

DRUG MULE

by Alberto Lau

It's winter in New England. Icicles outside our dorm window.

"Want to go to California?" says Josh.

"Of course I want to go to California! Never been there. It's warm, right?"

"All you have to do is take this bag to Juan."

Josh gets my attention. Juan is our friend. He is about five foot nine with curly blondish hair, pale skin, and very thin. His cheekbones pop out, he has bony hands and bony knees. He drops out of Yale and goes west to "tune in, turn on, and drop out," as Tim Leary put it. And he has less than a year to go!

I know what's in the bag. Though small, it has hundreds of doses of LSD, Juan's drug of choice and his means to a living.

A few months back Juan gave us a few tabs and my friends and I took a few trips in the comfort of our college dorms. Collectively, my five or six trips were the most intense experience I've ever had. Walls melted and I felt I was experiencing the most important moment in my life. Every trip was different, depending on the setting. We took turns on the dorms we tripped in, sometimes within the Gothic architecture of Saybrook College (my dorm), or the modern Ezra Stiles College (Josh's dorm) or some other dorm. The residential colleges at Yale all look inward in that they almost always enclose an outdoor quadrangle. So even when you go outside, which we did a couple of times, you are well protected from the street. They are the epitome of a cloistered life, and perfect as a safe setting for an acid trip.

Each trip was equally intense and seemingly important. In some there was the feeling that I was witnessing the most beautiful and transcendent thing. Every sensory receptor in my body was amplified, and they competed for my attention, which had also been enlarged and could entertain visual, auditory, olfactory, and touch inputs with ease. It was a state of hyper awareness and hyper vigilance verging on paranoia. Indeed, sometimes, there was an underlying sense of anxiety that you might never go back to a state of normal consciousness. But we always did.

Juan's grandfather had been the last prime minister of the Spanish Republic before Franco. He went into exile in France and in Mexico, where Juan grew up. Juan let me stay in his Paris apartment for a few days the previous summer. But, of course, he did not want his family to know he was doing psychedelic drugs in the U.S., let alone that he had become a dealer.

I think about Josh's offer to take the bag of acid tabs to Juan in California. They don't search people at airports or planes when you fly domestically. You don't have to go through customs. It would be nice to see Juan.

"OK," I say to Josh.

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Nevertheless, I am sweating bullets on the plane. Is the stewardess looking at me funny?

California is sunny, blindingly so. I try to project an air of calm nonchalance as I walk through the terminal. Nobody meets me at the airport so I take a cab to Juan's apartment in Berkeley. When the cabdriver offers to help me with my bag I quickly decline. I ring the doorbell. Nobody answers. I hear music playing inside, and a kind of dramatic lamentation. Suddenly, through a window, I see Juan rush by, stark naked. He is so thin and pale he resembles a giant bird without feathers. He's crying, "She won't fuck me!"

The door is unlocked. I go in. A bunch of hippies stare at me. I speak to Juan in Spanish. He recognizes me and calms down.

"Did you bring the stuff?"

"Sure thing!"

Juan smiles. He's happy. I'm happy to get rid of the stuff. That evening Juan and his friends take me to a Jimi Hendrix concert. They're all stoned on acid. I keep it down to grass. A rock concert is intense enough.

EPILOGUE

The Yale Class of 1967 50th Reunion Book, published May 2017, has the following entry about Juan:

JUAN F. NEGRIN
Died August 28, 2015

Juan founded Yale's Party of the Left, debated John Kerry, studied existentialism and mentored classmates in matters of the head and heart. Juan made a career of social activism in keeping with his family's storied history. His grandfather, Juan Lopez Negrín, was Spain's Republican prime minister during much of the Spanish Civil War. Juan grew up in Mexico and became a lifelong champion of the Huichol indigenous people of Mexico's western Sierra Madre. He received numerous accolades for his work to preserve the Huichol's culture and environment. His efforts to protect tribal forests from illegal logging so angered complicit officials, they sought to unsuccessfully try him for being an "unelected dictator." Many of his Yale friends remember him as they might a worldly wise older brother or spiritual guide. "He once gave me a half-hour lecture on how to caress a woman's knee," David Lippman recalled. To John Zuska '68, "Juan was a visionary who understood that the universe was a single organic entity of great beauty."