

"You will find that I don't need an alibi or anything but an apology. Meanwhile, I suppose I'd better get someone to go bail for me."

While I was scribbling a summons to my father and a vague lie to Kate, the girl was talking in a low voice to the magistrate. It didn't occur to me what she was up to till he remarked that he'd leave me here for the present, and closed the door in my face. I called him furiously as the lock turned, but mademoiselle's heavy pathetic had evidently been more effective than my righteous wrath.

My accomplice buried her face and began to cry. I leaned against the wall with my arms folded and awaited developments. After a moment she pulled herself together.

"This ain't stage business," she said, drying her eyes. "It's the shock."

"The shock of finding that I was still true to you, I suppose," I suggested.

She looked up and smiled. She had a strange little brown face with a squirrel brightness about it, and when she smiled her eyes became two shiny brown lines. Angry as I was, my face relaxed a little.

"Now I know I've got you into a hole—a mean one," she began, growing very serious. "It was a dirty trick, and you can say just what you're a mind to. I've been cussed before."

"I don't wonder," I said. "I want to know why you did it."

She looked at me consideringly. She was not pretty, but there was an odd attractiveness about her face. I don't think I am an absolute fool in my judgement of women (though it is only fair to add that Kate thinks I am), but I saw sincerity in her. I felt that is her own way she would play fair. I think she must have seen this opinion dawning in me, for she gave another of her queer little goblin smiles.

"I done it for the biggest reason a woman ever does anything for," she said finally.

"Then there is a man in the case?" I hazarded.

"You're not so slow," she nodded.

"And you want to shield him by getting someone else suspected in his place?"

"Just till tomorrow," she said. "I'll give away the whole fake myself in the morning."

"And then how will you be any better off?"

"Today's today and tomorrow's tomorrow," and she shut her eyes, as though to hide her meaning. "I suppose they'll be all just alike, today's and tomorrow's, after I'm shut up for good," she added. "I never got in before. Three hundred and sixty-five days in a year. How many years, do you suppose?"

"Why did you do it?" I broke out. The idea of using great stone blocks and iron bars to hold that little scrap of a creature irritated me.

"Never you mind," she returned. "I wonder how much she'd do for her man, the girl that owned the things?" she added. "Three hundred and sixty-five days! I picked up that sock for luck, but I guess it didn't get to working till today. How did you come here, anyhow?"

"Through the other sock," I answered. She was not listening.

"And, oh, for one minute I thought they'd pinch him," she went on. "Here's your partner in crime," they said. Gosh! I couldn't look. When I saw it wasn't, I just went it blind, and luck was with me."

"How do you know I won't go and tell all this tonight?" I asked. She looked up at me very earnestly, and I swear she wasn't playing a part.

"I don't guess you will," she said slowly. "I watched you yesterday when you helped that pretty white lady in the hack—oh, I spotted you today as soon as I saw you close up—and I guessed then what sort you were. A man with your face is good to women, and to people in trouble. And, God, if I'm not a woman in trouble!" She did not lower her eyes, but they grew suddenly shiny, and two tears rolled down her face.

"It's all such a pity, such a miserable business," I exclaimed.

"There's not many jobs I'd stick at, if he needed anything and I could help him get it," she said simply. "I bungled and got pinched. They could get him tonight, but he'll be safe by tomorrow. Now you know."

"There was a distant slam of an iron door. "Well," she said, looking squarely into my eyes.

"Well?" I answered, but I don't suppose my face had the look of a man about to do his duty by his country, for the little goblin smile crept out again.

"I wish I could do something for you," she said. "Just for the way you—you look at me. Do you want to kiss me?"

"No," I said, keeping my eyes firmly on the ground.

"Sorry," she sighed. "I haven't got anything else."

"I'll keep the red sock," I said, as the key turned in the door.

My father was in the outer office, very mad and very excited.

"It will all be cleared up tomorrow. It's just a fool mistake," I told him. "Bail me out and let's go home to dinner. I'm dead tired."

