple of horses.

The Mounted Police, world-famous for their unrelenting efficiency as man-hunters, immediately despatched Sergeant C. C. Colebrook and a half-breed scout to set forth into the north country and re-take their prisoner, cost what it may. Sergeant Colebrook took up Almighty Voice's trail and headed north into the bush country.

One morning as the sergeant and his scout were rounding a low bluff, they heard the crack of a gun. Spurring their horses to a gallop and cutting around the bush, they suddenly came upon Almighty Voice in the act of picking up a prairie chicken he had just shot. When he saw the approaching policeman he quickly re-loaded his gun and stood waiting until the party had advanced to within about twenty yards of his position; then he commanded them to halt. Paying no heed to the command, Sergeant Colebrook continued advancing with his gun pointing at Almighty Voice.

"Stop, or I'll shoot!" came the Cree command which was interpreted to the sergeant by the half-breed scout. The scout said to Colebrook, "We had better stop. He will shoot, sure!" Ignoring this warning, Sergeant Colebrook said, "No, I'm going to do my duty"; and he rode on. His horse had taken barely two steps, when "Crack!" a bullet came tearing into his neck. He fell forward in his saddle, dead.

Pulling back the other trigger of his double-barreled muzzle-loader, Almighty Voice shouted to the half-breed: "Now you had better fly, or I'll put a bullet in you, just to mark you!" And Francois flew as fast as his horse would travel beneath him. Stopping at Duck Lake barely long enough to acquaint the police with what had happened, he fled the country, and has not since returned.

The killing of Colebrook marked the commencement of the biggest and most daring man-hunt the West has ever known. Almighty Voice was now outlawed with a substantial price on his head, dead or alive. From this time on, until May 24, 1897—nearly two years later—he is dropped into mysterious oblivion by all books touching upon his career. The Mounted Police force scoured the country for him in vain. Not once were they able to pick up as much as a sign of his trail. "The Riders of The Plains," the official history of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, says: "During this period Almighty Voice never showed himself among his people, nor did he apparently hold any communication with them." But as a matter of truth, Almighty Voice constantly visited his people during this period, and spent much of his time in their camp. His mother says:

"My son would come into camp every now and then and take a rest, and then he would go out into the wilderness again, and we would not hear from him for days and weeks. Then he would suddenly return again.

Finally he came back to our camp and stayed; he was here all the Spring before he was killed. He said he was tired of dodging the police and that he was going to show himself and fight it out. But first he wanted to see his father, who was in prison."

Sounding Sky, the outlaw's father, was again in the hands of the Mounted Police, having been re-incarcerated that spring under suspicion of being an accomplice

of his son. Sounding Sky was himself a warrior of note, having fought with distinction under Chief One Arrow (incidentally his wife's father) in the Northwest rebellion of '85. And Almighty Voice, like all other young Indians, had implicit faith in his father's judgment.

With a view to watching his movements, the Mounted Police let Sounding Sky out of prison late that spring. They suspected a close liaison between father and son, and they had kept the old man either in prison or under close observation all during the two

Albert, forty miles away. At midnight, April 25, 1897, twelve Mounted Police set out from Prince Albert under Capt. Allan. On the gallop they headed straight for the Minnechin Hills. At the same time another force under Inspector Wilson was despatched from Duck Lake.

About nine o'clock the next morning, Friday, Captain Allan's detachment was riding past Bellevue Hill, when one of his men noticed in the distance three glistening objects moving towards a small bluff. He said, "I see three antelopes over there." Changing the course of their horses, the party rode over towards the spot, thinking that they would take a shot at the animals; but when they approached closer they were surprised to discern the forms of three Indians, stripped for battle. Almighty Voice had with him his young cousin, Going-Up-To-Sky, a mere lad, and his brother-in-law, Topean; these young men aspired to go on the war-path with him.

Realizing that he had located his quarry, Capt. Allan gave the order to charge. Almighty Voice waited until the detachment had advanced to firing range and then opened up. The first burst of Indian fire brought down the two officers commanding the detachment, Capt. Allan and Sergeant Raven. Capt. Allan's right arm was smashed and Sergeant Raven sagged in his saddle with his thigh dangling uselessly over the side of his horse. The wounded officers were hurriedly removed from the field, and Corporal Hockin now assumed command of the detachment, which stood guarding the bluff while waiting for further reinforcements which had been immediately sent for.

