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## A Very Unchristian Retreat

GILES CURTIS

### Chapter One

It is said that in moments of stress the brain speeds up, giving the impression that time has slowed down. This was not the case for Hugo. It might have been, had his brain been the major organ which had led him into the position he now found himself. It was a predicament which prompted panic, and reluctantly his groin was relinquishing control back to his brain. And his brain was telling him he was in very deep shit indeed.

Suzanna had taken his towel, which would not have been too bad on its own, but she had also taken his wallet and his clothes, and most pressingly of all, his car keys. Now that his brain had fully taken command, it couldn't help relish its evident superiority over his reproductive area. Or put another way, Hugo A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) couldn't help reminding himself that he was naked, penniless and thirty miles from home. With no means of getting back.

It had been so easy for him to get himself into trouble. Getting out of it was going to be another matter. The yoga lessons had been Jan, his wife's, idea. As a bonding exercise it had been less than successful. And his self control had been less than exemplary. Suzanna, the yoga teacher, had been barefooted and leotarded. Her movements had been different to his: she glided. It felt a long way from the beach, almost in a foreign language.

"Now move into the down-facing dog," she'd said, stretching panther-like into the pose. Hugo had thrown himself in a way which could be described, at best, as badger-like.

"Now into the child A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) pose," she'd said. She asked the class to think of their special place. And he had. Hugo had

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pictured A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) the holiday cottages he'd created in South West France. She'd instructed them to forget about work. And he had. Since his redundancy, he'd been working on their house in Godalming. Godalming, he'd thought, the clue's in the fucking name. She'd told them to close their eyes. And this he hadn't done. Perhaps everything would have been fine had he not looked up. Her elegant flowing form was topped off with a smile that he thought flashed in his direction and twinkled. It was something in A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) the eyes, or it might have been the lips, or another part of the female anatomy Hugo had never been acquainted with. He wasn't sure. But he was certain that she was quite easily the most sensual human being he'd ever laid eyes on. And that was with her clothes on.

Twenty-five minutes earlier...

All Hugo had planned to do was bump into her. He had been surprised when Jan had suggested that the yoga class come down to France. Jan had to remain in England to look after her shop. But he hadn't expected to find himself following Suzanna, nor had he anticipated her heading for the naturist beach. She had thrown her towel down and stretched with a suppleness that could only prompt hazardous thoughts. And with balletic A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) beauty she'd removed her clothes. Hugo tumbled onto the sand, transfixed. There was nowhere to hide. His throat was suddenly very dry, which would prove to be his least troublesome bodily response. He tried to look casual, but he was clothed when everyone around him wasn't. He had no choice.

Hugo had never inflicted the greater public to his naked body. Indeed, he'd been naked in the presence of far fewer people than he would have liked, which might have been a contributory factor. He struggled out of his clothes and cast his eyes nervously at the resultant naked form. It was going to need work. It wasn't possible to turn back time and re-sculpt his physique in the gym. He was going to have to work with what he had. He looked down but, in its ready-for-urination only mode, his penis did not resemble a cucumber or a courgette, or even a carrot. It was more like a button A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) mushroom. It must, he concluded, be the slight breeze. He had to take it further up the vegetable hierarchy.

Hugo covered himself with a towel, cupped the fungal growth in question, and coerced it rather keenly. So keenly that he didn't noticed the couple settle next to him. The man was bronzed and muscular and his wife was blonde, very beautiful, and very naked. He tried not to let them distract him, and so Hugo's gaze didn't immediately light on the man's angry face.

"Sorry, it's not what it looks like..." Hugo said, even A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) though it was exactly what it looked like.

He lifted the towel and sneaked a glance. He was ready. With barely a glance at the naked

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couple, he hurled his clothes onto a white rock with feigned nonchalance. He did so as if he were the kind of man who regularly strides butt-naked through highly populated public areas. Before either his resolve or anything else deflated, he headed for Suzanna.

