

LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN

'LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN WILL EXPLODE LIKE A RUSTY
HELLISH BOMBSHELL OVER AMERICA AND STILL BE EAGERLY
READ IN 100 YEARS' ALLEN GINSBERG

HUBERT SELBY JR.

Last Exit to Brooklyn

Hubert Selby, Jr.

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ISBN: 0-8021-3137-9

This book is dedicated, with love, to Gil.

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Part I

Another Day Another Dollar

*For that which befalleth the sons of
men befalleth beasts; even one thing
befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth
the other; yea, they have all one breath;
so that a man hath no preeminence
above a beast: for all is vanity.*

Ecclesiastes 3:19

THEY sprawled along the counter and on the chairs. Another night. Another drag of a night in the Greeks, a beatup all night diner near the Brooklyn Armybase. Once in a while a doggie or seaman came in for a hamburger and played the jukebox. But they usually played some goddam hillbilly record. They tried to get the Greek to take those records off, but hed tell them no. They come in and spend money. You sit all night and buy notting. Are yakiddin me Alex? Ya could retire on the money we spend in here. Scatah. You dont pay my carfare ...

24 records on the jukebox. They could have any 12 they wanted, but the others were for the customers from the Base. If somebody played a Lefty Frazell record or some other shitkicker they moaned, made motions with their hands (man! what a fuckin square) and walked out to the street. 2 jokers were throwing quarters in so they leaned against the lamppost and carfenders. A warm clear night and they walked in small circles, dragging the right foot slowly in the hip Cocksakie shuffle, cigarettes hanging from mouths, collars of sport-shirts turned up in the back, down and rolled in front. Squinting. Spitting. Watching cars roll by. Identifying them. Make. Model. Year. Horse power. Overhead valve. V-8. 6, 8, a hundred cylinders.

Lots a horses. Lots a chrome. Red and Amber grill lights. Yasee the grill on the new Pontiac? Man, thats real sharp. Yeah, but a lousy pickup. Cant beat a Plymouth fora pickup. Shit. Cant hold the road like a Buick. Outrun any cop in the city with a Roadmaster. If ya get started. Straightaways. Turns. Outrun the law. Dyna-flows. Hydramatics. Cant get started. Theyd be all overya before ya got a block. Not in the new 88. Ya hit the gas and it throwsya outta the seat. Great car. Aint stealin nothin else anymore. Greatest for a job. Still like the Pontiac. If I was buyin a car. Put fendei skirts on it, grill lights, a set a Caddy hubcaps and a bigass aerial in the rear... . shit, thats the sharpest job on the road. Your ass. Nothin can touch the 47 Continental convertible. Theyre the end. We saw one uptown the other day. What-a-fuckin-load. Man!!! The shitkickers still wailed and they talked and walked, talked and walked, adjusting their shirts and slacks, cigarettes flipped into the street—ya shoulda seen this load. Chartreuse with white walls. Cruise around in a load like that with the top down and a pair of shades and some sharp clothes and ya haveta beat the snatch off witha club— spitting after every other word, aiming for a crack in the sidewalk; smoothing their hair lightly with the palms of their hands, pushing their d a/s gently and patting them in place, feeling with their fingertips for a stray hair that may be out of place and not hanging with the proper effect— ya should see the sharp shirts they got in Obies. That real great gab-adine. Hey, did yadig that sharp silverblue sharkskin suit in the window? Yeah, yeah. The onebutton single breasted job with the big lapels—and whats to do on a night like this. Just a few drops of gas in the tank and no loot to fill it up. And anyway, wheres to go—but yagotta have a onebutton lounge. Ya wardrobe aint complete without one. Yeah, but I dig that new shawl job. Its real sharp even as a sports jacket—the con rolled on and no one noticed that the same guys were saying the same things and somebody found a new tailor who could make the greatest pants for 14 skins; and how about the shockabsorbers in the Lincoln; and they watched the cars pass, giving hardlooks and spitting; and who laid this broad and who laid that one; and someone took a small brush from his pocket and cleaned his suede shoes then rubbed his hands and adjusted his clothing and someone else flipped a coin and when it dropped a foot stamped on it before it could be picked up and as he moved the leg from the coin his hair was mussed and he called him a fuck and whipped out his comb and when his hair was once more

