

Podcast Transcript: [From the Ashes, Season 02, Episode 02](#)

My name is Becca and this is From the Ashes, Season 2, Episode 2: Abundant kindness, deep isolation, and gratitude for sexual frustration.

This season of from the Ashes is all about helping my friend Casey overcome medical debt because of testicular cancer treatment. If after listening, you enjoyed the story, I would love it if you could go to smarthotfun.com, click “Help Casey” and make a donation.

The story you’re about to hear is one that I think of as a “Margarita Life” story. If you’ve been listening to From the Ashes, you may already be familiar with some of the characters in this story, as they are the stars of [Season 1, Episode 5: False starts are okay.](#)”

This story happened well before that story, and is the experience that I believe led us to feel like a small road family. It’s also where we developed our group identity as Punto G.

This story includes joy, sadness, struggle, and sexual frustration that is luckily for me, not mine.

As always, I hope you enjoy hearing the story as much as I enjoyed living it.

There was an uncommon silence as the 7 of us drove along Argentina’s infamous Ruta Cuarenta in Margarita. Margarita was our 1982 daisy yellow Volkswagon T3 Kombi. None of us knew if she was going to make it to the next town before her engine burned out.

Usually our small, mobile community would be laughing, joking, talking about sex, discussing politics, chatting about families with various understandings of our need to travel. We would be marveling at the immense beauty of the ever-changing landscapes, or discussing our seemingly never-ending hunger.

Our morning had started out this way. It had started with, you know, a jovial bet between friends.

The bet came to be because something that I love to do when I’m abroad is pick up random food that I’ve never seen before and try it.

The night before, I had picked up Membrillo.

Membrillo is this gelatinous block that looks like canned cranberry, but it’s in a perfect rectangle shape.

The Complex Dynamo and I began the morning discussing whether or not the Membrillo would spread onto bread.

“Dude” I said to him, “It’s totally going to spread. It’s just like jam.”

He clapped back, “I’ll bet you two pesos that it won’t.”

I agreed to the bet. Not only was I fully confident that this mystery food would spread, but I literally had nothing to lose. At the time this happened 2 Argentinean pesos was equal to about 15 cents, US.

A few moments later, I even upped the ante. I knew I was right.

“And.” I told him “When I win, I also want to fart in your face.”

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“Pants on or off?” He asked.

“On!” I replied. “This bet is about ME winning, not you.”

“You know that either way, I win, right,” he said, “People pay good money for a fart in the face.”

As we waited for the Philosopher Chef to finish cooking our breakfast, I walked to Margarita, grabbed a piece of bread, and removed the plastic wrap from the membrillo package. I cut a rectangle shaped slice off the end.

“You ready to lose?” I asked the Complex Dynamo.

With literally no effort, the Membrillo spread across the flaky surface of the bread.

The Complex Dynamo handed over the two pesos immediately.

Taking a page out of the “How I Met Your Mother” playbook, I told the Complex Dynamo that the fart would come at a random time of my choosing.

“Bring it.” he said. “I look forward to it.”

At this point, it’s around 12pm, and we were trying to leave. However, our crew moved at the speed of a shit trying to exit the body after like 2 weeks of constipation.

Which is to say ... painfully fucking slow.

If we had hopped in the van right at noon, we would’ve sped off, slow as fuck in Margarita, to our next destination.

But instead, we shot the shit, we drank Mate, we joked around, and we watched as a police car rolled by.

In response, the Complex Dynamo sang a few verses of “Fuck the Police” by NWA.

Not two minutes later, the same police car rolled up to our campsite, lights flashing as the Charismatic Catalyst was literally throwing avocado peels out of the car onto the ground.

Like, literally littering.

Our crew was using iOverlander, an app desinged to help campers all over the world find good campsites. The campsite we had rolled into was marked as free. While we had amazing luck two nights before with a beautiful site near a mountain and a river, the previous night we had gotten into town late and pulled into a manufactured forest within a city.

And, to be honest, it wasn’t really a legit campsite....

Because we weren’t legitimately camped, the cops gathered our passports and took down our information. Things were really somber for a moment.

