

**A FREAKY KIND  
OF COURAGE**





CALEB PASCAL & THE PECULIAR PEOPLE

# A FREAKY KIND OF COURAGE

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Summary: Happy to be in the care of the old clown Guillaume Pascal, orphaned Caleb tries, with God's help, to adjust to his new life in the circus and become a useful member of the troupe despite Twin Nightshade's plots to get rid of him and the camels he loves.

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## Dedication

*For Towyoung, who's got the Scriptures  
and the Papa's courage too!*



*Peculiar People* in the title of this series is what is known as a play on words.

Today the word *peculiar* has the meaning of being strange. An odd or unusual thing or person is described as peculiar.

But there's an older meaning of the word *peculiar* too. The *King James Version* of the Bible (published in the year 1611) used *peculiar* in this older meaning.

“The LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure” (Psalm 135:4).

Jesus “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us . . . and purify unto himself a peculiar people” (Titus 2:14).

“Ye are a chosen generation . . . a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9).

In these verses, people who follow the Lord are called “peculiar.” But it doesn't mean they are strange. What *does* it mean? It means that the Lord's people are his treasured possession, his very own, singled out to belong to him.

In this series you'll follow Caleb in his adventures with all kinds of people—people who are . . . well, peculiar!

1887





# CHAPTER 1

*Do not gloat over me, my enemy! . . . Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light.*

—Micah 7:8

“Caleb!”

*Caleb scrambled deeper into his hiding place. How had Mr. Groeger found him? Fingers like sausages groped in the dark. They caught his shirttail and dragged him backwards, out of his hiding place. Mr. Groeger shook him.*

*“Liar!” Mr. Groeger said. “Thief! You don’t belong to him.” He threw back his head and roared. His teeth were the fangs of a lion. “You belong to ME!”*

“Caleb, my son!”

*Son?* It was Guillaume\* Pascal, the old circus clown, calling him.

\*(pronounced GHEE-ome)

“Good morning at last!” Guillaume laughed. “You have slept a day and a night! You see, Jock! He is awake now!”

Guillaume’s one-eyed dog was sitting at the edge of the cot. Jock’s dog eye watched Caleb intently, but the pale blue iris of his glass human eyeball was contemplating the wall. His mustard-yellow hair grew in patches, long here and short there, and in a tuft on the end of his ratlike tail. He lifted his lips in a smile, and all of his snaggly teeth stuck out.

“Good morning,” Caleb whispered.

Jock sneezed with delight, spraying Caleb’s bare chest.

“Jock!” Guillaume scooped up the ugly little beast as Caleb wiped the droplets off with the blanket. “This is not good manners.” The old man sat down on the edge of the cot. “How is your back?”

Caleb flexed his shoulders. The welts from Mr. Groeger’s strap hardly stung, but they still hurt when he moved. “Not too bad, sir,” he said. “The horse liniment helped.”

“Sir?” Guillaume laughed again as he set Jock down on the floor. “Yesterday you called me Papa!”

“Yes . . . Papa,” Caleb said. *It’s quite a change for a fellow to make overnight.* He’d been with Mr. Groeger for three years before the old circus clown showed up, offering to be Caleb’s own papa.

*“Liar! Thief! You don’t belong to him.”*

Caleb shivered. The cold sweat of his dream was trickling down his sides. He’d told Guillaume the truth about that, right in front of Mr. Groeger. *“I am a liar and a thief.”* He’d figured the old man would turn and walk away . . . but he hadn’t. He’d said, “Do you want to be my son?”

Which probably meant the old guy was crazy. The nicest crazy man Caleb had ever met. But still crazy.

Caleb pulled on his trousers and found his shirt folded at the foot of the bed.

“The first thing we do in my house,” Guillaume settled his spectacles on his nose and opened his Bible, “is read from the Good Book. And then we will ask the Papa’s blessing.”

Caleb nodded as he buttoned up his shirt. Guillaume’s home was one-third of a train car. Caleb didn’t feel the car moving and figured the train must be sitting still. There were two doors in the small room. One led onto the little porch at the rear of the train car; the other led to the two-thirds that was a traveling stable for Guillaume’s animals—Babs the elephant, her baby Babbette, Thunder the old pony, and Nadine the goat. It was like living in a stable on wheels. Caleb could hear Nadine bleating for her breakfast.

“Today we read from Psalm 27,” Guillaume said. He rested his finger on the page. “This is a song written to God by the great King David.” Caleb didn’t have any idea who King David was, but he nodded anyway, and Guillaume started to read. “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh—”

Someone rapped hard on the rear door.

