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Woman Accused of Setting Apartment on Fire Faces Arson Charges in St. Thomas

Crime / **Published On July 18, 2023 06:09 AM /**

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ST. THOMAS — A woman suspected of almost burning down her apartment is now facing charges of arson.

According to court documents, police responded to a call for assistance at a Prindsens Gade location in St. Thomas at around 3:40 on the morning of Saturday, July 15. Officers made contact with the property owner, who said that about twenty minutes prior, he received a message from one of his tenants reporting that his other tenant – Shayla Roberts – was singing loudly outside. Five minutes later, his tenant sent another message saying that there was a lot of smoke emanating from Roberts's apartment.

The property owner said that he grabbed a fire extinguisher and went to look for the problem. Once at Roberts's apartment, the man said he found what appeared to be a bonfire on the porch, which upon closer inspection turned out to be a fire in a crockpot. He used a lid to smother the fire, and saw Roberts walking down the driveway. She reportedly asked whether he had extinguished the crockpot fire.

There was a second fire, the property owner told police, which he discovered when he went inside the apartment. This one was burning in the sink, with flames licking up towards the kitchen's upper cabinets. The landlord extinguished this fire as well.

He told police that he saw Roberts walking back towards the apartment and decided to apprehend her. In the process of tackling her to the ground, the man said his mobile phone fell from his grasp and, as he tried to retrieve it, he lost his grip on Roberts. She reportedly was able to slip away and initially tried to take the property owner's phone on the ground. However, she left the area after being chased by her landlord — at which point the man called 911 for help, he said.

Police took note of the black crockpot on the porch, the burnt items in the sink, and minor damage to cabinets above the sink. A preliminary investigation revealed that Roberts had only been a tenant of the property since January.

While responding officers were waiting for the forensics team to arrive, they spotted Roberts returning to the scene and promptly detained her. She was then transported to the Schneider Regional Medical Center to receive treatment of an injury to her eyebrow, sustained in the scuffle between herself and her landlord. While at the hospital, Roberts reportedly said that she started the fire for her friend.

She was ultimately arrested, charged with first-degree arson and destruction of property, and remanded into custody to await her first court appearance.

At her advice of rights hearing in front of Judge Paula Norkaitis, probable cause was found to support both charges, and Shayla Roberts was assessed bail in the sum of \$75,000 without the option of paying 10 percent in cash. Her next court appearance is on August 4.