

## Buggy and Doghead Undo Crete

By Harriet

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Crete, Crete, Crete, what can I say about Crete? I can't say anything. But my friend, Buggy Whitebread will be happy to tell you about Crete, because I found this story about Buggy taking some trip to Crete with her estranged husband, almost ex-husband, and two sons. Sounds pretty. . . I don't know. Sounds pretty. But maybe I'm glad I wasn't there.

Well, first it was the holidays, the big ones, Christmas and Hanukah both. And they were supposed to still be a family of four celebrating the holidays at home. So husband Doghead invited a never grew up college buddy for eight days of interruptive houseguesting. Buggy returned home from visiting her family and friends the week before Christmas to Doghead's houseguest Ted.

Her approach to Ted's intrusion was distance, shutting the door behind her, silence. Well it didn't work one speck. Ted just opened the door, didn't knock, said "How're you, what's up, tell me this, tell me that". Not much room for silence without being way too obvious. Buggy answered briefly, sort of barking, and felt bad, sort of. Especially since she was usually a famously extroverted person with the biggest laugh in town.

As the days went by and after a pair of delicious holiday meals cooked by Doghead and Ted, Buggy warmed up to Ted and realized he was fine, it was Doghead who was a pill. Well duh! Doghead had asked Buggy for a divorce three months earlier and they had just told their young sons, Shout and Monkey, about the impending divorce just a few weeks before, but they weren't really separated yet. So of course Doghead was not a cheerful smiling family guy, he was a miserable "I want to be divorced" guy playing house with zero enthusiasm. Hell, he wasn't even all that nice to his houseguest Ted.

"Sure, living in Europe on sabbatical makes it more challenging to get separated, but maybe getting separated is really too necessary to avoid any longer" thought Buggy. But when she shared this with Doghead, he was coldly unenthusiastic. "I don't want to have separate homes" he declared. Buggy thought, "Is this denial or what? I already asked if we can stay married and he still wants a divorce, so why does he act like separation is some evil, isn't that the goal of divorce, to be separate?" Buggy wondered. "And how much money can I spend on this rental anyway?"

Maybe Doghead was just too comfortable the way it was. Buggy was the one barely surviving his silent treatment. Doghead had his own cozy bedroom fashioned in the attic eaves among the landlord's construction debris. It was his

own space, he'd made it home, and he spent a lot of time "hiding" there in Buggy's opinion. And hey, he didn't need to talk to anyone, as he made clear.

Buggy had kicked him out of their room a month before when her jealousy was proven justified. She was glad to have her "own" room, their old room, not exactly her own space. And Buggy now and then sadly remembered that damn, she still loved Doghead. But he sure could be annoying and it could be so good to be separate from him. "Yes!" she coached herself. "This will be good!"

Ok, ok, Crete. That's what the story's about. Two days after Christmas, Houseguest Ted left in the morning, and then Buggy, Doghead and the boys left for Crete around noon the same day. "It's so nice living in Europe" thought Buggy as they walked the one block to the train station and rode to the stop directly under the airport, one escalator from their departure gate. "Too bad I have to deal with divorce too".

Shout was ten and Monkey six, they had their Gameboys and sat with Buggy on the plane in their three seats across, with Doghead across the aisle just like a stranger. Buggy liked sitting next to Monkey because at six, he only needed half his airplane seat and Buggy's 240 pound butt enjoyed his extra half seat.

They ate the food, they played Gameboy, Buggy read "Harry Potter" out loud to the boys which she loved and they begged for. They changed planes at dinner time in Athens. What a surprisingly low key airport, just kind of a dumpy place and wonderfully comfortable at about 55 degrees, slight breeze, gentle darkness, no bad smells. But why does everyone have to smoke? The plane to Heraklion, Crete was short, 45 minutes. Just long enough for Monkey to react to the turbulence by barfing almost completely into the provided barf bag. Many napkins later, they exited the plane looking embarrassed. Did Buggy mind the cheering of the passengers when they landed? "Well it's one kind of camaraderie", she guessed. "And two tries at landing is enough for me too".

The transition to vacation mode was subtle. "Is Doghead not speaking to me again, or is that man really a stranger that looks just like Doghead?" thought Buggy as they managed the car rental and started the drive into the old city to their hotel. "More importantly, can he be helpful?"

Well yeah, sort of. Stranger Doghead drove the car and Buggy navigated. Surprise! The street signs were in Greek alphabet and the map provided was in regular English alphabet, so it was like navigating by Braille. Every street was a one way alley and who knows what Doghead was thinking, but he drove like a stressed out, tired, unhappy, lost guy, jerking here and there. Poor sick little Monkey finally said "Daddy, please drive normal" and Doghead snapped "Shut up!"

Don't you all just remember some tense awful moments, especially as they stretch on with no one daring to comment. Buggy had the common sense to be guiding them into the correct alley and a parking space directly in front of their hotel. Leaping out of that car on fire with stress, even fatso's can move when motivated, she arranged their two rooms while that cranky guy who drove the car brought in everyone's luggage. How convenient?