Hugo scanned the A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) beach, squinting into the sun, and reminded himself of the advancing need for glasses. The beach was, as far as he could see, scattered with dots of various colours. Some brightly coloured with costumes, some naked and white, some naked and brown. Some of the dots were much larger than others, less dot-like more like splodge-like. Finally he saw a dot A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) that was not a splodge. It was a perfectly formed dot, slender and fit. It was Suzanna, the yoga teacher, and she was naked.

“Dear mother of God,” he muttered to himself. It prompted, for no reason he could fathom, a coughing fit. He couldn’t believe what his eyes were allowed access to. If only she wasn’t so far away.

Hugo looked down to check everything was in place, and A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) drew his shoulders back, and his stomach in. He sauntered off in her direction. Unfortunately his contrived casualness and waning eyesight were such that he soon lost sight of A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) her. As Hugo searched the beach he slowly let his stomach out, his shoulders fell into a natural hunch, and his eyes screwed up. A fresh breeze undid his preparatory work. He withered very slightly. Then he felt a tap on his shoulder.

“Hello Hugo.” Suzanna was standing by his side.

“Er...” Hugo managed. Suzanna smiled.

“Um...” Hugo countered. Suzanna looked directly at Hugo

“Ahh...” Hugo continued until he noticed her eyes A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) fall, and this prompted his next comment.

“Er...” It was a slightly louder, “er” but still an, “er”.

He realised he should have given some thought to what he might say, not quite a script, but at least a vague outline. His thoughts had not extended to conversation. He had admired, and studied, every part of her in that yoga class. Not just the obvious parts, but her hands, her feet, her ears, her nose. They were all perfect. He’d looked for a flaw, but couldn’t find one. Perhaps her nose, Hugo had thought, was slightly too long. No, that was perfect too, he’d decided. It wasn’t this that had rendered Hugo speechless. It was the opportunity to study parts of her that, up to now, he had not been granted access to. This and his patent inability to communicate with her. If he had a boyish charm it remained hidden. But if that had been the first flaw in his plan, A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) the second, and currently A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) more major flaw was growing fast.

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“Er,” Hugo managed again.

“Are you okay?” A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy)  
Suzanna enquired sweetly.

“Um,” he countered. He was not okay, he was in trouble. It was a little late to think about mixed messages. He’d assumed that when her eyes twinkled, they twinkled for him. As he stood naked and exposed, he couldn’t see them twinkle. He looked closely and observed they were entirely twinkle-free. They weren’t sparkling or glimmering or even flickering. They looked irritated, as if they were about to teach him a lesson.

He reviewed his position. Back to the car was three hundred metres and it was seventy-five metres to his towel. That left the cover of the sea, which was about twenty metres away. Tough choices. Hugo didn’t like cold water, and was inclined to take twenty minutes to acclimatise himself.

“Are you okay?” Hugo met Suzanna’s eyes. She held A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) his gaze. He slowly twisted his body away from her. As her eyes lowered, it was more than just Hugo’s panic A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) which rose. He had to say something, urgently.

“Not the right moment for a down facing dog then”.

“I’m sorry?”

“Down facing dog, on the beach, er, not the right moment...”

“No probably not.” He tried to hold his eyes on hers. He wore a fixed grin. Despite himself, he couldn’t resist studying the corners of his peripheral vision. He saw her slender shape, the rise of her breast and some well-tended topiary that demanded inspection. Worse still, he thought hard about that inspection. A little too hard.

“Is everything good?”

“Good?”

“I mean in the cottages...”

“Oh yes, great.”

The conversation had come to a halt. If she looked at his eyes, maybe she won’t notice, he prayed. Her gaze faltered. His eyes darted away for just a flash. His body A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) was twisted and he glimpsed at his shadow. The sun was high and, Hugo observed, he looked like a tripod. He twisted more. Hugo felt very foolish, but a convenient hole was not likely to open for him to fall into. He was trapped and very exposed; the only naked person in an open public space. But that wasn’t the case. He

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was the only naked man with an erection. And that tended to stand out.

