

A Sneak Peek Behind the Curtain

What you're reading here is a rare thing — the very first chapter of A Bold Adventure, exactly as it went off to my editor. It's about draft five, still needs a polish unpolished, but I'm sharing it because I believe readers deserve to see how a story begins — not just in the plot, but in the creative process itself.

This chapter hasn't been professionally edited or formatted yet — you may spot typos, awkward phrasing, or scenes still finding their shape. But the heart of the story is here, and if you've read A Bold Pursuit, you might just recognise a few familiar faces.

Enjoy this honest glimpse behind the scenes — and thank you for being part of the journey.

A Bold Adventure - The Beginning

For a fraction of a second, there was nothing.

The air reeked of drying fish and the sour tang of river mud. Humid, rank, and thick with the scent of bodies pressed too close. It caught in the back of her throat. Her hand gripped Theo to her side as she felt the pressure of a swathe of people. All male. Silent. All focussed on her.

As if a spell had broken, the Hooghly River wharf roared back into action. The throng in front of her surged forward, filling the little space around her.

Their hands reached out, touching the fine eggshell blue linen of her skirt, some laughing, some solemn and watchful. Older men with folded arms and neutral expressions stood scattered among the younger men. She stepped back until her heel touched the timber rail. Beyond the immediate throng, a river of people flowed—just as surely as the one she had sailed up that morning. Calcutta’s port seethed, full of life, as were the docks crammed with ships.

Evelyn Gracewell, never a woman to let a situation get the better of her, dipped her knees and set the wooden cage with her darling Theo on the rough-planked wharf. Noting his throaty protest, she gave the bars a quick tap of reassurance before straightening to face the press of bodies before her. She drew a deep breath, lifted her chin, and stretched to her full five-foot height before bestowing the assembly of menfolk with a radiant smile

“*Nomoshkar, nomoshkar,*” she called, her palms together in front of her chest as she bowed her head. Her voice boomed out—surprising even herself and she thought,

Here stands the child of a clergyman!

Regaining her thoughts, elbows at her side, she raised her hands with palms outwards and repeated the greeting, smiling and nodding as she turned through an arc to address all before her. Using a trick her father employed during Sunday sermons, she selected two anchors in the crowd to direct her words toward. One was an older man, head and shoulders

above the rest, his face resplendent with the most luxurious facial hair she had ever seen; the other, a serious-looking young fellow squatting in front with a mop of black hair falling over his face.

“Nomoshkar, a pleasure to meet you.” Her hand fluttered towards the aft of the ship where already the crew were unloading trunks, tea chests, an array of solid British furniture, and even a complete Victorian villa, cut into pieces and resplendent with filigree ironwork, on heavy hemp ropes down to the wharf.

“Would one of you gentlemen be able to help with our luggage, please?”

As she spoke, a ripple of laughter ebbed through the crowd. Determined not to lose control of the situation, she ignored the merriment even as she heard Theo hiss with indignation. To gain the more mature gentleman’s attention, Evelyn addressed him again, believing he would take her more seriously. His amusement now seemed greater than the situation deserved, in her view. Humour sparkled in his expression. With arms folded, he rested his elbow on his forearm and cupped his jaw, forefinger raised to hide the growing curve of his smile.

“I was told the practice here is to pay the going rate—as suggested by the ship’s master.”

She raised her voice over the rising tide of laughter, unsure of the cause of the amusement, but certain in her bones she was at its centre. A flicker of determination tightened the muscles around her eyes and she felt a flutter run up the skin covering her spine.

Her words caught in her throat and her hair rose on the back of her neck. Then, something wrested more than one or two hairs from her head, along with her favorite straw hat and her mother's pearl-headed hat pin.

"Oh!" she yelped, and her hand flew up to accompanying raucous laughter. The younger man was no longer serious, but now he wasn't the only one doubled over, clutching his stomach, eyes streaming as he gasped for breath.

Hot tears formed, due only to her follicular discomfort, she assured herself. She refused to let a gang of misbehaving men upset her composure.

She shook her dark blonde curls as they spiralled down to her shoulders and stretched herself upright until her heels lifted in her leather boots. Her chin tucked in and all pertness disappeared, she shot the tall man a fierce look.

"Please tell me what is happening here?" she said.

To which those at the front of the crowd howled with laughter while the contagion caught those behind them, all of whom joined in for the sheer hell of it, she thought.

Evelyn held her position. British imperiousness schooled into every fibre of her being, without her even knowing it.

"Well?" she said, bristling with discomfort as she acknowledged to herself this situation was now, if it ever had been, no longer under her control. And if she could not complete a simple task such as engaging some porters,

then what hope did she have in assisting the expedition manager for the coming months? In bloody India, of all places!

✨ Intrigued by Evelyn's arrival?

This is just the beginning of A Bold Adventure, a sweeping historical adventure inspired by true events. If you'd like to be among the first to read more — and receive an exclusive pre-launch offer — sign up below. You'll also get behind-the-scenes updates, early access to new chapters, and a glimpse into the real history behind the Bold series.

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Thanks so much for reading, can't wait to share more soon! - Penelope