

Right Number
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It was late evening when Monica Kaye heard her business line ringing. She pushed "Line 2" and answered it. "Kaye", she said simply.

"Yes, may I speak to Mr. Feith please?" a woman's voice said.

"There's no Mr. Feith here, I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry," the woman said, and hung up.

Monica cradled the phone and waited for it to ring again. 'They always call again,' she thought to herself, 'because they think they misdialed.' Sure enough, the phone rang almost immediately.

"Kaye," she answered again.

There was a pause. "There's got to be a Mr. Feith there. He told me I could reach him at this number."

"Nobody of that name is here, nor has he arranged to come here. My name is Monica Kaye, I'm a detective. This is my office."

"A detective? That may be what I need. My name is Sonja Milckey, and I'm a cashier at Rhite-Med, the medical clinic." Names are changed, of course. "There are three cashiers, and we use the same drawer. Today the count came up \$200 short, and the manager, Mr. Feith, was furious. He insists we stole the money, and he wants us to make it up out of our own pockets or he will call the police. I don't have the money and I can't afford to make it up."

She sounded as though she was on the verge of tears. "Let me do this, Miss Milckey. I'll make an appointment to see Mr. Feith and discuss this with him. There are better ways of handling a situation like this. You get some sleep."

Miss Milckey filled in Monica on the company's address and some other particulars. She sounded much relieved as she hung up. "Oh, thank you," she said, "Maybe I dialed the right number after all."

The next morning, Monica made an appointment with Mr. Feith without giving any particular reason, and arrived at Rhite-Med dressed in a tan blouse and dark-gray pants suit.

"He'll be with you in a moment," said the receptionist, who then took off her headset and said in a whisper, "He likes his girls wearing skirts."

"I'll bet he does," replied Monica.

A graying man leaned out of an office door and called to her. "Miss Kaye? Will you step in here?" he said.

Mr. Feith was behind his desk in the tiny office. Monica sat in the visitor chair. "Mr. Feith, I'm here to talk to you about a case of employee theft."

Mr. Feith looked momentarily alarmed. He gaped, and said nothing.

"I've spoken to a woman who is employed as a cashier by your firm. She says that you have accused three cashiers of stealing \$200 from the register."

"I'm sorry, Miss Kaye, but you seem to have been misinformed," he said, standing up. "Now if you'll excuse me..."

"No, she hasn't been misinformed," came a woman's voice at the door. An older, white-haired, grandmotherly-looking woman wearing a medical smock came in and reached out a hand to Monica. "Pleased to meet you, Miss Kaye. I'm Dr. Kellie Zintept. So tell me what you think."

"Well, the person called me by accident, you see. But what caught my attention here is that you're not handling this matter professionally. You know, doing things yourself could land you in legal hot water. It's not a question of \$200, it's a person's reputation, their career. I'm a detective, and I'm experienced in handling situations of this kind. By using my services, you can get your answer sooner, and could avoid exposure to costly litigation."

"Thank you for your kind offer, Miss Kaye, but we have the situation well in hand," Mr. Feith said, getting up. "We have a very busy clinic here, and—"

"Don't be so hasty, Mr. Feith," interrupted Dr. Zintept. "In the medical field we learn to appreciate that professional methods are needed to get professional results."

"Doctor, I'm not doubting that, but all we have here is a very simple case where a cashier has taken some money from the register. There is no doubt whatsoever that one of these three women took it. Miss Kaye's fees will likely be more than the amount stolen."

"The issue is not two hundred dollars, Mr. Feith. The issue is our confidence in our cashiers and our procedures. I say we hire Miss Kaye and let her do the job right. We can't afford to make a mistake."

After a discussion of fees and procedures, the deal was made, and Monica Kaye was engaged to interview the suspects and make a report. The interviews would commence after lunch. Monica would use Mr. Feith's office for the interviews.

The first suspect was Rachel Dahy. She was a tall, thin woman with long, straight brown hair.

"Miss Dahy, how long have you worked at RHITE-MED?" Monica began.

"I've been here since the clinic opened last year," she responded, knitting her fingers together. Miss Dahy looked at the floor, the desk, her hands, but wouldn't meet Monica's eyes.

"Do you feel you're well paid?"

"Well you know, money is to me not an important thing, it's kind of like, you know, out there," Miss Dahy rambled.

"The other cashiers, do you know them well?"

Miss Dahy's eyes went to the ceiling again. "Well you know, how much does anyone really, like, know another human being? I mean, people are just so, you know, out there."

"Miss Dahy, I've spoken to your cat."

"You have?!" Eye contact at last. "What did Mycroft tell you? Or Lucrezia? Or Cesar?"

"Mycroft says he doesn't like the food you're buying him," Monica said seriously. "Miss Dahy, if you were ever short of money, would you be justified in stealing food to feed your cats?"