“Cottages A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) comfortable then?”

“Yes.” He turned his body so far round he’d described a circle. There was nothing else he could do. He was going to have to forego the twenty minutes of acclimatisation. He ran for the sea.

“Must go, see you back at the cottages!” he yelled over his shoulder. With each pace there was a slap against his stomach, but there was no turning back. He covered the twenty metres in record time. He brought his arms together, and plunged headlong into the sea. Like Hugo, it was shallower than he had anticipated, and he was lucky he didn’t injure himself. A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) He pulled three strokes and collided with a naked A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) woman who was large and solid. Her considerable stomach cushioned the collision, and he bounced off her. He A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) apologised and dived under the water and swam for a pitifully short distance. He resurfaced and gave his impression of a young surfer type spontaneously running and diving athletically into the sea. It wasn't very convincing. Still warmed by his embarrassment, Hugo swam further out to sea. Far enough away not to be seen or to collide with anyone, so far, that when he stopped, and looked for Suzanna, he could no longer see her.

It was fifteen minutes before he was ready to rejoin the human race. He trudged out of the sea, swaying from side to side, shivering slightly with the cold. He passed a group of giggling teenage girls. He looked at himself; button mushroom. A small fungal growth had got him into all this trouble. Perhaps it was the little A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) vegetable that had amused the girls. Hugo went in the direction of his clothes.

He squinted in the sun but couldn’t locate them. He looked for a point of reference. It all seemed a blur. He took his hand off his genitals, and used it to shield his eyes. Finally he remembered the white rock and the couple that had settled next to him. There was something about the landscape of a crowded beach that makes landmarks difficult to determine. He reasoned that with the force of the tide, he had moved further down the beach and altered his course. He was nearly at the white rock when it came into focus. But it didn’t look the same, mostly because it was no longer decorated with his clothes.

He wiped his eyes in the hope that his clothes might reappear. Instead his eyes smarted with the salt from the water and a moment later with the sand from his other hand. He tried to convince himself that it was the wrong rock, but the naked couple next to it were unmistakable. He leant over and addressed them.

“My clothes? Mes vêtements?”

As his eyes cleared, he realised that he was addressing the blonde naked lady’s breasts, until they were eclipsed by the aggressive face of her muscular husband. Hugo’s mind focused

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rather quicker than his eyes, and he stepped back until A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) the white rock caught him behind his knees. He tumbled onto his back with his hands defensively wrapped round his crotch. He got up and tried to compose himself.

“Sorry, clothes, vetements,” he asked meekly.

Finally the blonde woman turned to him and said in A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) faltering English, “Your girlfriend take them away”. Hugo turned an alarming colour. “Girlfriend?” he said. They nodded. Events had taken a further turn.

“But she’s got my towel, my wallet, clothes.” They looked at him.

“And the keys to my fucking car!” Hugo yelled. They looked away.

## Chapter Two

“Today we are A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) going to talk about faith,” A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) the vicar intoned. A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) He looked at the congregation and smiled. He paused. His eyes found Jan, and he widened his smile. Jan looked down. She fidgeted with the church notes, and pondered her own crisis of faith.

“Faith and belief,” he repeated. Jan was struggling with both. Not so much with the almighty, whose existence was not a high priority to her. More with Hugo, who was anything but almighty. Her friends took a cynical view of him although, unlike Jan, most were divorced.

The vicar inclined his head. Jan sensed a question. He didn’t disappoint, “why should we believe?”

Some part of her did believe in Hugo. She couldn’t be sure which part, and she certainly couldn’t rely on it. It hadn’t been easy A Very Unchristian Retreat (A laugh-out-loud Tom Sharpe style comedy) with the kids and the redundancy.

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## A Very Unchristian Retreat A Laugh Out Loud Tom Sharpe Style Comedy

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