

*An inspirational journey of healing yoga throughout India where life and death choices must be made. Humor exists in even the toughest moments in life and unimaginable joys can happen without us knowing. It is a reminder to embrace life with all its uncertainties, to cherish the joyful times and the wonderful people who make them possible.*

# CHASING MARIGOLDS

By MOIRA YELDON

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# Chasing Marigolds

Moira Yeldon

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ISBN: 978-1-64718-096-6

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Yeldon Moira

Chasing Marigolds by Moira Yeldon

TRV003040 | TRV026050 | OCC010000

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019919203

Printed on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.  
2019

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## Chapter 12 – From a Rooftop

Some of my favourite moments were experienced looking down from above. While India elevated me to a higher level of consciousness, the added height enabled me to literally transcend limitations at street level, to see beyond and feel as if I was floating above in my own ethereal space. It is sometimes difficult when facing challenges head on to know how to deal with them. Rising above such difficulties allows one to view situations from a different perspective and the solution often becomes clearer.

During yoga meditation we often set ourselves an intention or *sankalpa* where we reflect on the qualities we want to invite into our lives. I wanted to accept whatever confronted me in India without making judgement about the place or its people. It was not my role to question their reality because *satya* is also about honouring the truth of others. Determined to embrace life, my intention was to love every moment, be content with whatever I was doing, wherever I was, regardless of whether it was easy or difficult. For it is this quality of contentment that ultimately leads to inner peace.

Sitting on a rooftop allowed me space and quiet time to reflect on these ideas where I felt closer to nature, the sky, clouds, birds and trees. While there were many rooftop opportunities in India, one memorable spot was our hotel in Udaipur. The family who owned the hotel had searched all over India for artefacts, statues and old building materials sourced from ruined sites. These recycled items were then used in their interior and exterior décor. Tastefully designed, it was in sync with the original architecture and style. Huge entrance doors, made from thick recycled timber, were like some I had previously seen in forts and palaces. Resplendent with domed stone gazebos

and scalloped arches which reflected floodlit minarets at night, each of our rooms had spectacular views of the lush flowering garden below. From the rooftop, we had the most unbelievable vistas of surrounding hills, temples and the picturesque lake in the distance. Eating breakfast and dinner served on the rooftop was an opportunity to absorb the calming energy close to the sky and think about how far I had come.

By this stage, I had travelled about 4000 kilometres across India and during this time, I also reflected on how far I had come in my personal journey. From the moment I arrived, I felt a real connection to the place and its people. After one week, I was also feeling well-balanced, my insight was clearer, memory sharper. Physically, I was keeping healthy but most importantly, my digestive system was tolerating three Indian meals per day. I was feeling well, enjoying every moment.

Before I left Australia, I started a daily yoga practice known as the Five Tibetan Rites found in a book called *The Secret to the Fountain of Youth*. Ideal for travelling, it is a short routine that can be done when you get out of bed, before eating and can be easily slotted into a busy itinerary. In the body there are seven *chakras* or vortex energy centres which govern the seven ductless glands in the body's endocrine system. In a healthy body each of these vortexes revolves at a high speed, permitting vital life or *pranic* energy to flow upwards through the endocrine system. In the first of the five rites you are required to spin in a circle which helps speed up the vortexes allowing one's *chakras* to spin in balance. It is reminiscent of the practice performed by the twirling dervishes or Sufi practitioners who believe it releases the soul, allowing it to connect to the Divine.

While I wasn't actively seeking "the fountain of youth", I felt it was having a positive effect on my general state of well-being. By the time I reached Udaipur I was certainly feeling grounded, despite my time spent aloft in higher places.

Known as the City of Lakes, Udaipur is one of the prettiest places in Rajasthan. Once part of the ancient kingdom of Mewar, established around 1567 AD, it is one of the oldest surviving dynasties in the world. Udaipur's interesting history is showcased in the city, which is akin to an oasis in the desert. Its rich tapestry of lakeside palaces, forts, temples, havelis and gardens, reflect its varied influences over the centuries. The City Palace stands high on a hill on the banks of Lake Pichola. Standing on the high surrounding walls, I had magnificent views of the lake. Four major palaces and several minor palaces complete the City Palace, whose main entrance is through a triple arched gate, the Tripolia. Built in 1725, the gate leads to a series of courtyards, corridors and gardens.