And then, the cops basically laughed at us, and they told us there was free camping with showers and a BBQ pit literally 200m away. It was safer and better than where we had set up. We shrugged our shoulders. Silly gringos.

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After returning our documents, the cops pulled away, and we left not long after to embark upon on what would be one of the craziest, longest days of our entire trip.

Ruta Quarenta is in two words: Awe Inspiring. The number of changes in landscape as you roll along the Argentinean equivalent of the US's route 66 is mind-boggling. You can find photo opportunities literally around every corner.

Luckily for me, The Charismatic Catalyst is a fellow hobby photographer. Where I would've be content to shoot photos while Margarita rolled, he was constantly asking if we could stop to snap shots of some of the more impressive scenes.

At our first photo stop, some folks smoked cigarettes, they stopped to pee, and the Charismatic Catalyst and I snapped photos. All of a sudden, our Irreverent Captain suggests that we should get naked on top of Margarita for a photo.

The Hedonistic Climber was all for it. With his characteristic enthusiastic puppy energy he barked "Yeah guys! Let's do it. Right now!"

He dropped his pants, stood there in his boxers, and waited for all of us to join him.

Nothing. No one else was up for it.

Despite our unwillingness to drop our various levels of modesty, we positively peer pressured him to get more epically naked.

Luckily for us, the roads on Ruta Cuarenta were always amazingly empty of other cars. The isolation made it feel like the entirety of the Argentinean landscapes were just for us.

With a little encouragement, the Hedonistic Climber made his way out to the middle of the road, cheap e bottle in one hand, pants around his ankles, and topless. When the coast was clear, the boxers came down to his knees.

He threw one free hand up in the air in triumph, and covered all the important bits with the whiskey bottle in the other hand. We all snapped a few photos and laughed.

How ballsy of him. Literally.

As the Climber got dressed, the Catalyst and I snapped a few last photos, and we all piled back into the van. The day was marked by really epic and frank conversations about fucking, and we lapsed back into the topic, until the terrain began to get more hilly.

For some unknown reason, Margarita was losing power. A lot of power. She was barely making it up the hills anymore.

Our conversations about crazy sex stories tapered into silence as our irreverent captain pulled over. The Charismatic Catalyst, Philosopher Chef, and the Complex Dynamo hopped out to asses the situation.

It was an oil leak. There was oil all over the mud flaps, and most likely, we had been leaking oil since our departure, over 600 km ago.

Fuck.

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The next town on the map was close-ish. It was small, but our only shot to avoid being stranded in the middle of fucking nowhere with a busted-ass vehicle, was to drive until we could make it there.

We stopped for 20 minutes to let Margarita cool down for a bit. The Hedonistic Climber, Complex Dynamo, and Philosopher Chef took the opportunity to ride the Climber's ancient longboard down a pretty decent hill.

A few epic tumbles off the longboard later, we got back on the road.

Margarita was not doing well.

The combination of the oil leak, the weight of 7 people, and the weight of 7 people's stuff made it so that Margarita was struggling. She lurched forward, our Irreverent Captain pushing her, willing her to move forward, just to get us to the next town.

I was nervous and feeling slightly responsible. After all, I had added myself to this crew at the very last minute, pushing the limits of the capacity of this Volkswagon to its very, very outer edges.

Would things be this bad if there were only 6 people inside? There was no way to know, and no way to change the situation now anyway.

As Margarita struggled along ruta cuarenta, we saw the cars of two gauchos pulled over by the side of the road.

We slowed and stopped. Our crew's men hopped out of the car and began speaking with the Gauchos.

This is where I first experienced the kindness and generosity that runs deep in the people of Argentina. In this case, the kindness was in the form of oil. Both Gauchos had spare oil in their cars, and they gave all they had willingly, asking for nothing in return.

We poured the Gaucho's gift into Margarita, and the grand total of different oil types in Margarita rose to 4. Not ideal to have 4 different kinds of oil in a car, but we hoped it would be enough to get us to the next town.

We let Margarita cool down for another 20 minutes, hopped in, and held our breaths-almost literally.

