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Flying Away

This year it proved even more embarrassing than usual to confess that I was off to spend a week skiing. But there is only so much a truffle's wife can take, and the day that Tom announced that he thought it would be bad karma to charge a penny for his services as a truffle hunter, was the one I booked my flight to the snowy peaks for a good think. Skiing in the Alps was once the pastime of 007 and the Milk Tray man. Now, the slopes are full of grannies from oop north and junkies. Ascending in a chair lift, marvelling at the landscape lifted straight from the Sound of Music, I found myself instead on the set of Coronation Street. Three seventy year-olds sitting next to me were discussing the best place to find skiing goggles in Bingley. "The cheapest are in that ski shop next to Weatherspoons," croaked one. "Well, I bought mine from Aldi," droned another, dressed, like her friends, in a pastel skisuit with matching sweatband. Skiing feels dangerous enough at 45. At 71 it must be suicide. But more surprising still was an encounter I had, two days later, with a bunch of French Algerian snowboarders. Five of them trouped into a cable car, sat down and flicked open the window. One then fished what looked like a piece of fudge out of his pocket, but instead of eating it, he started to burn it and rolled it into a big fat joint. As he puffed his way up the mountain, stopping only to offer a drag to his friends, and, at one point, to me, I vowed to ski behind him. I needn't have worried. As soon as we reached the top, he skied off, toke in hand, off the edge of the piste and into oblivion.

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