neatly in place it was mussed again and he got salty as hell and the other guys laughed and someone elses hair was mussed and they shoved each other and someone else shoved and then someone suggested a game of mum and said Vinnie should start and they yelled yeah and Vinnie said whatthefuck, hed start, and they formed a circle around him and he turned slowly jerking his head quickly trying to catch the one punching him so he would replace him in the center and he was hit in the side and when he turned he got hit again and as he spun around 2 fists hit him in the back then another in the kidney and he buckled and they laughed and he jerked around and caught a shot in the stomach and fell but he pointed and he left the center and just stood for a minute in the circle catching his wind then started punching and felt better when he hit Tony a good shot in the kidney without being seen and Tony slowed down and got pelted for a few minutes then finally pointed and Harry said he was fullashit, he didnt really see him hitim. But he was thrown in the center anyway and Tony waited and hooked him hard in the ribs and the game continued for another 5 minutes or so and Harry was still in the center, panting and almost on his knees and they were rapping him pretty much as they pleased, but they got bored and the game broke up and they went back in the Greeks, Harry still bent and panting, the others laughing, and went to the lavatory to wash.

They washed and threw cold water on their necks and hair then fought for a clean spot on the dirty apron that served as a towel, yelling through the door that Alex was a no good fuck for not havin a towel forem, then jockeyed for a place in front of the mirror. Eventually they went to the large mirror at the front of the diner and finished combing their hair and fixing their clothes, laughing and still kidding Harry, then sprawled and leaned.

The shitkickers left and they yelled to Alex to get some music on the radio. Why dont you put money in the jukebox? Then you hear what you want. Comeon man. Dont be a drag. Why dont you get a job. Then you have money. Hey, watch ya language. Yeah, no cursin Alex. Go get a job you no good bums. Whos a bum. Yeah, who? They laughed and yelled at Alex and he sat, smiling, on a small stool at the end of the counter and someone leaned over the counter and turned the radio on and spun the dial until a sax wailed and someone yelled for service and Alex told him to go to hell, and he pounded on the counter for service and Alex asked if he wanted ham and

eggs and he told Alex he wouldnt eat an egg here unless he saw it hatched and Alex laughed, Scatah, and walked slowly to the coffee urn and filled a cup and asked if he was going to buy everybody coffee and they laughed and Alex told them to get a job, you all the time hang around like bums. Someday you be sorry. You get caught and you wont be able to drink this good coffee. COFFEE!!! Man this is worse than piss. The dishwasher upstate tastes betteran this. Pretty soon maybe you be drinking it again. Yourass I will. I should report you. Then Id have some peace and quiet. Youd die without us Alex. Whod protect ya from the drunks? Look at all the trouble we saveya. You boys are going to get in trouble. You see. All the time fuckaround. Ah Alex. Dont talk like that. Ya make us feel bad. Yeah man. Ya hurt our feelings....

Alex sat on his stool smoking and smiling and they smoked and laughed. Cars passed and some tried to identify them by the sound of the motor then looked to see if they were right, raising their shoulders and swaggering back to their seats if they were. Occasionally a drunk came in and they would yell to Alex to get up off his ass and serve the customer or tell the guy ta getthehell out before he was poisoned with Alexs horsemeat and coffee and Alex would pick up the dirty rag and wipe off the spot in front of the drunk and say yes sir, what you want, and theyd want to know why he didnt call them sir and Alex would smile and sit on his stool until the drunk finished and then walk slowly back, take the money, ring it up then back to his stool and tell them they should be quiet, you want to scare good customers away, and Alex would laugh with them and spit the cigarette butt out of his mouth and turn his shoe on it; and the cars still passed and the drunks still passed and the sky was clear and bright with stars and moon and a light breeze was blowing and you could hear the tugs in the harbor chugging and the deep ooooo from their whistles floated across the bay and rolled down 2nd avenue and even the ferrys mooring winch could be heard, when it was quiet and still, clanging a ferry into the slip ... and it was a drag of a night, beat for loot and they flipped their cigarettes out the doors and walked to the mirror and adjusted and combed and someone turned up the volume of the radio and a few of the girls came in and the guys smoothed the waist of their shirts as they walked over to their table and Rosie grabbed Freddy, a girl he laid occasionally, and asked him for a halfabuck and he told her to