In our silence, we made it to the small town that we had been aiming for all afternoon, and we let out a collective breath. We weren't sure what we'd find in this small, rural argentinean town at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, but luckily, there was an oil and lube place still open. As the problem was definitely related to an oil leak, we figured that if the guys at this place couldn't fix the problem, they could definitely point us in the right direction.

Our Irreverent Captain pulled Margarita over the oil pit and hopped underneath the car with the lube technician. The Complex Dynamo, Charismatic Catalyst, Philosopher Chef, Hedonistic Climber, and I all hopped in that pit eventually as well. We definitely weren't helping, but we were all really curious.

The oil tech informed us that it was a problem he couldn't solve. But, he knew a guy that could help. Unfortunately, the guy was working elsewhere. We would have to wait for a bit before he could arrive.

As we waited for the Mechanic to show up, we began to explore the little town in which we had landed. All 6 of us at one point stopped into the small bakery that, to this moment, had the freshest, and most delicious selection of baked goods I've ever tasted.

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Weed was also a big concern for our crew, and at one point we inquired with the lube technician about where we could buy some. He explained that because of the way Argentina worked, weed was actually hard to come by, especially in small towns. To be honest, it would be easier to buy cocaine.

That being said, he knew a guy

We would find out later that the guy who could hook us up with weed was also the guy that was going to fix our car.

Shortly, the mechanic that could also hook us up with weed pulled into the oil/lube station. He told us to follow him to his shop, because it wasn't far.

We piled into Margarita, and took a very short two block drive.

Despite this drive being really, really short, on the way, we saw a beautiful girl with her hair half shaved practicing juggling in the park. As the Irreverent Captain would put it, she was "Muy Hippy." And, she was one of our kind, it was obvious.

Although the Philosopher Chef is without a doubt both an attractive and intelligent human being, he was experiencing the sexual frustration that comes with a dry spell measured in months. As we drove by The Juggler, his eyes glittered with approval and desire. I saw this, and smiled inwardly.

Not even half a block from the juggler, we pulled up to the garage, and our Irreverent Captain pulled margarita onto the lift so the Mechanic could diagnose the issue.

The smell of chemicals, rubber, and exhaust, and the seemingly haphazard piles of parts laying underneath posters of half-naked women brought me back to years of visiting my dad – who is also a mechanic - at work every Friday during summer vacation.

At the time, it seemed like a good sign.

As the Mechanic started to figure out the issue, the Philosopher Chef disappeared to the park where he had seen The Juggler. In my head, I cheered him on and wished him luck.

Shortly after the Philosopher's leave taking, the Mechanic provided us with a small clump of weed in the room adjacent to the garage. The room had a black and white tiled floor, and most of the real estate was taken up by a ping pong table covered in various items completely unrelated to auto repair ... or ping pong. There was a pretty decent layer of dust covering everything, and the seating was sparse. One busted bucket seat on the ground next to a small table.

The spartan nature of this room didn't phase us. The desire for weed trumped the strangeness of this place. After the joint was finally rolled, the complex dynamo immediately asked where the Philosopher Chef had gone. See, the Dynamo and the Philosopher were hetero life mates in a seriously beautiful bromance. The Dynamo didn't want the Philosopher to miss out. He was a sweetheart like that.

The Hedonistic Climber, whose smoking was limited to tobacco, agreed to go find the Philosopher Chef while we enjoyed the joint.

A few minutes later, the Hedonistic Climber returned. He shared a story of conflict. He saw the Philosopher Chef sitting and speaking with the Juggler, and didn't know if he should interrupt or if he should let them be. He didn't want to cock block, but he also didn't want the Philosopher to miss out on the weed.

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Ultimately, the Climber had decided to interrupt. It is a good thing he did. I'm not sure how this story would've ended had the Climber chosen differently.

Shortly after the Climber related his story, the Philosopher and the Juggler joined us in the garage. She shared her name and her story, and we all shared the joint.

In the other room, the Mechanic and Our Irreverent Captain assessed the car. The issue was the oil pan. The seal was made out of cork, and in the heat of carrying so much weight, the cork had warped, causing the leak.

With skilled, but notably shaky hands, the Mechanic glued the cork into place, and sealed the cork with silicone.

Throughout this process of repair, we were still discussing where we could sleep. At this point it was dark, and because Margarita was busted, we knew we had to stay in the town.