From the palace, I walked down a series of narrow cobblestone streets to a small rooftop café called The Rainbow where I sat sipping hot chai. Looking down from above, I was captivated by the colours reflected in the small shop windows selling miniature silk paintings, vivid textiles, bright clothing and vibrant silky scarves, each with their own rainbow reflections. Like many cities in Rajasthan, Udaipur boasts some of the oldest Hindu and Jain temples. Some of them were built in the 6th while others were built in the 11th century. Two temples stood at the edge of the lake, while several that had not survived the test of time, were now submerged in the lake. Another complex of 108 temples was dedicated to Lord Shiva, who was the deity of the Maharanas of ancient Mewar.

In Udaipur we visited an old park called Saheliyon-ki-Bari or Garden of the Maids of Honour, which was built by Rana Sangram Singh for his wife. In this small ornamental garden, royal ladies could relax while going for a stroll, without being seen by men. With its many fountains in four delightful pools, chiselled kiosks and ornamental marble elephants atop green lily ponds, it was a popular place to escape. Strolling past masses of purple bougainvillea overgrown by lush tropical undergrowth, I found it a welcoming relief from the city heat. When I closed my eyes, the sounds of the water fountains mimicked the noise of the monsoons and it was easy to imagine the deafening deluge. A delightful place for embracing peace and tranquillity, it must have been a wonderful alternative for the royal maids who would otherwise have been kept indoors, according to the practice of *purdah*.

As we drove from Udaipur to Jaipur along a busy highway, we saw nothing but businesses selling marble. Most of it is quarried out of the nearby Aravalli hills which are said to be one of the oldest archaeological ranges in the world. For 400 kilometres we looked at signs all along the roadside advertising marble. Blocks of every size and colour were displayed in rows for all to see. While some of the signs suggested that they sold Italian marble, it may have been a marketing ploy to attract the attention of customers.



In Jaipur Christina would be leaving us. Having been to India several times before, she confided that she had a secret paramour who she was eagerly waiting to see. He was now working in the gift shop at the Jaipur hotel where



we were going to be staying. The first time she came soon after her husband died, she needed a shoulder to cry on and a pillow to share. While she wasn't really looking for romance, she needed someone to guide her. She first met Maneesh at the Taj Mahal and was moved by this devotion of love by the Shah Jahan for his beloved Mumtaz. When Maneesh offered to drive her all around India, she paid him to do so. Driving to places he had never been was a wonderful holiday for him, with all his expenses paid. With the aid of the *Kama Sutra* which he sold in his shop, he also took Christina to heights she had previously never reached or imagined.

She said it was a mutual understanding, whereby she returned to her home in Mt Gambier where they continued their liaison via Skype or WhatsApp. In between visits, she sent him Lacoste T shirts, Assix joggers and a new iPhone each year. Deciding it was time for him to marry, his parents had just planned a big wedding to an eligible Indian girl. As it was to be in November, he invited Christina to his wedding. She promised to bring him the latest iPhone. When Christina confided all this to me, I was astounded. 'Are you actually going to attend his wedding?' I queried, incredulously.

'Well I can't decide but I think I should', she replied.

'Why should you?' I asked.

'Well I feel that I need to be supporting him. You know this is an important part of his life', she stammered.

'But what about your feelings?' I pleaded indignantly.

'I don't really know but I want him to like me', she hesitated.

'Does he like you enough to consider your feelings in all of this?' I pondered.

‘I’m sure he does’, she said.

One night, Ravi invited us to his parents’ house for dinner. His parents, wife and daughter, lived in a 200-year-old haveli in Jaipur. His mother showed us the ceiling of one room which was embedded with rubies and emeralds in floral designs. Unfortunately, their house was damaged in an earthquake and was in desperate need of repair. We staggered up a dark, narrow concrete stairwell at the rear of the house to another rooftop above the first one. Positioned high above the ground, we had magnificent views of the old city including an ancient fort built on a distant hill. At this time of night, the illuminations were spectacular. His mother enjoyed living in this old house as there was always plenty to see in the street below. While the family followed both modern and old traditions, his mother chose to stay at home, leaving her servants to shop at the markets.

A few doors along, lived a man who owned an elephant, which he hired out for weddings. Down the street from him, a teacher ran classes at a modern school, while next door, a priest lived in an ancient Hindu temple. A constant flow of traffic, pedestrians, cars, rickshaws and of course the ubiquitous cows that wandered all over town, meant there was always something of interest to attract one’s attention.

As their rooftop was edged by a low crumbling stone wall, our hosts were concerned that our men, many of whom were well over two metres tall, were standing too close to the wall. At mid-calf height for most of them, they could easily topple over the edge. But there was much to see at street level, so we did not want to miss out on the entertainment below. Ravi’s mother told me that their pet dog, while chasing a monkey one night, had plummeted over the edge. Miraculously he had survived sustaining only a fractured leg.