Ready to Fight Until Death

ALMIGHTY VOICE had taken his fourth "Coo," one killed, three wounded, and had sought cover in a small bush now known as the Almighty Voice Bluff. His people knew that he would not come out alive; for he had selected this site on which to make his final stand.

This bluff, which I visited yesterday, is situated on the eastern slope of a gentle rise of prairie land. Running from North to South by the eastern edge of the bluff is a long, broad and grassy stretch of lowland, about a half-mile wide. Looking east from the bluff across this lowland, one sees another gentle rise which terminates on the horizon about a mile away. It was on the crest of this horizon that the field guns ultimately were to be placed.

West of the bluff the land rises abruptly to a short horizon.

Following the unfortunate raid that morning, Corporal Hockin's detachment was joined by the party from Duck Lake; and that afternoon this combined force was further reinforced by a command consisting of every spare man from the Prince Albert barracks and the whole of the Duck Lake force.

At six o'clock that evening the Corporal called for volunteers to charge the bluff. Nine policemen and civilians answered the call, and a raid was made. This was the most disastrous movement of the day, as the Indians, perceiving their intention, were

lying on the edge of the bluff awaiting the onslaught. Scarcely had the fringe of the bush been reached when Corporal Hockin received his death wound, a bullet in the chest. The rush continued, however, both Indians and raiders firing as fast as their guns would operate—the Indians were using muzzle-loaders, and the Mounties, their Winchesters. E. Grundy, postmaster of Duck Lake,

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Dr. Stewart, of Duck Lake, Sask., holding the rifle used by Almighty Voice. He was one of the first to reach the gun-pit after the four days' battle.

The aged mother weeping over the gun-pit in which her notorious son was shelled to death on May 29, 1897. At the left stands her eldest son, Prosper; and right Almighty Voice, Jr., son of the dead outlaw.



years in which Almighty Voice had been running at large. They believed that ultimately this would lead to the outlaw's capture. As a matter of fact, it seems that from the outset the police and government authorities feared the old man more than they did his son. They knew he was influential among his tribe; that by the flick of a finger he could cause a whole-

sale Indian uprising, which would have been serious. When his father reached home, Almighty Voice had a conference with him, "and from that time on," said his father, "he made no efforts to conceal himself. He decided to show himself the next time the Mounted Police came around our camp, and fight it out with them."

The news of his re-appearance after two years of baffling evasion was received seriously at Prince

builders, who were tackling a task quite different from any that had ever been attempted on the continent, and tackling it entirely by hand labor; and an attempt will be made to picture the strange conglomeration of men, including thousands of

Chinamen—the first large number Chinese coolies to be imported into the country—who hailed from the four quarters of the world and many of whom lost their lives in the often dangerous work of blasting the way for the iron horses of progress.)

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was the next to fall dead with a bullet through the heart. An instant later Constable Kerr went down to his death with a bullet in the chest.

This tragic sequence brought about an immediate retreat, with no time to remove the dead. One of the Indians, Topean, was killed on the edge of the bluff, and Almighty Voice received a bullet which shattered his right leg. However, he fought on for two days and two nights with neither food nor drink, against a force which increased to one thousand Mounted police and volunteers. That night the besiegers endeavored to burn the Indians out of the bush, but these efforts were unsuccessful.

Not until now did the Mounted Police realize the size of the job they had undertaken; and a third call for reinforcements was sent out, together with brief notes on the gravity of the situation which had arisen since the initial attack, nine o'clock that morning. A cordon of pickets was thrown completely around the bluff to prevent the escape of the outlaw during the night.

That night in the Regina Mounted Police barracks, two hundred miles south of the scene of battle, the ball celebrating the send-off of the Queen's Jubilee Contingent, was at its height when suddenly the band struck up, "God Save the Queen." Men and women stood rigidly silent and looked at each other in bewilderment. When the music ceased, Colonel Herchimer, the commanding officer of the entire Mounted Police Force, stepped to the centre of the floor and announced that the Mounted Police contingent to the Queen's Jubilee in England, was temporarily cancelled; that grave news had just been received from the North. "Festivities must be stopped immediately," he commanded, "rigs will be waiting outside to take the ladies to town," and from the floor he issued orders that every available man was to start north at once.