There was a municipal camp ground in the city we could go to, but Our Irreverent Captain expressed hope that we could sleep in the side room of the garage for free.

I did not relish the idea of sleeping in that side room at the garage. After the suggestion came up that we stay there, I walked around to assess the place. I was embracing the idea of sleeping in places for free, but I wasn't quite fully free of some of my standards for where that sleeping happened. In my examination, I caught site of dead mice in the corner laying cold and dead on the black and white tile. It looked like death by poison.

I shuddered, hoping the option to sleep in the garage would not become available to us. I didn't relish sleeping in a room where I would be inhaling air infected with the essence of dead rodents.

For a short time longer, all of us hung out waiting for the verdict on Margarita. We attempted to learn some juggling and hoola hoop courtesy of the Juggler, and played ping-pong on the tiny sliver of table not covered in shit.

At some point, the Juggler informed us that she had to leave. A bunch of her friends were having Guiso – a traditional Argentinean soup - and she was gonna go to join them for dinner.

We said our "Ciao's" and reconvened in the dead mouse side room of the Mechanic's garage.

After the initial repair, the Mechanic informed Our Irreverent Captain that there was another issue with the engine that he had to look at in the morning. Our Irreverent Captain also informed us that the mechanic wouldn't accept payment for the repairs. All he wanted was to have an asado with us. (An asado is, basically, a barbecue.)

This, initially, seemed like great news! Eating a dank meal of grilled meat in exchange for a healthy Margarita was a total win-win.

And then, The Juggler returned.

She informed us that we were invited to come eat guiso. Although she couldn't guarantee it, there was also a possibility that we could pitch our tents in the garden of the host of the guiso.

This is where the Mechanic began to start to show us who he was. He bristled. Noticeably. You could tell he didn't like the idea of having to compete for our attention. He tried to sweeten his deal to get us to choose him that night.

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He told us we could sleep in side room of the garage, and that we could take showers at his house. I saw a strange desperation in him. I could feel the depth of his need, and honestly, it scared me a little bit. There wasn't a way for me to express all of this in the moment. So, I sat back, took the path of non-striving and surrender, and watched my fate unfold in the hands of others.

At first, it looked as though we would spend our evening with the Mechanic. Our Irreverent Captain was a fan of showers. He liked taking them at every juncture possible, and he had been without for some time.

The idea of a shower plus the offer to sleep for free plus the fact that our car was in the hands of this man made our Captain advocate in favor of taking up the Mechanic's offer. Although he was only one of seven, being our Captain always gave his vote a lot of power.

Luckily, there were four single men in the crew. One of whom who had put himself out there to speak with the Juggler and get us this invitation.

The Charismatic Catalyst sparked and took control of the situation. We didn't have to decide between them ... we could do both.

He explained to the Mechanic that we would go to the guiso tonight, and then we do an asado with him the next day.

Although I believe most rational people would've been fine with this, The Mechanic was not satisfied with this answer. He continued to try to advocate for us to hang out with him. But the Catalyst stood strong, and he repeated that we would definitely do an asado with him the next day.

Finally the Mechanic relented. Although I hadn't realized it, I had been holding in a breath. I let it go as quietly as possible, relieved that I would not be sharing my pillow with dead mice.

We packed our bags back into Margarita, and as we were leaving, the Mechanic invited himself to the Guiso.

The Juggler was not happy about the mechanic inviting himself, and neither was I. I could sense something dark in the Mechanic, and my initial relief at forestalling having to spend time in his company was completely overturned when he forced his way into the celebration.

But, what was done, was done. All seven of us, the Juggler, and the Mechanic made our way to the Guiso. It was only two blocks away.

We walked through a gate and came across a very small gathering. We greeted our hosts with one kiss on the cheek, telling them our names and sitting around a table made out of half a blue rubber barrel. I felt odd, thinking that we had crashed a small, intimate dinner party between friends.

We all sat down anyway, the Spanish speakers explaining the journey that had brought us to this small, rural town in Argentina. The people at the party were kind and patient with my shit Spanish as I tried to explain where I was from and where I had been before this.