The officer turned up early the next morning to tell me that the young woman had acknowledged that she had put up a game on me, for no reason worth consider-

ing, and that what they had found out about me would have satisfied them there was a mistake, anyway. The woman, he added, was believed to be a confidence agent who had been doing several raffles. They had given up the confederate theory. She was evidently working alone.

I had to tell Kate the whole story to explain the broken engagement. She took a cynical view of the case.

"I know just how she worked you. Any good looking woman could," she declared. "She only had to cry a little, and you go forth and pull wires till she gets off without being prosecuted. You're as bad as Muriel—you believe everybody."

Kate may be right; but I never quite lost faith in the brown, gnomish face that looked up at me so squarely. And I have kept the crimson sock. My wife laughs at it, but she never suggests that it shall be thrown away. Perhaps, on the whole, she is not sorry that I can be worked by a woman.

Moving Cause of Fire

Many more fires than is usually supposed arise from spontaneous combustion. It is, however, by no means easy to determine whether a fire originates in this manner or not, because unless the fire be detected in its very beginning the flames will have presently destroyed the evidence of its cause. The dangers of spontaneous combustion are not at all appreciated by most people, and a fire originating from this cause was long regarded as a phenomenon. It is only recently that spontaneous combustion has been even partially understood. There is now, however, a more general conception of the fact that many substances ignite without the application of fire or flame, through the agency of chemical changes of the materials themselves.

Spontaneous combustion arises because of the absorption of oxygen from the atmosphere by various substances having an affinity for it. The evaporation of certain oils, especially vegetable oils, such as linseed, rapeseed, almond and palm oil, as well as the drying of moist charcoal, result in the rapid absorption of oxygen to the extent of ignition. None of these things are dangerous in bulk, as in barrels or cans, but the danger arises when any of the oils are distributed over fibrous substances, such as rags, cotton waste, etc. They form an especially hazardous risk when covered up so as to confine the generated heat. Petroleum products are likewise dangerous on account of their vaporizing qualities and ignitibility.

Sawdust mixed with linseed oil will ignite in a few hours. Cotton waste saturated with linseed oil will burn through the agency of spontaneous combustion in from two to ten hours, according to circumstances. With some of the other oils named the ignition is even more rapid and takes place in from five to six hours as a maximum.

Silk waste is more dangerous than is cotton. Wet cotton, damp oatmeal or bran, and, in fact, most vegetable substances, when packed together in a confined space without being sufficiently dry, undergo fermentation or heating, and are liable to take fire. Shipments of cotton are thus extra hazardous marine risks, and because of a tendency toward spontaneous combustion may account for some unexplained losses of ships. Spent tanbark is liable to ignite spontaneously when stacked in heaps. Iron filings, to which moisture has access, generate heat; iron rust is combustion or oxidation of iron. An instance was recently cited by Francis C. Moore wherein a large machine shop was flooded by a sudden freshet, which thoroughly wetted certain heaps of iron scraps or shavings upon the floor of the shop. They began to heat from the rusting immediately after the water had subsided.

The spontaneous ignition of coal mines is supposed to be due to the chemical action of water and iron pyrites. Unslacked lime is subject to spontaneous ignition when dampened in any way. Charcoal will burn when pulverized or divided. Indeed, a ton or two in a state of minute division is almost certain to ignite spontaneously.

Lampblack is dangerous, as there is very little doubt of its ability to ignite spontaneously if mixed with oils which contain a large proportion of hydrogen.

Tracing paper, made transparent with oil in process of manufacture, if the sheets are not thoroughly dry and cool before piling, will take fire within an hour on account of the linseed oil used.

Roasted coffee sometimes takes fire spontaneously. Hay, when stored away too green or wet, is very liable to set barns on fire by the heat generated in fermentation. Tarred felt and moist hemp have been known to take fire spontaneously. Many of the fires originating in broomcorn warehouses are supposed to arise from spontaneous combustion resulting from the saturation of the fiber with oil from the seed, expressed by the process of baling and handling, and the numerous fires in cotton gin houses may be largely due to the ignition of cotton saturated with oil from the cotton seed expressed during the process.

