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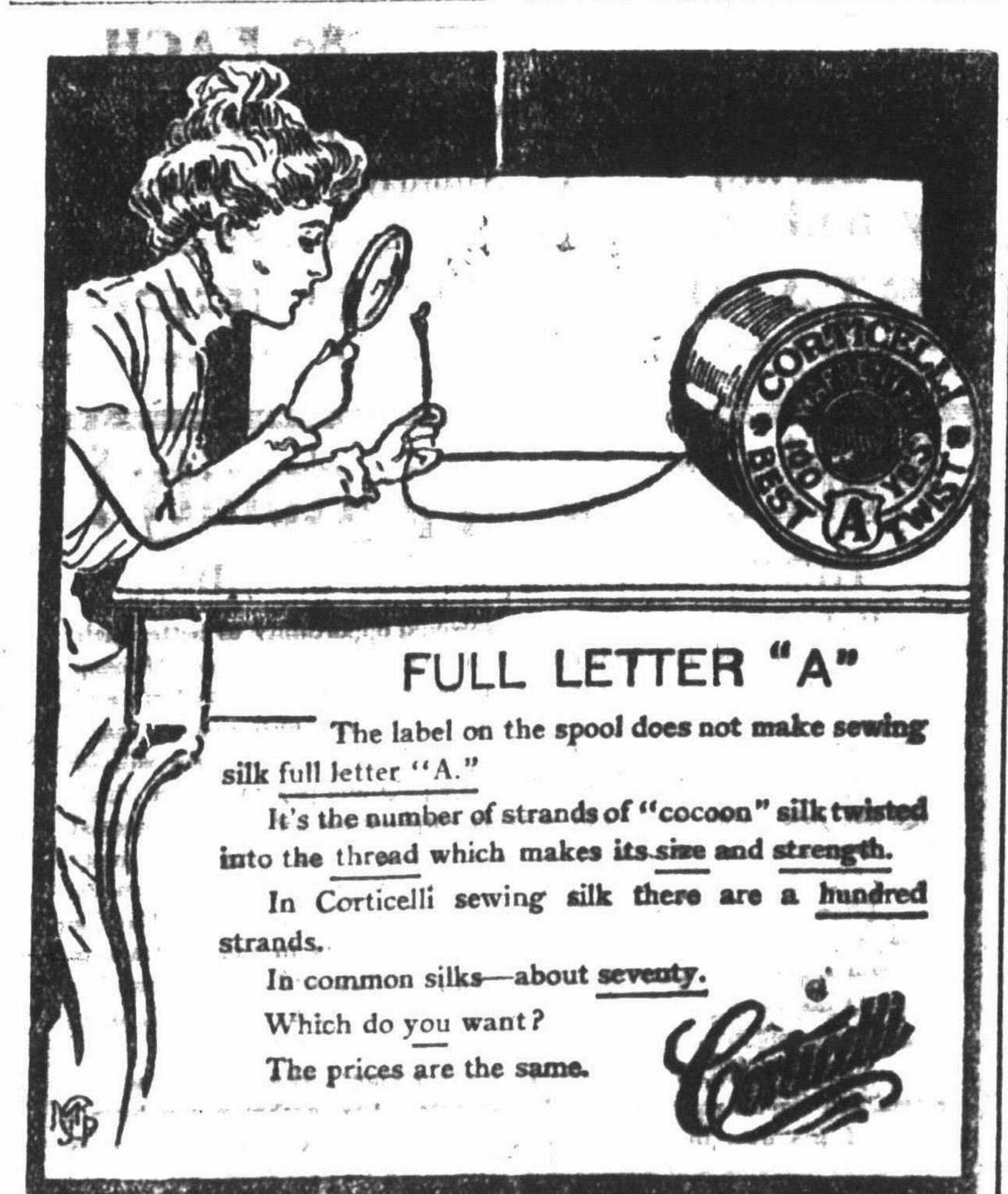
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ner on the flags, fierce, unknown faces their awaking. and haggard, repulsive figures around

Petronilla crept into her sister's came for them. arms, and thus, with their hair tanged together and their heads against pushed them with his foot. the wall, they remained, scarcely darling to breathe, never daring to speak, even to one another.

The thoughts of Prisca, so far as she thought at all, were of the dead body lying all alone in the hut.

Petronilla could not think at all; her senses were all stupefied with fear. She clung to her elder by instinct alone; Prisca had always put her first, and saved her from all harm.

They were left in their corner undisbut unsuccoured. There were sounds around them, and from manded, stifled voices which cursed and protested; noises, too, from the street without of traffic and cries, and now and then the shrick of a dog being lassoed, or the crash of a horse falling on the stones.