A contingency from our crew left to go pick up booze, and someone at the party fired up another joint. We sat in a circle listening to someone play Pink Floyd on the guitar. We drank wine, and as we enjoyed one another's company, lots more people started showed up.

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At some point, the Guiso was ready. It was a delicious, chunky vegetable soup cooked extremely well. Even with two joints and my share of red wine in my system, I remember that the veggies were the perfect balance of crisp and tender, and seasoned to perfection. I definitely went back for seconds.

After the Guiso was served and enjoyed, I thought the party would return to polite conversation and the informal music of before. But then ... the drums started.

Four badass women in the corner of the garden began to deliver beats, and those who gathered at the party began to dance. Later, it would be explained to me that this music was called the Candombe, and came from the history of slavery. There were specific dance moves that went with the pulsating rhythms. That there was an entire story and tradition to go with the beats.

But before I knew, high and just a little drunk, I gravitated towards the people playing the drums. I walked next to the Juggler, my body already infected by the music, and she beckoned me over, welcoming me to dance with her.

To this day, I don't know where it came from. I'm not sure how, but something in the rhythm of the music overtook my consciousness completely. The beat of the drums moved from my ears into my legs and hips, and I just let go and danced to the beat.

I felt connected to it in a primal way, in an irrational way. My body needed to move to it, and I could not stop myself. As I danced, the beat intensified, the four drummers came into a serious groove, and my body kept dancing on its own as if my consciousness did not even exist nor matter. Nothing existed for me but the movement of my body and that beat. I danced, they drummed, and we came to a beautiful crescendo together.

When the beat came to an end the drumline cheered. It was a cheer I recognized from my years of playing music. It's the kind of exclamation that happens when you know you've just come out of being one with a group of other musicians. I shouted with them, feeling in awe that I could've shared something magical with a group of complete strangers.

As I came down from the dance, I watched as someone else became infected with the next beat. I laughed as he trampled the unprotected patch of mint leaves, dancing with the whole of his self, completely oblivious to the owner of the mint leaves trying to make him aware of what he was doing.

I knew that if I had starting dancing literally three feet to the right, I could've easily trampled those mint leaves as well.

The night rolled on, people kept drinking and dancing, and eventually our hosts started to teach us traditional Argentinean dances.

The movements were small and samba-like, mixed with the story line of a formerly oppressed people. The Hedonistic Climber jumped right in to the circular dances, stumbling, not quite perfect, but very enthusiastic. Laughter filled the air as those experienced in the dance watched, and appreciated his efforts.

I jumped in with them eventually, attempting to catch on the dance, my eyes glued to the feet of those next to me, fully ignoring the hand movements.

We danced and danced and danced until the exhaustion from the day finally caught up with me.

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At some point earlier, the owner of the garden had generously offered to let us set up camp there. Excusing myself from the party, I crawled into my tent and fell asleep to the sounds of dancing, music, and laughter, in awe that one day could hold so much adventure.

Part 2

The next morning I awoke around 10a. I was definitely hungover, but it wasn't the worst hangover I've ever had.

I asked my friends how the rest of their night had gone, having been woken up at random intervals by laughing, dancing, and shouting.

After hearing the tales of younger people with far more party endurance than me, our talk turned to Margarita and the Mechanic.

Apparently, the man supposed to ensure we got back on the road safely had done more than his fair share of drinking the night before. He had gotten quite drunk and more than a little aggressive toward some of the guests at the Guiso. He had been quite creepy with the Unassuming Artist as well.

Our Brilliant Host, the woman with the garden who let us stay with her, told us that sometimes, older men in the town were just like that. She shook her head, and I wondered what life must be like for a woman in small-town Argentina.

Our Irreverent Captain, who had sat with The Mechanic most of the night, shares that he thinks the man has no friends or family in the town.

I nod my head, thinking that I might understand now why he was so aggressive in trying to get us not go to the Guiso the night before. Why he invited himself. Why he drank so much. Isolation is a heavy burden for humans. Loneliness is a powerful catalyst for addiction and disease. I feel more compassion for him, though I am still worried that our fate is now tied to his.

On cue, my fear manifests. The Lonely Mechanic arrives, unannounced, to our Brilliant Host's home. His energy is like a dark storm cloud in the brightness of our connection.

