

THE BLACK HEADLINES

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impassioned appeal for clemency. The jury was out not more than an hour. Their verdict was an acquittal for Ernest Cronk, a conviction for murder in the first degree against Richard, with the recommendation that he be hanged by the neck until dead.

Following the conviction came the application for a new trial, which was not granted. The record in the case was so clear of error and the proof so conclusive that Mr. Prull declined to carry the matter to the higher courts, realizing the hopelessness of such a proceeding. Then began the systematic, earnest effort to induce the governor to commute the sentence to life imprisonment. He declined to interfere.

Dick Cronk was doomed.

At eleven o'clock on the morning of a bitterly cold Friday in January a grim, sulien group of men, evil-faced fellows whose eyes were heavy with dread, and whose lips hung limp with dejection, crowded around the stove in a squalid, ill-smelling basement room. They spoke but seldom; their voices were rarely raised above the hoarse half-whisper of anxiety known only to men who wait in patience for a thing of horror to come to pass, an inevitable, remorseless thing from which there is no escape.

They shivered as they crouched close to the red-hot stove, notwithstanding the almost unbearable heat of the foul, windowless room in which they were gathered. Their faces were pallid, their eyes bloodshot, their flesh a-quiver.

Occasionally one or another of them would go to the door to listen for sounds in the black passage beyond. He would resume his seat without a word to his fellows, each of whom looked up with stark, questioning eyes. Then they would fall to staring at the walls