

The Dancing Statue

A Featherland case that is not in the book.

by J.P. Brocca



SHERLOCK COCKATOO was enjoying a sunny day in his garden, tying string to his tomato plants, when he heard a knock on his door. It was his good friend Oscar the duck, the curator of the Featherland Museum.

“Hello, Sherlock! I need your help with a very strange case.”

“Of course, Oscar. What’s the problem?”

“Well, we have a new exhibit at the museum. It’s a beautiful statue of a swan. And every night, it starts dancing on its own!”

“Dancing on its own?! I have never seen such a thing in my life.”

Sherlock put on his thinking cap.

“I’ll take the case!”

They went to the museum that night and hid behind a large plant to watch.

On the bench in the hall the guard was finishing his supper. He stood up, shook the crumbs off his uniform, and walked away to do his round.

“He will have a fine lot of sweeping to do tomorrow,” whispered Sherlock.

“That is the strange part,” whispered Oscar. “Nobody cleans that hall at night. And by morning there is not one crumb left.”

Then a clock began to strike twelve somewhere in the dark.

And the swan moved.

She leaned to one side, and then to the other. She turned a little, wobbled, and stopped, standing off to one side of where she had been.

Every feather on Sherlock stood straight up, and he grabbed the edge of the flowerpot.

They waited. Nothing else happened. Oscar was getting up to leave when the swan moved again: she leaned, and turned, and wobbled, and settled back exactly where she had started.

“A ghost!” whispered Oscar. “Everybody says this building is haunted!”

“Perhaps,” whispered Sherlock, whose feathers were still standing up. “But I want to know one thing: whether your ghost always comes at the very same hour.”

The next morning he asked the guard three questions and wrote the answers in his notebook.

1. It always happens at midnight.
2. The guard has never seen it at any other hour.
3. By morning the swan is always back in the same place.

“Something that happens at the very same hour has clockwork in it,” said Sherlock. “There must be a key.”

He walked all the way around the swan looking for one. There was none. He tapped her with his wing, and she sounded like an empty teapot. He pushed the edge of her base and she leaned and wobbled exactly as she had the night before.

“I was wrong,” said Sherlock. “No clockwork. She’s hollow, and she moves with almost nothing.”

“A ghost does whatever it likes, whenever it likes,” said Sherlock. “This happens at the very same hour, every night. That is not a ghost: that is somebody with a schedule, the way you have one for going to work.”

The following night he came back with a bag of flour and sprinkled it in a ring all around the statue.

They waited. At midnight the swan danced again. Sherlock waited until she was still, and switched on his flashlight.

“Oscar, come and look,” he said quietly. “There is something here that was not here when we arrived.”

In the flour there was a line of tiny footprints, some of them bigger and some of them smaller. And in between the footprints, running from one end to the other, there was a thin long line, as if somebody had dragged a piece of string behind them.

So this is what he had. A hollow swan that moved at midnight, footprints of several sizes with a thin line behind them, and a floor without a single crumb on it every morning.

They did not go around the statue. They went straight underneath it.



Your turn, detective:

What do you think is under that statue?

Sherlock's thinking cap tipped to one side. Underneath it his crest opened and lifted the cap clean off his head, the way the lid of a teapot lifts when the water comes to the boil.

“By my feathers, I have it!”

He knelt down beside the base.

Under the edge was a small round hole. Then two whiskers, moving. And then a little pink nose.

A mouse came out of the hole, and five smaller ones came out behind her. When they saw Sherlock they all went very still.

“Well, well, well,” said Sherlock. “Good evening.”

“We're very sorry!” squeaked the oldest mouse. “We didn't mean to make trouble.”

“There is nothing to be sorry for,” said Sherlock. “What I want is to understand. Why do you move her?”

The mouse pointed at the hole.

“That’s our front door,” she said. “It always has been. And then they put the swan on top of it. When the guard goes off on his round we come out, gather up every last crumb he dropped, and get back inside before he returns. We are small, so we push her from one side and then the other. That is why she wobbles. Both times we put her back exactly as we found her.”

Oscar’s beak fell open.

“So the crumbs were you!” he gasped. “And you always put her back!”

“We didn’t want to be a bother.”

Oscar looked at the hole. Then he looked at the swan.

“We put her right on top of their house,” he said.

“You did,” said Sherlock.

“And they have been moving her every night so as not to bother us.”

Sherlock nodded.

“They were here first, Oscar.”

Oscar looked at the base a moment longer. Then his eyes went wide.

“I have an idea!” he said, and he crouched down to tell them.

When he had finished, all six mice said yes at once.

Then he went to find a carpenter.

The swan now stands on a base with a small round door cut into one side, and above the door there is a little brass sign, like the ones on all the other exhibits, that says THE FAMILY WHO WERE HERE FIRST.

And that was Oscar’s idea: that the mice should go on making the swan dance, only now to delight the visitors. Every afternoon, at five o’clock exactly, people queue up in the hall and leave crumbs beside the little door. The swan leans, and turns, and wobbles, and everybody claps. The mice have never eaten so well!

One of those afternoons Sherlock came back to watch, with his five o’clock tea in his wing. When the show was over, the oldest mouse tried to come out through the little door to say hello. She got her head through, pushed with her paws, and stuck fast.

“Congratulations on the new job!” said Sherlock. “Do you need a hand getting out?”

“Yes, please! But what I need most is for people to stop bringing so many crumbs!” said the mouse, and everybody burst out laughing while Sherlock pulled her free.