As the Philosopher Chef whips up another dank meal with the help of our Irreverent Captain, the mechanic asks us if we have slept.

As the Charismatic Catalyst and Hedonistic Climber create a stone circle and trim trees to protect the mint of our Brilliant Host from future dance-induced trappings, the Lonely Mechanic brags that he has been up all night, continuing to party.

As the Complex Dynamo and Unassuming Artist create a new, bricked off plant bed near the wall, the Mechanic circulates with a morning drink, trying to get us to join him.

As I pick up trash, I contemplate the depths of loneliness as the Lonely Mechanic tells our irreverent Captain that he will not be able to fix Margarita today. He is too tired and too trashed.

He leaves to go sleep it off, and I wonder why our Irreverent Captain is continuing to stick with this mechanic. I know we are in a small place, but there has to be another person. This man cannot be the only person who can fix our car.

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Because I am on the path of non-striving and surrender, I keep my thoughts to myself. Our merry band continues to work for our Brilliant Host. And as we make small improvements to her garden she shines a light that adds brilliance to our crew. We feel lucky that she has invited us to stay with her. We are all in awe of her never ending generosity and hospitality.

We make plans to go the river, but first, we want to acquire some weed. Our crew splinters into two for the afternoon, and I find myself alone with the Philosopher Chef and the Hedonistic Climber. After a short walk around town, my former life as a teacher comes up, and I end up getting a full explanation of the plot of Breaking Bad.

And while I can assure you that the only similarity between me and the dude from breaking bad is that we're bald are that we're no longer teachers, I find myself sharing why I have left teaching behind with an acceptance that is more deep and finite than any other telling before this one.

We sit and wait for a while, and find out that while we went on a short walk to go to try to get money, our friends have already gone to the river. We're not sure where that is, but we decide to head that way. As we exit our Brilliant Host's home, the Hedonistic Climber spots the Mechanic sitting outside the house in his car.

The Hedonistic Climber suggests that we should ask the mechanic where the river is.

I protest. I don't want him coming with us. I know the guy is lonely, but I am like a sponge for energy, and the Mechanic's energy is dark and draining for me. Also, shouldn't he be sleeping so he can fix Margarita?

The Climber sees my point. We walk and try to pretend like we didn't see him.

When we are two blocks away, we hear the whir of an engine, going far too fast in a residential zone.

The mechanic pulls up next to us. My heart races. This does not feel right. This does not feel like it's going to end well.

He asks us if we are going for a walk. The Philosopher Chef replies that we are.

For a moment, I hold my breath, hoping the Mechanic will not offer us a ride. Hoping he will not ask to come with us.

He doesn't. Without a word, he speeds off in the opposite direction.

I let out a breath. I relax my clenched asshole. I feel a little bit of guilt for how little I want him around us considering how lonely I know he is. I'm still glad that he's gone.

We continue on a journey to the river to find our friends, but are fully unsuccessful. We go back to the home of our Brilliant Host and wait for our friends to return. This afternoon, we owe the Mechanic his Asado.

It is around 4pm, and the time for the Asado has arrived. None of us want to do it. We urge our Irreverent Captain to find another mechanic, but he won't be swayed. The work will be free, and that is worth the price of spending time with the guy. This time I don't hold my silence.

I will do this asado, I will hang out, however, if he gets too wasted and blows off the repairs again tomorrow, I will personally pay for us to go somewhere new.

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Until then, we gameplan how to keep the drinking to a minimum so that the Mechanic will be sober enough the next day to actually fix the car.

When the Mechanic arrives, he, our Irreverent Captain, the Philosopher Chef, and the Hedonistic Climber go out to get the meat. When they return, the Mechanic has spent a small fortune on a nice cut of meat for us, and all we have spent is very, very little on sausage. He won't let us pay him back for anything.

As we grill, we do our best to play gracious hosts. We stand outside around the fire. The mechanic makes sure our glasses – and definitely his glass – is always full. We've hidden anything harder than beer.