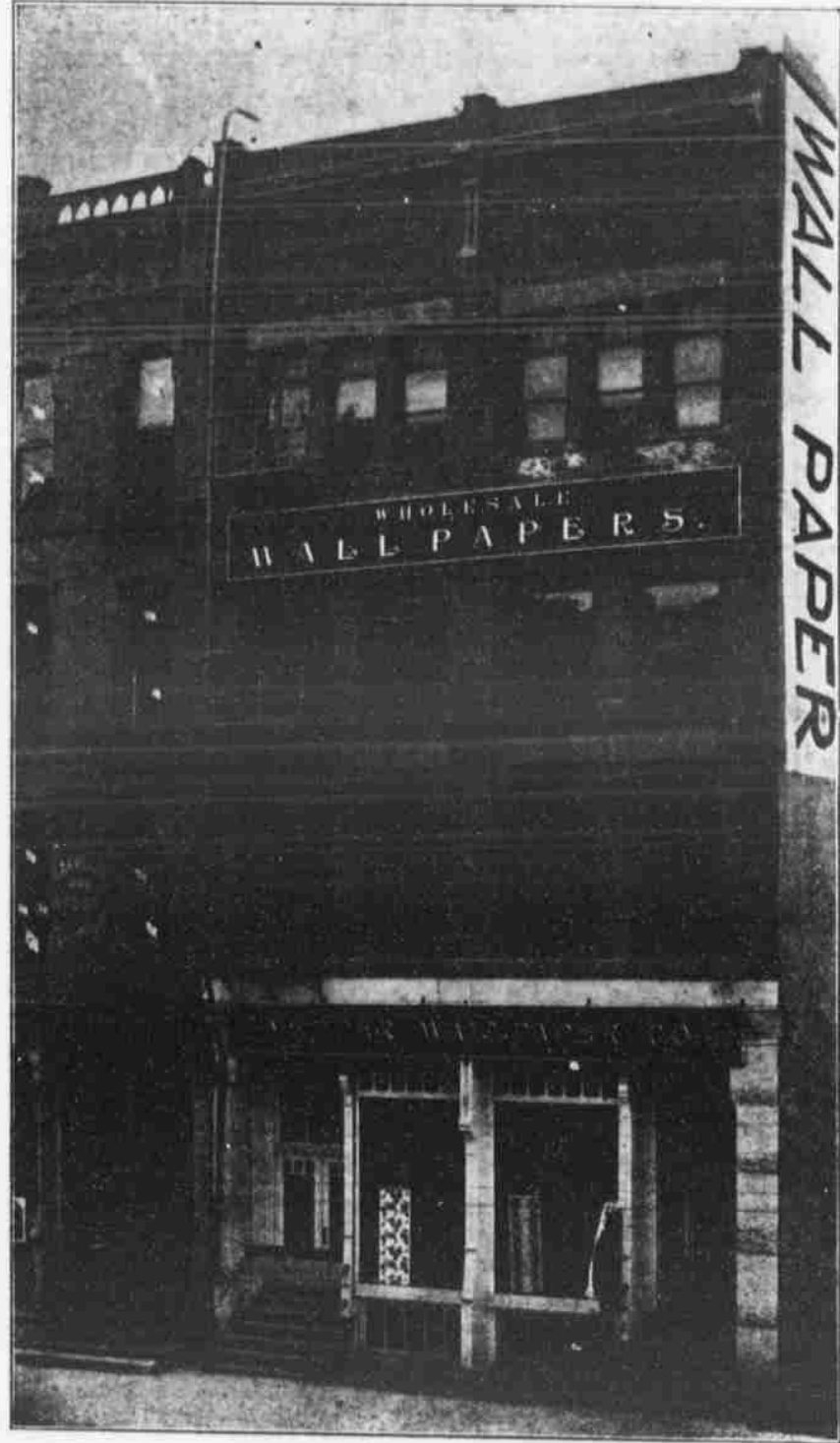
From the few examples cited it will be quite evident that spontaneous combustion as a moving cause from which fires result is more prevalent than laymen have been accustomed to suppose.—New York Independent.

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