"Stealing," Miss Dahy laughed, "like anyone really possesses anything. We are just spirits inhabiting the universe. These things out here, they belong to everyone. But—" She suddenly stared Monica straight in the eye, "You can tell Mr. Feith that I didn't steal his filthy money."

Second to be interviewed was Rosann Bevuld. Mrs. Bevuld was a short Hispanic woman with a much more rapid fidget than Miss Dahy's dreamy meandering.

"Mrs. Bevuld, you have some children?" Monica asked.

"Yes, I have three children," Mrs. Bevuld beamed. "They are good children, go to school each day. I take good care of my children."

"Does Mr. Bevuld live at home?"

"He lives at his own home," she spat out, "but he no spend no time with his childrens. I got to take care of them all of my own."

"That must be hard on what RHITE-MED is paying you."

"Back in my country people make much less money than me. But what you gonna do? You got to save what you can and you got to take your chances. I'm a take my chances. I'm a gonna give a better life to my childrens."

"Mrs. Bevuld, you know your children have to eat, have to have clothes for school, paper, pens, books. If you didn't have enough money, would it be OK to take things from the store and not pay for them?"

"I do what I have to for my children. People around here are rich and waste their money. I no have money to waste. I do my job and I get my paycheck and I no waste not even a penny. I did not take nothing from any store and no pay. Who say I do that? Who?"

"Nobody said you did that, I am just asking—"

"I did not steal nothing. If somebody say I stealing something, they are lying."

The final interview was Sonja Milckey, the woman who had called Monica in the first place. Miss Milckey was a worried-looking woman with curly black hair.

"How long have you worked for Rhite-Med, Miss Milckey?"

"Since I came to this country, about three months ago. I'm from Romania. Miss Kaye, I don't want to go back there. If I'm convicted of a crime, I could be expelled from the country. Please don't let them arrest me. I didn't take the money."

"How did you happen to come to America, Miss Milckey?"

"I had to pay a lot of money to come over here," she said, looking down. "I had to pay... everything I had. I'm working as hard as I can. Things are so expensive here. I've got to keep this job. I need the money desperately. Can't you see how things are? I'd have to be crazy to steal money from my drawer. I see how much it is, I know how much is there, how it could make my life easier. But don't you see?"

"Do you have any relatives back in Romania?"

"Yes I do, my parents," she said, tears breaking out. "They want me to send them money. My mother is sick - I'm trying the best I can, I will send them money when I can, but I can't right now, everything is so expensive!"

"Miss Milckey, the person who took this money wasn't planning on the drawer being short at the end of the day. That person had a plan to do it so it wouldn't be found out. Maybe that person has a sick relative who needs money, too. Would that make it OK for them to steal the money, knowing that it wouldn't be found out? You see how that could be?"

"I see how that could be. But I don't know how they could take it and not be found out. It would not be right, they should not do this if other people could be in trouble. Miss Kaye, you must believe me, I did not take that money! You must believe me!"

Monica needed to relax for a minute after that last emotional interview. She would need to collect her thoughts before confronting the perpetrator before them all. She pondered what each of them had said and idly stared at the telephone.

About half an hour later, Monica was ready to announce her conclusions. Rather than squeeze everyone into the tiny office, she had the three cashiers, Dr. Zintept and Mr. Feith, gather in the waiting room. There were a couple of patients in the room, who were asked to go to another room during the conference.

Monica waited for all to be seated and looking at her. "It's quite clear who stole the money. There's no doubt in my mind at all." She paused and looked at each of their faces. (Who do you think it was?)

"I won't keep you in suspense. It was Mr. Feith." She turned to look at him. He looked pale, but didn't flinch. "A lot more money than \$200 has been stolen. It's likely thousands of dollars. It was done very carefully, over a long period of time. A good accountant will probably be able to figure out the exact amount. Everything depended on the registers being counted properly to match a fudged amount of receipt. Yesterday, something went wrong, a miscalculation perhaps."

"I counted the drawer yesterday," said Dr. Zintept. "Mr. Feith was very busy, and it was getting late and the girls wanted to go home. There was no miscalculation. It was exactly \$200 short."

"So that's what happened. In most businesses, each cashier has her own drawer, so there would be no mystery about who was short. Mr. Feith hoped that he could smooth over the problem by getting the cashiers to make up the difference out of their own pocket. In that way, his long-term pilferage could go on. He might have to hold off for a few days, but then it would be business as usual. Monkey business, that is."

Mr. Feith looked at her fiercely. "Are you finished?" he spat out.

"No, there's one more thing. I wondered what digits Miss Milckey was trying to dial, when she called me yesterday evening. So I thought about transposing the digits of my number in various ways. Finally I concluded there were only a few real possibilities. None of them matched your home number. So, I dialed them. One of them was the right number. A woman answered, and she knows you. We had a long talk. She told me—"

"Shut up!" Mr. Feith bellowed at her. He put his hands over his face, which was white as a sheet. Dr. Zintept dialed the police on her cellphone.

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