The Charismatic Catalyst does his best to chat with the Mechanic. Although usually I curse my inability to speak Spanish, this night, I am glad that I don't. It excuses me from all but superficial interaction with the Mechanic, and enables me to keep my distance without seeming rude.

As the meat cooks, others take their turn entertaining the Mechanic and making sure he feels welcome and included. Although I have no hand in this, he looks like he's having a good time, even if my friends don't particularly happy.

At one point, our Brilliant Host pulls out a small guitar and begins to sing. Her voice is beautiful, and the music provides a calming backdrop to an increasingly awkward affair. The Charismatic Catalyst and I sit down and listen to her sing, and then we just sit to be with her.

The Catalyst makes a comment about how she interacts with other people, and for the next 20 minutes she draws us into her story. Her story is not mine to tell, but in the telling I am rapt. I feel fear, sadness, and a burning anger. I also feel a deep respect for this woman whose strength far surpasses my own.

In my shitty Spanish I say, "Tu eres una mujer de mi corazon. Mas fuerte." Through the Catalyst, I tell her that I wish I spoke better Spanish. She reminds me of the women I grew with in college. Through him I tell her that I think that if I could speak better Spanish, she and I very would be good friends.

During her story, Choripans are passed around and after her story we eat to bursting fullness. We have also consumed the last bit of the beer. After the last bit of beer is consumed, the Mechanic bids us all good night. As he says his final goodbyes to the people outside, I feel lighter.

We got through the evening without much hardship.

Those who talked to him throughout the night comment on how he is a difficult man with whom to connect. He doesn't really talk so much as respond with disconnected exclamations that have little to do with questions asked or subjects being talked about.

I find myself wondering if the isolation predated the communication style, or if perhaps the communication style created the isolation. As I am about to raise this question, the Mechanic returns with two bottles of wine in hand.

A joint has been passed around, and most of us are pleasantly high. Our Irreverent Captain is absolutely glowing. Joyful, jubilant, loving, and laughing uncontrollably at everyone and everything.

It is contagious, and we are all laughing deep, full belly laughs. And then. The Mechanic points at our Irreverent Captain and says something I don't understand to him. I have never seen a mood shift so quickly. Our Captain goes from unadulterated joy immediately to fear. He withdraws into himself, and the mood of the entire room gets covered in a deep black haze.

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In my head, I curse mirror neurons.

We stand there, not knowing what to do, not knowing how to respond, and then the Charismatic Catalyst grabs an instrument, and begins beating out a sort-of-semi-latin-ish rhythm. Our Irreverent Captain grabs another instrument and starts to play. Then the Complex Dynamo joins, then I join, then the Hedonistic Climber joins, and then the Philosopher Chef joins.

On a smattering of completely unrelated instruments, we beat out the most atonal, arrhythmic garbage I have ever willingly made. There were no leaders, there no followers. I mean ... I've played trombone for 20 years, I know how to find a beat. I try desperately to find one. Anything. There is no beat to be found, let me tell you.

I surrender. I beat the tiny hand drum to my own damn beat -just like everyone else - and I devolve into uncontrollable laughter. I simply cannot help it.

In a place where just 24 hours earlier the beats being thrown down were some of the most beautiful rhythms my body has ever danced to, we are fucking terrible. Just fucking terrible.

Despite that, we keep at it for a good amount of time, until a "natural" taper occurs. The catalyst immediately says, "Not bad, eh?"

The Mechanic tells us that we are terrible.

For the first time since The Mechanic was thrust into our lives, I feel connected to him. Because he is right. I agree with him fully. I break into a new round of giggles.

We play a second song that results in the neighbors asking us to stop. They have to work tomorrow.

It is the first performance of a band I will know forever in my heart as Punto G.

As we put our instruments away, we continue to talk and banter. We discuss performing in the street for money. I argue that we might want to practice first, and then I'd be willing to give it a shot.

And then, one wine bottle out of the two completely gone, the Mechanic asks us to stop speaking in English. He feels left out, and he does not want to feel left out.

At this point, the Spanish speakers are fatigued in trying to connect with a man who does not actually connect – even in his own language. The Catalyst tries to explain that some people don't speak Spanish. The Mechanic does not care. He wants us to only speak in Spanish.