go fuckerself and walked away and sat on a stool. She sat beside him. He talked with the guys and every few minutes she would say something, but he ignored her. When he moved slightly on his stool she started to get up and when he sat down she sat. Freddy stood, adjusted his pants, put his hands in his pockets and slowly walked out the door and strolled to the corner. Rosie walked 6 inches to his right and 6 inches to his rear. He leaned against the lamppost and spit past her face. You're worse than a leech. A leech ya can get rid of. You don't go for nothin. Don't bullshit me ya bastard. I know ya scored for a few bucks last night. What's that to you? and anyway it's gone. I ain't even got a pack of cigarettes. Don't tell me. I ain't ya father. Ya cheap motherfucka! Go tell ya troubles to Jesus and stop breakin my balls. I'll break ya balls ya rotten bastard, trying to kick him in the groin, but Freddy turned and lifted his leg then slapped her across the face.

Three drunken rebel soldiers were going back to the Base after buying drinks for a couple of whores in a neighborhood bar and were thrown out when they started a fight after the whores left them for a couple of seamen. They stopped when they heard Rosie shout and watched as she staggered back from the slap, Freddy grabbing her by the neck. Go giter little boy. Hey, don't chuall know you're not to fuck girls on the street.... They laughed and yelled and Freddy let go of Rosie and turned and looked at them for a second then yelled at them to go fuck their mothers, ya cottonpickin bastards. I hear she's good hump. The soldiers stopped laughing and started crossing the street toward Freddy. We'll cut yur niggerlovin heart out. Freddy yelled and the others ran out of the Greeks. When the doggies saw them they stopped then turned and ran toward the gate to the Base. Freddy ran to his car and the others jumped in and on the fenders or held on to the open doors, and Freddy chased the doggies down the street. Two of them continued running toward the gate, but the third panicked and tried to climb over the fence and Freddy tried to squash him against it with the car but the doggie pulled his legs up just before the car bumped the fence. The guys jumped off the fender and leaped on the doggies back and yanked him down and he fell on the edge of the hood and then to the ground. They formed a circle and kicked. He tried to roll over on his stomach and cover his face with his arms, but as he got to his side he was kicked in the groin and stomped on the ear and he screamed, cried, started pleading then just

cried as a foot cracked his mouth, Ya fuckin cottonpickin punk, and a hard kick in the ribs turned him slightly and he tried to raise himself on one knee and someone took a short step forward and kicked him in the solarplexus and he fell on his side, his knees up, arms folded across his abdomen, gasping for air and the blood in his mouth gurgled as he tried to scream, rolled down his chin then spumed forth as he vomited violently and someone stomped his face into the pool of vomit and the blood whirled slightly in arcs and a few bubbles gurgled in the puke as he panted and gasped and their shoes thudded into the shiteatinbastards kidneys and ribs and he groaned and his head rolled in the puke breaking the arching patterns of blood and he gasped as a kick broke his nose then coughed and retched as his gasping sucked some of the vomit back in his mouth and he cried and tried to yell but it was muffled by the pool and the guys yells and Freddy kicked him in the temple and the yellowbastards eyes rolled back and his head lolled for a moment and he passed out and his head splashed and thumped to the ground and someone yelled the cops and they jammed back into and on the car and Freddy started to turn but the prowl car stopped in front of them and the cops got out with their guns drawn so Freddy stopped the car and the guys got out and off the car and slowly walked across the street. The cops lined them against the wall. The guys stood with their hands in their pockets, their shoulders rounded and heads slumped forward, straightening up and raising their arms while being frisked, then resuming their previous positions and attitudes.