This force consisted of twenty-five men, a nine-pounder field gun and a Maxim gun, under Assistant-Commissioner McIlree and Inspector McDonnell. Another detachment of reinforcements left Prince Albert the next day under Inspector Gagnon. This brought to the aid practically the entire Mounted Police Force of Saskatchewan. Added to his, hundreds of volunteers had been recruited and rushed to the scene. A transport was recruited at Duck Lake quipped with picks and shovels and sent out to throw up earth-works to enable the troops to advance under cover, in case they should not be able to wipe out the Indians with shell-fire. So disastrous had been the first two attacks on the bluff, orders were issued from headquarters rebidding the Mounties to make any further raids. Enough lives had been lost and it was now realized that field operations must be adopted.

As the stillness of night settled over the magic field on Friday evening, Almighty Voice shouted over to the troops in Cree: "We have had a good fight to-day. I have fought hard and I am hungry. You have plenty of food; send me some, and tomorrow we will finish the fight."

Early the next morning a crow flew over the bush—"Tang!"—went Almighty Voice's gun, and the crow dashed headlong into the bush. One of the Mounties remarked, "Isn't it queer; that fellow never wastes a bullet. Every time he shoots something falls."

His Mother's Encouragement

ALMIGHTY VOICE'S old mother, a Spotted calf, had stood on the rise just back of the bluff all day, shouting encouragement to her son. She recounted the bold exploits of his father, and of his grandfather, One Arrow; and she urged him to die the brave that he had proved himself to be. He answered her affectionately, and from time to time he informed her how he was getting along.

After the two attacks on Friday, he

told her, he and his boy cousin had dug a hole, got into it and covered it over with brush. Two Mounted Policemen lay dead ten feet from his pit, he said; and he had taken their guns and ammunition, and thrown away his old muzzleloader. (This latter weapon, however, had accounted for all of his victims.)

"I am eating the bark off the trees; I am almost starving. I have dug as far as my arm will reach, but can get no water." This was the last message received from him.

All day Saturday fresh troops were arriving on the field from Regina, Prince Albert and Duck Lake. Excitement had become tense in the surrounding countryside and the whole citizenry of Northern Saskatchewan seemed to have flocked to the scene overnight. A grave food shortage occurred, and it was necessary to despatch Dr. Stewart to Duck Lake in great haste, with orders to commandeer every available pound of provisions in the stores, together with vehicles to transport it over the twenty-mile trail.

By Saturday evening the field guns, a nine-pounder and a seven-pounder, were well in place, and at six o'clock the first shells were sent thundering into the bluff. The second shot got the range, and the remainder of the barrage went plump into the spot where the fugitives were known to be ensconced. When the firing had ceased, Almighty Voice shouted from the bluff: "You have done well, but you will have to do better."

Darkness settled quickly over the landscape and a silence, as sickening as the whining, thundering shells of a few minutes before, bore itself into the very souls of the volunteers. "Men heard other breathing," said one of the men to me. Creeping in behind the throes of their own dead comrades came the half-sad realization that to-morrow would spell the eternal end of the two miserable creatures below, who had partaken of neither food nor drink—nor slept—during the past three days. Right or wrong, they had displayed a quality which all men admire. One of the attackers confided to me that he secretly wished that they would escape during the night, never to be heard of again.

The Mother's Death-Chant

THE night wore on, interrupted by only one mysterious shot which took the hat off the head of one of the pickets. Then, attracted by the smell of the decomposing bodies in the bluff, a group of coyotes gathered on the lowland below and set up their dolorous chorus of "Yip, yip, yip, hoo-o," which lasted far into the night.

Another sound floated from the opposite hill, just behind the bluff—"Hi-heh, hi-heh, hey-o, hey-o"—It was Almighty Voice's old mother chanting her son's death song. "I wanted to go in that bluff and take my son in my arms and protect him," she told me, sweeping her arms through the motions of an affectionate embrace. Again and again she had tried to enter the bluff all during the three days' vigil, but each time she was intercepted by the Mounties. "They told me," she said, "you must not go in there; it would not be nice for us to have to kill a woman." She continued, "I was very weak that night; I had not had anything to eat for three days. I did not want to eat while my son was starving."

Presently, a deep-toned echo of the old woman's chant came rumbling out of the bluff, which had been deathly quiet for hours past. It was Almighty Voice answering his mother. That was the last time his voice was ever heard. At six o'clock the next morning the big guns began belching forth their devastating storm of lead and iron in deadly earnest; and it was obvious that no living thing could long endure their steady beat.

