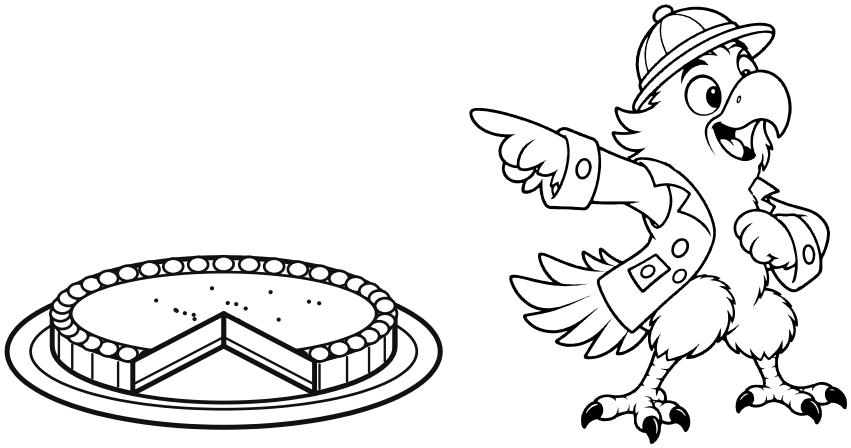
SHERLOCK COCKATOO

THE FEATHERED DETECTIVES CLUB

The Missing Slice

A Thanksgiving case from Featherland. It is not in the book.

by J.P. Brocca



Everyone in Featherland says the same two things about Greta's pumpkin pie. One slice is never enough. And nobody ever gets two. Greta the goose takes care of the big house on the hill, and every Thanksgiving the whole town walks up the hill for supper. This year eight friends came through her door.

They sat down at the long table, four on each side. On one side sat Sherlock Cockatoo, Officer Otto, Sammy the snail and Max the mouse. On the other side sat Pippin the heron, Rita the flamingo, Leo the badger and Toby the mole. Otto already had his fork in his hand. Sammy was still sitting down. There was corn, and sweet potatoes, and a bowl of cranberries so big that Max could have taken a bath in it. And at the end of the table, in front of Greta's empty chair, sat the pie: big, round and orange, like the moon on a cold night.

Greta put a cushion on Max's chair so he could reach the table, and pushed the corn a little closer to Sammy. When everybody was comfortable, she stood behind her own chair with the pie knife in her wing.

"First I count," she honked. "Every year I count, so every year nobody fights."

She walked all the way around the table, tapping each chair with her wing as she went past it.

"One, two, three, four," she counted down one side. "Five, six, seven, eight," she counted up the other. And she was back where she started, behind her own chair.

"Eight!"

She cut the pie into eight slices, as carefully as if she were cutting it for a queen, and gave one to each of her guests.

Only then did she pull out her chair, sit down, and look at the pie dish.

It was empty. Not one slice. Not even a crumb.

"Oh!" said Greta, and her neck went very long. "Somebody," she said slowly, "has taken two."

Every head at the table turned to Officer Otto.

Otto's plate was already empty.

"Not me!" cried Otto. "I only had one! I'm just fast!"

"He IS fast," said Rita. "He finished his corn before I opened my napkin."

Sherlock put down his teacup and walked slowly around the table, looking at every plate.

Seven plates had one slice of pie on them. Sammy had not even started his: he was still on his first bite of corn. And on Otto's plate there was nothing left but one curved piece of crust, the hard end of one slice.

"Seven slices on seven plates," said Sherlock, "and one crust on Otto's. That makes eight. Otto, you are fast, but you only had one."

"Then where did my slice go?" asked Greta. "I counted! Eight!"

"Would you count again?" asked Sherlock. "Slowly, please."

Greta got up, went behind her chair, and walked around the table again, tapping every chair.

"One, two, three, four. Five, six, seven, eight." She stopped behind her own empty chair. "Eight. You see?"

So this is what Sherlock had: seven slices and one crust on eight plates, not one plate with two, and a goose who counted every chair she walked past and finished her count standing behind her own.



Your turn, detective:

Nobody ate two slices. So why was there no slice for Greta?

Sherlock's thinking cap gave a little hop. Then his crest puffed up underneath it, slowly, the way a pie crust puffs up in the oven, and lifted the cap right off his head.

"By my feathers, I have it!"

He pulled out Greta's chair.

"Sit down, Greta. Now count us again. From there."

Greta sat. She looked around the table.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight..."

She stopped. She looked down at the empty plate in front of her.

"...and nine," she whispered. "Me!"

"You counted every chair you walked past," said Sherlock. "But you never walked past yours. You stopped behind it, and you didn't count it."

Greta's beak fell open. Then she laughed so hard that the cranberries wobbled in their bowl.

"Eight slices for nine friends!" she honked. "Oh, what a silly goose I am!"

Greta put the knife down next to her empty plate.

Max looked at his slice. Then he looked at Greta's plate. Then he put up his paw, very slowly.

"I have an idea," he said, so quietly that only Toby heard him.

"Max has an idea!" said Toby, much louder.

Max cut a thin piece off the side of his slice and put it on Greta's plate. Rita did the same. Then Leo, and Pippin, and Toby, and Sherlock. Otto looked at his empty plate for a moment. Then he picked up his crust and gave her that.

Sammy gave his piece last. It took him until everybody else had finished.

When they were done there was a slice on Greta's plate. It was a very funny slice, made of seven thin pieces and one crust, and it was the biggest slice on the table. Greta ate every bit of it, and she ate Otto's crust first.

"Next year," she said, "Sherlock does the counting."

"With pleasure," said Sherlock.

He walked around the table, tapping every chair, and stopped behind his own.

"Eight!" he announced.

Nobody said anything. Everybody looked at Sherlock. Sherlock looked at his empty chair.

"...Nine," said Sherlock, and he sat down very fast, and everybody laughed until the candles flickered.