Why the Vulture is Bald

Once upon a time, when birds could talk and pigs had wings, Vulture lived a quiet life among the treetops. Vulture was a little slow, but he was also humble, and much liked by the other birds. Once a day, he would have tea in a bamboo thicket that also served as a cafe. He was always polite to the other birds, especially the mynah birds that waited on him in the cafe.

“How are you today?” he would say to the mynah birds as they hovered around him, putting on his napkin and pouring his tea (rather shakily) into his tea cup.

“We’re fine, Vulture,” the mynah birds would chirp. “We’re always fine. There has never been a day when we’ve not been fine. But thanks for asking.”

“Of course,” Vulture would say. “It’s only polite of me to do so.” And he would tip his cup in their direction, in a salute to their good work.

Then he would return to his treetops, where he would write in his diary, compose music for forty-piece bird orchestras, and ask deep questions of the empty air. All in his life was balanced and peaceful.

Then one day Vulture noticed that he had fewer feathers on his head. At first, he thought nothing of it and went about his business much as before. But soon he could not ignore the fact that he was losing feathers.

“Why is this happening?” he asked the hoopoo bird that flew past his open-air tree-top apartment one day. He pointed to his balding head.

“Hoo-poo, hoo-poo,” replied the hoopoo bird. This was its answer to all of life’s questions.

“I rather doubt it,” Vulture said. “Hoo-poo” was no proper answer at all. For one of the first times in his life, he felt irritated.

When he flew down to the bamboo cafe for his tea, he was definitely not happy.

As the mynah birds gathered around him, he asked them, “Have you noticed I’m going bald? Do you know why? Is there some reason? Can I do anything about it?”
The Retrieval

*The Retrieval*, the first novel of the Dangerous Professions series, follows the adventures of the Lodge Family. People hire the Lodge Family to retrieve lost or stolen items, and even to find lost family members. In *The Retrieval*, father Ray, mother Susan, daughter Becca, and son George are on the trail of precious jewels stolen and hidden away by the master jewel thief, Richard Vandelay. The clues lead them from Paris to the wilds of Central Asia, and then, in this chapter, to the forests of Wales. (Wales is part of the British Isles, to the west of England.) Ray and Susan are experts in the outdoors and in investigation work, while Becca has a great sense of direction and George is always coming up with brilliant inventions to help them solve cases. In Chapter 4, “Wandering Through Wales,” the family closes in on one of Vandelay’s hideouts.

Chapter 4: Wandering Through Wales

It was grimy, wet work under a lightly falling rain that was worse to Becca than if it had been a downpour. Becca loved the weather of her native Florida—the sharp, intense thunderstorms, and the way everything seemed clean afterwards. This Welsh weather just seemed depressing by comparison. As her dad and mom walked ahead of her, with George following behind, pushing the buttons on some “echo locator” he’d built in the hotel the day before, Becca smiled. What was she complaining about? They were on an adventure. What other kid got to do what she was doing? They were on the trail of a dangerous jewel thief! She wondered for a second why Vandelay did it, how he’d gotten started, and what made him keep doing it.

She was so lost in thought that she tripped over a branch, almost fell, and George had to turn and catch her.

“Thanks,” she said, gasping. She needed to pay more attention to the treacherous path and less attention to daydreams about jewel thieves.

George laughed. “You can’t get lost, Becca, but you sure can lose your balance easily. I’ll have to invent something to help you.”

Becca frowned and said, “Thanks a lot. Just wait until you get lost and I have to save you and your weird inventions from a life wandering around the forest.”