Two by two guards entered; one by one most of those arrested were led out; the day passed; the night fell. There was no light except a glimmer from a gas-jet in the passage beyond which came through a square unglazed grating into the cell. Three persons alone remained there beside the children; one a very old woman taken up for begging, the second a youth who had been hawking wares without a license, and the third a pickpocket The old woman told her beads and muttered over them incessantly; the wouth sobbed and swore and cursed the parents who had given him birth. and the bawker who had tricked him into buying the wares; the pickpocket cursed himself off to sleep, being fa the children, who, indeed, looked no more than a bundle of rags in their

Once the youth shook and awakened the pickpocket, arousing a volley of dreadful oaths. "Shall we be here all night?" he asked, tremulously.

dark corner.

"Certain sure," said the thief. "With nothing to eat?" The thief turned on his side and re-

sumed his slumbers, not answering so I foolish a question, Prisca, whose ears had caught the word "eat," listened where she lay in the torpor of her terror; if only she could get some bread for her sister!

youth's question she understood. There was no hope of any food that mother, dear mother!" she know. wailed, aloud. She could not believe that their mother could be deaf to inued. their prayers. Her body was dead

and cold-yes-but she must be some-The old woman looked towards the stopped her aves for a moment; then ders. and went on again, telling her beads. She had enough to think of herself. She had a sick son and seven grandchildren at home in her cellar; they were all waiting for her and for what they would expect her to take home to them. She could not busy her brains missary, "or they are feigning idiocy. with others, though a meagre pang of They are very small, very miserable. fellow-feeling ran through her slow Send them out of the for a moment. If she had had come, it is plain to see, from anything to give the children in the Campagna." corner yonder she would have given There were scores of similar children

but she had nothing. were pushed back, and guards enter-, again and again, and held up over to the number. them a petroleum lamp to make sure that those detained were there. Their the blackness of night behind them. again in Rome no mercy will be shewn There was not even a glimmer of the you. gas-jet in the corridor, for that had been put out early.

sobbed himself to sleep, the pickpock- unenergetic chief. ble; their bones ached in every joint; fever had come upon them its chills. around him. heats, its tremors, its aching hungry and unhappy, but they were very ill. The time passed for them in a dull, stupid, suffering, varied paroxysms in which they screamed aloud. In one of these the pickpocket flung one of his boots at them with curse, through the dark, and then the other. The latter struck Prisca on the head. The old woman, awaking dimiy to what was passing, thought she was at home in her cellar. "Don't hit the

sily, believing that she spoke to her.

sense of his threat, as she leant child scarcely moved, scarcely aided own throat. against the wall, and her heavy eyes herself in any way, and Prisca felt her Mother mother will know," she dilated, and she drew her little sis own limbs quivering under her, and thought; and then she, too, was ter still closer to her with a material the chills and heats of fever coursing gesture of protection. She did not let | through her veins. They had come in herself sleep again, and she succeeded by a gate by a barrier, they must go all the night, locked in each other's in hushing Petronilla into unconsci- out of one: that was all which was ousness and rest. So the black night clear to her: that the gates

with morning from the corridor, the of her mind in its actual state. filthy figure of the old woman, hud- Now, she had come in by the Porta dled in her rags, the stupid scared face Pia, but the questura from which she them, they were carried to the comof the youth, the brutalized counten had been expulsed was in the Via di mon ditch in which the poor and the dirty flags of the cell, and its it was into an alley out of this street sitively infallible in troubles peculiar to the SEVERAL FINE ROOMS TO RENT, FUE bare, grim walls, gained a still more that they were turned adrift, knowing of the street, blown about a little

eat! Petronilla was always murmur-They were wet through and trem- | ing : . "Mother, mother! where is the bled from head to foot, but they bread?" For their mother, going were dumb from sheer terror; no one without often herself, had always noticed them; they were left in a cor given them a good lunch of bread on

"Get up!" said the guard, and he

Prisea, trembling, tried to obey, but] her body and limbs felt stiff as stakes

and yet empty. Petronilla continued to cry "Mother -bread!" as a hungry fledgeling in a deserted next cries for his slain patlents and his lost food whilst the bird

through the grass and the blossoms

Prisca tried to obey, for she had sense enough to know that they would pointed out where they should only fare worse, the more they resist | and then, neglecting his out of the cell before the guard, who he said, good-naturedly. held their hair, to keep close hold on

They were taken before the police set free. The commissary of police gate. But Prisca only gathered had, without investigation, consigned the other three to gaol on the unstated declaration of the guards, the old woman being sentenced because she

could not pay a fine. before him the commissury looked at along on pleasant errands. But them with vague pity; they were two | could not disentangle the network such miserable atoms to be offenders the streets, and she went instead also seen them beg for and obtain tootsore and fever-stricken. their accusers.