And that was it, Doghead had completely disappeared and this cranky, unspeaking, driver/luggage carrier, appeared in his place. And the whole following week had this cranky driver guy accompanying them almost everywhere, except the few hours he disappeared later in the trip. Where did that guy come from? And who cared as long as he didn't talk or have any needs of his own. But late in the week he finally spoke and it was to criticize Buggy's basic nature and damn her parents and friends for supporting her. Buggy was shocked. Easy to prefer the nasty silence, eh?

Buggy, Shout, and Monkey and the apparently cranky driver went touring around, sitting around, driving around, walking around, laying around Crete. It could have been relaxing except for the tension. The setting was fabulous.

More about the setting. When Buggy woke up the first morning, she went straight after her morning pee to the balcony for a view. What a view! There was an abandoned building across the alley with empty eye socket windows and peeling concrete skin. Beyond that were layers of city in a variety of repairs. And it was sunny! And warm-ish. Bonus!

They did the basic and incredible sights; the archeology museum, the Knossos Palace, some roman ruins in Gortyn, the Venetian and Turkish town of Chania. This stuff was 500 to 4,000 years old!

It was mind bending, imagination soaring, and extremely frustrating to convey to Shout and Monkey. Hey, not to worry, the hotel TV showed American movies each night and they got that. And there was plenty of room to chase each other under the olive trees or along the edge of some ruin. You can play imagination anywhere that you're out of harm's way, and an olive grove full of 2,000 year old temple foundations and carved columns is plenty far from the freeway.

The mountains were the best part; literally awesome, lots of space for separate pleasures, calm and empty of other humans. They stayed two nights above Zaros, a village three blocks long (pretty big). The hotel was over a spring, tucked into a ridge with a view down cascading valleys. Shout and Monkey hiked with the cranky driver. Buggy drank beer in the bar beside the courtyard where she could hear the spring water over the disco music, both of which were a comfort. They all went to the mountain lake and heard the goats jingling their bells on the cliffs above them in the cloudy mist. Gave their picnic rejects to the

aggressive geese, looked into the bathroom sized orthodox church filled with golden icons and atmosphere.

Because winter is the rainy season, it was beautifully green. It was olive harvest time with black nets spread on the ground, weighted with field stone. The farmers couldn't really just be waiting for the ripe olives to fall off, could they? All the roads were little and plain, no bill boards. All the mountains were big and steep, no tops due to clouds. Some mountains had snow frosting up their sides.

The sea, it really was turquoise. But that was only when the sun was out. Remember it was rainy season. The cranky driver brought Buggy and the boys to the beach at Matala to see the old roman burial caves in the sandstone cliffs, used by hippies like Bob Dylan as homes in the '60's. It was a rough sand beach, wide and steep with strong looking breakers, held in by arms on either side of orange cliff. The overcast broke and setting sun bounced off the low clouds to create a stage set of orange light, but only for three and a half minutes. Shout saw it. He was sitting on the damp dry sand with Buggy building forts and smashing them. Buggy saw it and wanted to share it with Monkey. He was with his Dad exploring the caves. Did they see it? The light was aimed right at them.

But Matala beach wasn't anything compared to the beaches on the north of Crete which tucked into the cliffs beside the highway everywhere there was an indent. And the sun did shine, the water did glow pale blue, the boys did not look up, the driver was silent, staring ahead, and Buggy felt alone and resolved to enjoy this life, whatever it brought, including this tension and this beautiful sun lit ocean. She rolled her window down a little more. The driver turned the heat up a little more. It was a day like the others, exploring Crete as a family fallen apart and waiting for the future to bring the next step.

In Chania, it was New Year's and that brought back to back national holidays that shut down the entertaining tourist attractions. It also brought rain, cool enough for a fleece jacket and the sidewalk cafes to put down their clear plastic walls and serve mostly tea and coffee instead of ice cream and coke. Buggy's pension room was sweet with three green french doors looking out two sides, blue shutters, orange house across the way, green vines everywhere, black wrought iron, white trim on the doors. There were steps out the window to the roof and a view of the tiny ancient stone walled harbor.

Laying in bed reading "Harry Potter" aloud to Monkey and Shout was a pleasure with the heat cranked and the rain singing staccato, but just a little guilt tinged, weren't they supposed to do something Cretan, special for being so far from home? Not what they'd do at home? Then for a break, a walk to the plastic protected cafe for a feta cheese lunch, tea, and Greek chocolate cake, the view of the 600 year old venetian harbor with domed Turkish baths across the way, rain pattering down, fleece jackets zipped tight all the way up. Where had that driver gotten to anyway? And was it helping him cheer up?

It was time to leave at the end of the trip. It had been time for a while. Buggy packed up Shout and Monkey, met the driver in the last hotel's lobby where he loaded the luggage a last time in the rental car. Off to the airport getting misplaced only twice but following Buggy's nose and finding the airport in plenty of time. Flying home with Buggy's butt enjoying that extra half seat, no barfing this time. The train, the one block walk home, and suddenly the driver is again really just almost ex-husband Doghead and he's gone to his room in the attic after delivering the luggage to the bedrooms and they're all Home.

"It is so nice to be home. I want to make garlic cheesy pasta for dinner. I'll plug in the Christmas tree lights. I'll watch a video with the boys. I'm glad to be back but it sure is dark here" thought Buggy. "I can hardly wait to take a real shower! Wasn't Crete beautiful? Thank God it wasn't hot there."

"I have to get separated."