Guillaume looked up from his Bible. “Come in.”

The door opened, and Tannakin the Pig-Faced Girl burst into the tiny room.

“Guillaume!” She gulped air like she had been running.

“Mr. Bartlebee wants to see you right away. You and Caleb!”

Jock raced in circles and started to yap, so Caleb picked him up. Mr. Bartlebee was important. His name was on every poster, wagon, and tent of Daggett and Bartlebee’s Phantasmagoria of Dangers and Delights.

“We were just about to pray,” Guillaume said. Tannakin bowed her head.

“Heavenly Papa,” Guillaume said, “bless me today. Bless my son, Caleb, and bless Tannakin too.” He looked at Caleb. “Do you know what blessing is?”

“Saying thank you for your food?”

“It is good to say thank you.” Guillaume was smiling. “And food is a blessing. But when the heavenly Papa blesses, it means giving us good things—more good things than we can imagine or even hope for. Now,” the old man said as he closed his Bible, “what is this about?”

“About Caleb,” Tannakin said. “Twin Nightshade’s stirring up trouble. He’s telling everyone that you’ve taken in an outlaw, Guillaume.”

“An outlaw?” Caleb turned his face to avoid Jock’s tongue.

“Twin says the sheriff in Cottonwood told him all about you,” Tannakin said. “La Mère Alexandre and others are pretty upset. Everyone’s with Mr. Bartlebee now, waiting to see what he’s gonna do.”

Guillaume stood up. “Tuck in your shirt, my son. We will go see Mr. Bartlebee.”

The room started to rock from side to side.

“Babs!” Guillaume opened the door to the animals’ section of the car. The mother elephant was rocking from side to side as if she were dancing. She rolled her small eyes at Guillaume, curled her trunk up over her head, and opened her mouth. Babbette peeked hopefully around her.

“What are you doing?” Guillaume tsk-tsked at the animals. “Causing such trouble in the morning! Do you want this train to go off the tracks?”

Thunder made an *eh-eh-eh* sound that was his best attempt at a whinny. The pony must have been thirty years old if he was a day. His lower lip drooped, his back sagged, and even his ears hung down.

Guillaume pulled a burlap sack off a hook on the wall. “You may have apples, but then you must all be patient until we come back.”

Nadine was so delighted she butted Thunder in the rump. Guillaume had said the black goat and pony were friends, but Caleb figured Thunder just moved too slowly to get away from the pest.

“Why would Twin want to cause trouble for me?” Caleb handed Jock to Tannakin so he could finish buttoning his shirt and tuck it in. “He doesn’t even know me!”

“Bolin was Twin’s best friend,” she said as Jock wiggled out of her arms and ran after Guillaume. “Twin figures you got him fired.”

“The camel trainer? All I did was stand there so he couldn’t shoot the camel. Mr. Bartlebee’s the one who saved Sheeba. He bought both of Bolin’s camels, didn’t he?”

“Not because he especially likes camels,” Tannakin said.

“He bought the camels so Bolin could have money for a new start somewhere. Mr. Bartlebee’s a nice guy—mostly.”

“Most of the time?” Caleb leaned over to see if Guillaume was finished feeding apples to the elephants yet. He wasn’t.

“The boss doesn’t like trouble,” Tannakin said. “It gives him headaches. Twin is stirring up plenty of trouble now—and not just about you. He’s saying Bolin was right, that Sheeba’s gone mad and must be destroyed.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Caleb grunted as he pulled up his suspenders. “If Bolin hadn’t beaten her, she never would have acted that way. Who cares what Twin says anyway?”

“Twin’s uncle is J. N. Daggett,” Tannakin said.

It took Caleb a moment to figure it out. “As in Daggett and Bartlebee’s . . .”

Tannakin nodded. “That’s the one. J. N. Daggett owns half of this circus. The Nightshade boys are Mr. Daggett’s nephews. Twin has a lot of say around here.”

Caleb hadn’t met too many of the circus people yet, but he’d managed to meet both of the Nightshades. The one who traveled ahead of the circus putting up posters kept a shrunken human head in his pocket. His brother Twin kept a sideshow tent with the rest of the shrunken head family and Nefertiti’s grinning mummy.

“Guillaume?” A black giant dressed in leopard skins was standing at the door. He had gold bands on his massive biceps, and a heavy gold earring dangled from one ear.

If Caleb hadn’t known that Karoom the Cannibal wasn’t a cannibal at all but a graduate of Harvard Law School, he’d

have run. Karoom had not been happy when Guillaume decided to bring Caleb along.