"They are very young," said the commissary, "but if they be contu- moaning with hunger. She herse

Then he questioned them. "Where do you live ?"

"In the hut," said Prisca, feebly. " Where is your mother?"

"Where is the hut?"

Prisca did not answer. She did not) "Your names and ages?" he con- j open country; but in reality she had

missary to the guards; "she is more again, in circles, like a child lost in

to blame than they. "Where is your mother?" said the where the children lay and guard, and shook Prisca by the shoul-

"But if she be in the hut?" "She is in the hut."

"And where is that?"

implied immeasurable distance. "They are imbecile," said the com-

in the prisons and penitentiaries since The night grew darker; at times a the recent laws against vagrancy had key grated in the lock, and the bolts | been set in motion. He felt unwilling to add these miserable little creatures

"You may go," he said to them. "I will not send you before the trivisit made, they withdrew, leaving bunal this time. But if you be found one last effort she carried her sister

"He lacks zeal," thought a brigadier standing behind his chair, and As the hours went on the youth meditated a secret report against l

the street," said the gentleman with

doorway into the open air. the guard gave each a shake and

and keep out of it," he said, as his

Prisca understood that they were

there were the babble, the bustle, the would cease. Her little sister like a log to drag along; the lead to totally different points of the found them sitting thus, wore away.

In the gray, dull light which came compass was wholly beyond the grasp been dead many

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brain to get out of the city at once or be hauted back to prison, Prison, I trembling in every limb, ventured to ! I stop by an old man selling chesinuts, and to say under her breath; gate! Where is the gate?"

What gave : he asked. "The gate !" she repeated. He pointed upward towards the

"The Porta del Popolo is yonder. is that the one you want? Or is it I the Salara? sand the old man, who I was patient and kind,

" No," said Prisca; then, scarching

Her feet were numbed, and her I stove, seeing Prisco's face so wan and blue and scared, he offered her a handful of his chestnuts. "For nothing, dragging and half-carrying her, went for nothing; take them, little ones,

But she dared not take them; the them, and every now and then gave terror of another accusation and an it a rough jerk, as a bad driver tugs other arrest was on her. She dragged her sister away from the stall went on up the street, the child authorities to receive warrant and screaming and resisting. He had exorder for their consignment to prison. | Plained to her the way to take across The provisional preliminary imprison- the maze of streets to Porta Pia ment punishes equally with the guilty clearly enough for any one who had those innocent who on their trial are known anything of Rome to find the confused sense of some vust wilderness stretching between her and the homeward road.

The distance is not very great from the Corso to the Porta Pin to those When the two children were brought | who are in carriages or walking gails against the law. But he listened to without knowledge of what she did the deposition of the guards, who de- lowards the Tiber, taking by instinct clared that they had seen these two secluded and silent ways instead of little vagrants annoying people or the the thoroughfare where the traffic be pavement and in carriages, and had wildered her more and more. She was money. When asked their names and child hung on her like a log. Her residence they had been obstinately | sole means of making a few pence had mute; they had been taken up at | been taken from her, and the lady's three o'clock in the previous after gift also. In her dull, aching brain noon; they were old and incorrigible a sense of the injustice done to her offenders, well known to the police for seemed to burn her like a fire. What their contumacy: so at least said a quantity of bread that franc would have bought! Why had the guard kept it? Petronilla was crying and could not have enten if all the shops and inns of Rome had been open to her, but Petronilla-she felt as if she sinned against her mother, sinned against the Madonna, in letting the child want.

She dragged her frozen feet along over the stones in a belief that she was going towards Porta Pia and the turned away from it. She often went | I Duccion Imponial Muncopa a forest, and she was always further ?

and further from her goul. At last she came on a wholly deserted street; one of those marked The dwellers in it shut up. There was even a church which was closed, as it was to be Prisca made a vague gesture which swept away in a few weeks. It had a noble doorway rising above some wide low steps; the portico and pilsculptured Ecce Homo above it was of fine fifteenth-century make, a dealit for a foreign patron; the door when Petronilla sank out of her grasp on the stones, and she herself that she could move no more. With ward until they each leant against the door. The portico sheltered them in a wind blowing from the north, which drove down the doomed street clouds of grey dust from portions of it al-

ready dismuntled. No one came thither. The workmen were making holydays, for it was the vigil of the presentation of the Virloosened bricks, nothing clse moved.

heavy as a stone.

was feeble and fluttering like a halfdraw her little sister's curls about her

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