Down in the street, we could see a groom's wedding procession about to commence. Mounted on a decorated white horse, the groom was the centre of attention. Wearing a traditional red turban, trimmed in gold, long white silk jacket with decorative red baggy trousers, he was dressed in the style of a maharajah. Walking in front of him, six people pushed what looked like portable decorative lamps on moving rollers which the bearers kept pushing along. They were connected by electric cables, plugged into a small truck following along behind the groom. Leading the procession, musicians banged on drums, others blew horns loudly then the partying began. While the excited wedding guests happily danced along, singing and clapping, we watched, mesmerised, from above. Suddenly, Christina grabbed my arm, pointing at the groom. 'Oh my God, it's Maneesh', she cried.

I peered into the darkness trying to focus on the groom's features. Trotting along on his horse, it was difficult to see his face which was partially shadowed by his large decorative turban. 'Are you sure?' I asked.

'Yes, I'd know that cheeky smile anywhere. Perhaps I should go down there', she suggested.

As I turned to Christina, there was a loud bang. 'I don't think that's such a good idea. It's not safe.'

'But what if he has seen me? He will think I'm awful for not speaking to him', she worried.

'It's too bad what he thinks. You need to worry about your own safety', I added rather rudely.

Firecrackers exploded in the dark, lighting up the faces of the guests and we all jumped each time one went bang. Once the wedding revellers saw us above, they yelled at us excitedly, gesticulating wildly. Christina started waving madly, calling out his name. 'Maneesh, Maneesh, I am up here.'

Luckily, at 10 pm when we thought she had forgotten us, our hostess called us in to eat dinner. It would be a long night for Maneesh's guests but several days before the bride and groom would share their joint celebrations. In the meantime, the bride would be enjoying her own festivities shared with her family and friends. I wondered how Christina was going to deal with this complicated situation. While some days she was relatively confident, that night she revealed her vulnerability.

The following evening when our group went out for dinner, Mel decided she needed a quiet night on her own far more than she needed another dinner or cultural show. In her grief and unsettled emotional state, she had been coping well, interacting with people while enjoying most of our activities. She decided to pace herself, focus on self-care and let her heart guide her actions and decisions.

From each of her shopping experiences, she had bought some unusual gifts but in search of more, she went down to the hotel gift shop. Having purchased some brightly coloured turned-up toe slippers like gondolas, she was keen to buy another pair. She was also curious to meet Christina's paramour face-to-face. While she tried on her slippers, she caught a glimpse of Maneesh's shiny shoes below his silky pants.

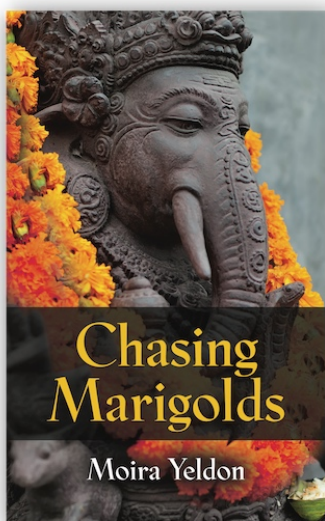
Allowing herself a few sly glances, she scanned his loose tunic, portly torso, sweaty neck and brow. While admiring his curling moustache she also noticed his flared nostrils and dark nasal hair. However, she failed to discover the source of Christina's desire. He asked her if she had any old phones she no longer used. She offered to have a look when she returned home and post them to him later. He then offered her many other wares from his shop. Did she want a turban, pashmina, silk scarf? As she was busily saying no to everything he offered, she was blown away when he

suggested, ‘Madam would you like me to come up to your room. Your friend has gone out. I am very good. It won’t take long.’

Her keen sense of humour soon outweighed her shock. She wanted to reply, ‘It won’t take long? So, it’s all about you is it?’

Instead she huffed, ‘Why don’t you go phone yourself’ and she shoved him out of the way.

As she walked away, she wondered if she had been a little hasty in refusing his offer. Those strange positions in the *Kama Sutra* did look rather intriguing. Besides, she didn’t object to a twirling moustache or a little nasal hair. Instead, she settled for a cold shower and a masala dosa ordered from room service. After that, it became a private joke and “it won’t take long” became a popular catch phrase on the tour that arose in many of our conversations. Of course, we didn’t mention it until long after Christina had left our group.



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