“Oh hi, Tanni,” the huge man boomed. “I didn’t know you’d already come to get them.”

He stretched his lips in a smile. Every pearly white in his broad grin seemed to have been filed to a point.

Tanni gasped. “Karoom! What . . . uh . . . your teeth!”

“Theatrical wax,” he said. “Do you like it?”

“*Bon*, Karoom!” Guillaume had come back in. “Just like your poster! But why are you in your costume?”

“We’re doing a show,” Karoom said. “Haven’t you heard? Half a show, anyway. We need the bull. We’ve got a town here now that wasn’t here when Nightshade came through a few weeks ago!” He drew in a deep breath. “There’s money to be made here. I can smell it!”

“What bull?” Caleb asked.

Karoom glared at him.

“He means Babs,” Tannakin explained. “All elephants are called bulls, even she-elephants. Other people call them rubber cows, even the he-elephants. It’s just circus talk.”

“So Mr. Bartlebee is in a good mood then?” Guillaume asked. Caleb thought he sounded hopeful.

“I’m afraid not,” Karoom said. “It was becoming fractious when I left. Let’s get this over with . . .” He glared at Caleb again. “So we can have breakfast.”

“What does *fractious* mean?” Tanni asked.

“Irritable, peevish, and unruly,” Karoom said. “Twin is good at stirring things up. You might say he has a gift for it. And this boy has given him plenty of things to stir.”

Guillaume picked up his hat. "Let us go."

Caleb and Tanni followed him out of the train car. The early morning air smelled of pine resin, prairie grass, and wood smoke.

The station was nothing but a frame house sprawled beside the tracks, but the skeletons of shops and houses were rising up right out of the ground on the prairie behind it. Some had roofs already, and one or two had walls, and even windows. There were wagons everywhere and piles of lumber ready to be turned into even more buildings. Here and there, women were starting to work over fire pits, blowing last night's embers alive or adding fuel.

"Welcome to Heydin, Kansas," Karoom said.

"We are not setting up the big top?" Guillaume asked.

"No time, not if we want to make our next show. We'll just give them a taste of what we've got this time," Karoom said. "Next year there will be a full house here, I'll bet."

A white tent had been set up halfway between the station house and the first building in town. Red, yellow, and blue pennants hung limp above it, waiting for the slightest sigh of breeze to lift them.

"They're charging a dollar a meal, for greasy food at the restaurant," Karoom explained. "Mr. Bartlebee won't pay that price. Thomas is cooking for us this morning."

"Mr. Bartlebee is waiting for us in the chow tent?" Caleb asked.

"The whole circus is waiting," Tanni said.

Guillaume slowed and then stopped. He looked back down the train. "Go ahead with Karoom and Tanni, Caleb,"

he said. "I will catch up. I have thought of someone who should be at this meeting."

"I'm sure everyone is there," Karoom said.

"Not everyone," Guillaume winked at Caleb. "I will be right along. Karoom, you will take care of my son, yes?"

Karoom made a growling noise.

"*Bon!*" Guillaume hurried down the tracks, and Jock raced after him.

"You heard him," Karoom said. "We don't want to keep the boss waiting."

"Can Mr. Bartlebee . . . throw me out?" Caleb asked.

"He can do anything he wants," Karoom said. "It's his circus. Hello, boys!"

Two boys standing very close to the side of the tent spun around. One hurriedly stuck a barlow knife in his pocket.

"What's wrong with *her*?" The smaller boy was pointing at Tanni. "Her face! She don't got a nose!"

Tannakin edged behind Karoom.

"Never you mind about her," Karoom said, stepping toward them. "Allow me to introduce myself. Karoom the Cannibal, at your service." He smiled, and the boys' eyes grew wide, then wider as they saw the pointed teeth.

"You don't have to cut a hole in my tent to see what's going on inside," Karoom said. "We are about to have breakfast, that's all. Why don't you come in? I'm starving!"

"George," the smaller boy's voice squeaked as he backed away, "what do cannibals eat?"

"People, that's what," the bigger boy answered. "Run for it!" They took off.

“Thanks, Karoom,” Tannakin said.

“Just doing my job,” Karoom said as the boys disappeared around the corner of the station. “Speaking of starving, I wonder if Thomas is serving . . .”

Caleb couldn’t hear the end of the sentence, as shouting had erupted inside the tent.

“I told you it was becoming fractious,” Karoom said loudly. “Let’s get this over with.” He pushed Caleb and Tannakin into the tent ahead of him.

The tables were ready, but no one was sitting down. They were standing in a mob, shouting and waving their arms.