I contemplate again how loneliness and social isolation are so powerful. His are so deep. So sad. So painful.

I am so proud of my friends for continuing to connect with him. Because I am not that strong, and I don't have that depth of compassion. He is too far gone for me.

The Hedonistic Climber begins to translate, continues to persevere and connect. The Mechanic is mollified by this effort. Eventually, I go to sleep, hoping that this guy is going to fix Margarita, or that our Captain will let me pay someone who will.

The next morning, I rise from my tent, and, as was always the case, our Irreverent Captain and the Unassuming Artist are still sleeping peacefully in Margarita. Today, all of the rest of us want to leave. It is time, but we know we can't until Margarita gets fixed.

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The weight of that fix is on our Irreverent Captain's shoulders. So, we decide to wake him up. The Catalyst decides that the best way is a repeat of our command performance from the night before. Just thinking about it makes me laugh.

I'm in.

We grab instruments, and with the same high level of arrhythmia as the night before, perform a mini-parade around Margarita. Our Captain and the Artist wake up, and we discuss plans.

This morning is going to be a divide and conquer. The Hedonistic Climber and our Irreverent Captain are going to make sure Margarita gets fixed. They're going to get on the phone with mechanics in the big city, and they're going to make sure that our Mechanic triages with them.

The rest of us are going to finish our Brilliant Hosts's garden. Our Brilliant Host gets the okay to use a large pile of bricks in the yard, and the Charismatic Catalyst, Philosopher Chef, Complex Dynamo, Unassuming Artist, and mI, get to work.

As the work begins, I laugh as the Catalyst, Chef, and Dynamo slowly bring their different ideas together. Each one of them is a smart and capable and they know what they're doing, and it's just such a blast to see them cooperate. I on the other hand, relish in being unskilled labor on the project. I help clean up messes, I lug bricks from the pile, I dig trenches, and I compact soil.

As we work on the Garden, the Mechanic, amazingly, works on Margarita, and our Brilliant Host cooks us another amazing Guiso. I proceed to ruin my Guiso with a salt-pouring accident, but I still find myself so grateful to her for everything she has done for us over the past three days.

When we find out that Margarita is fixed, the news is bitter sweet. It's sweet because it means we can continue our journey on Ruta Cuarenta, but bitter because we cannot take our Brilliant Host with us.

Before leaving, the Mechanic asks us to snap a photo with him. He is absolutely beaming in that photo. Although I do not see him when he returns to give us a small weed going away present, I am told that there are tears in his eyes when he says his final goodbye.

And then it is time to say goodbye to our Brilliant Host. As is our custom, we make a circle, and instruct her to stand in the middle. We slap our legs, let out a cry, and smash her in the middle of a strong, genuine group hug.

When we are done, we stand in a circle, and we talk for a time. No one wants to leave, and I do not think our Brilliant Host wants us to go. But as I mentioned, she is a strong woman. She tells us, "I think you guys need to go." And although we are hesitant, we do. She walks us to Margarita, we linger just a little while longer, and then finally, we are back on the road.

As we drive into our next wild camp, I find myself replaying the events of the three days in my mind. I have never experienced the abundant kindness of stragners afforded to us by our Brilliant Host. I have also never experienced deep isolation shown to us by the mechanic. I have never danced so hard to drum beats, nor been so grateful for sexual frustration.

For what seems like the 30th time since living my life behind, I feel like I'm on the right path. That I am learning so much more than I ever could in the school system.

From my seat in the back corner of Margarita, I sigh with contentment.

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I wonder what's next.

Aaaaaand you made it!

Again, if you like the story, if it kept you entertained, it would mean the world to me if you made a donation to help my friend Casey overcome medical debt accrued from testicular cancer treatment.

It takes about 3 minutes. Just go to smarthotfun.com, click, "[Help Casey](#)" in the menu, and click the "donate now" button.

If you've already donated, or aren't in a place where you can donate, it would mean everything if you could share his campaign on Facebook. According to the YouCaring website, which is the website we're using for his crowdfunding, every social share can generate around \$37, and in his case, every little bit helps.

Thank you so, so much for listening to From The Ashes.

Thank you for helping my friend Casey,

And, as always, I fucking love all of you!