At noon on Sunday the pelting ceased, and at one o'clock the volunteers, led by

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James McKay, K. C., (now chief justice of Saskatchewan) and Wm. Drain, decided to make another raid on the bluff. The Mounties had been refused permission to raid again. On the first rush the volunteers were not able to locate the hiding place of the Indians, so well had they concealed themselves beneath their covering of brush. A second crusade, however, brought them upon the gun-pit. The shells had done their work. Almighty Voice and his young cousin, Going-Up-To-Sky, were lying in the bottom of the pit, dead.

Almighty Voice had been wounded in seven places, but his death missive was a piece of shrapnel which split open his forehead. In the bottom of the gun-pit were two holes, the depth of a man's arm, which had been dug in a vain attempt to reach water. The bark from the surrounding trees had been stripped off and eaten. The bodies of Constable Kerr and Postmaster Ernest Grundy, who had dashed into the bluff on Friday evening, never to be seen alive again, were lying about ten feet from the hole. Corporal Hockin's body had been found and rescued from the edge of the bluff. The dead body of Topean, who had received a fatal wound in the second attack on Friday, was found lying on the fringe of the bluff, about twenty yards from the pit.

The startling discovery, that Almighty Voice had gotten out of the bluff on Saturday night and succeeded in getting clear through the pickets to a point some one hundred yards beyond, was brought to light by the finding of one of his blood-stained moccasins at this outlying point and a crudely made crutch which he had abandoned just inside the bluff on his return. This discovery explained the mysterious shot which clipped the hat off the head of one of the pickets during the uncanny lull on Saturday night. One of the pickets had struck a match to light his pipe when a shot clapped out of the darkness and whizzed off his hat, upsetting match, pipe, tobacco and all. As the cordon of pickets, who had been placed ten feet apart, was fully three-quarters of a mile from the bluff, the pickets on this particular sector had spent the remainder of the night trying to figure how the shot was fired and where it came from. At that moment Almighty Voice was lying behind them. Why he returned to the bluff, no one knows, not even his mother.

A Tribute to the Enemy

ON A small poplar tree standing over the bodies of the dead Mounted Policemen, was found the following inscription carved in Cree syllabics:

"Here died three braves."

Almighty Voice had crawled out of his hole and asserted this noblest of Indian

traits: recognition and admiration of bravery even in his deadliest enemy. The tree bearing this commemorative tribute to the three "Red Coats" stands to-day, the mute sentinel of America's last frontier.

Yesterday I visited the Almighty Voice Bluff with the dead warrior's mother, his son, Almighty Voice, Jr., his two brothers and the old half-breed, Henry Smith, who removed the body from the gun-pit and conveyed it to the old mother's tepee. It was a beautiful northern summer day. Under its peaceful quietness, broken only by the occasional short, gruff bark of a wolf-dog, it was difficult to realize that this magnificent stretch of bush and prairieland once echoed the thunder of the Northwest Rebellion and the cannon which wiped out Gitchi-Manito-Wayo—Almighty Voice.

Yet, as we swung out of Sounding Sky's camp and turned north along the trail leading to the bluff five miles away, I could look back and see the old bullet-ridden church of the Metis half-breeds, all that remains of Batoche, the last abode of the troublesome French mixed-bloods. Once the Metis believed that this village which they had founded in the wilds of the north country in the early '70's, would someday become the great Metis capital of the West. To-day they are among the poorest people in the surrounding country.

The old mother led us to the pit. There it was, about the size and shape of a bathtub, as distinct as it was twenty-six years ago. Even the bullet marks on the trees, the torn-away bark and the shell holes, looked as though they had been effected but yesterday.

I stood at the pit and gazed thoughtfully across the broad stretch of lowland at the rising hill beyond, where the field guns were put in position. Then I turned around and looked up the abrupt west slope of the rise on which the bluff is situated; and I could see the spot, a hundred yards above, where the old mother stood shouting and singing to her son during the long days and nights of the siege.

This reminded me to look toward the old mother to see how she was reacting to her first visit to this spot since she was carried home exhausted on the tragic morning of April 29, 1897. With a sleeping grandchild strapped over her back, she was standing ten feet from the hole, soaking her tears in the corner of a crimson and yellow blanket. Her head was bent diagonally, as if she were ashamed of the emotions which she could not control. She never once looked directly at the hole, nor did she approach it nearer than ten feet. Even when I asked her to pose for a picture over the pit, she walked up to it with her head turned slightly to the right, her eyes turned away.