Heads popped from windows, people occurred in doorways and from bars asking what happened and the cops yelled for everybody to shutup then asked what was going on. The guys shrugged and murmured. One of the cops started yelling the question again when an MP and the 2 doggies who had continued running, holding the third one suspended between them, head hanging limply, his toes dragging along the ground, came up to them. The cop turned to them and asked what this was all about. Those goddam yankees like takill our buddy heuh, nodding to the soldier between them, his head rolling from side to side, face and front of his uniform covered with blood and puke, blood dribbling from his head. Freddy pointed at him and stepped toward the cop and told him theres nothin wrong with him. Hes only foolin. The guys raised their heads slightly and looked at Freddy and

chuckled and someone murmured hes got some pair of balls. The cop looked at the soldier and told Freddy if hes fooling hes one hell of an actor. The chuckling grew louder and a few in the crowd of onlookers laughed. The cops told them to shut up. Now, what in the hell is this all about. The doggies started to speak but Freddy outshouted them. They insulted my wife. Someone said o jesus and Freddy stared at the doggies waiting for them to say something so he could call them a goddam liar. The cop asked him where his wife was and he told him right over there. Hey Rosie! Cornerei She wentover, her blouse hanging out, her hair hanging in lumps, lipstick smeared from Freddys slap, her eyelashes matter and the heads of pimples shining through many layers of old dirty makeup. We was standin on the corner talkin when these three creeps started makin obscene remarks to my wife and when I toldem ta shutup they came after me. Aint that right? Yeah. They insulted me, the god— Yuh dirty hoarr. How could yawl be insulted??? Freddy started toward him but the cop rapped him in the gut with his club and told him to take it easy. And youd better watch your mouth soldier. All yuhgoddamn yankees are the same. A buncha no good niggerlovin bastards. Thats all yuare. The cop stepped over to the soldier and told him if he didnt shut up right now hed lock him up, and your friend along with you. He stared at the soldier until the doggie lowered his eyes, then turned to the crowd and asked if anyone had seen what had happened and they yelled that they saw the whole thing that the drunken rebels had started it, they insulted the boys wife and tried to beat him up and the cop told them ok, ok, shut up. He turned back to the soldiers and told them to get back to the base and have someone look after their friend, then turned to Freddy and the others and told them to beat it and if I see any of you punks in a fight again I/ll personally split your skulls and—Hey wait a minute. The cop turned as the MP walked up to him. This aint going to be the end of this officer. These men have rights and its my duty to remind them of them. They might want to prefer charges against these hoodlums. What in hell are you? a Philadelphia lawyer? No sir. Im just doing my duty and reminding these men of their rights. Alright, you reminded them now go back to the base and leave well enough alone. You know these neighborhood bars are off limits. Yes sir, thats true, but—but nothing. The MP started stammering something, then looked to the three soldiers for

support, but they had already started back to the Base, the two dragging the third, blood splattering on the street as it fell from his head.

The bodies went back in the doors and bars and the heads in the windows. The cops drove away and Freddy and the guys went back into the Greeks and the

street was quiet, just the sound of a tug and an occasional car; and even the blood couldnt be seen from a few feet away.

They slammed around the lavatory washing, laughing, nudging each other, roaring at Freddy, splashing water, inspecting their shoes for scratches, ripping the dirty apron, pulling the toiletpaper off by the yard, throwing the wet wads at each other, slapping each other on the back, smoothing their shirts, going to the mirror up front, combing their hair, turning their collars up in the back and rolling them down in front, adjusting their slacks on their hips. Hey, didya see the look on the bastards face when we threwim off the fence? Yeah. The sonofabitch was scared shitless. A buncha punks. Hey Freddy, hows ya gut. That was some rap that bastard giveya. Shit. I fuck cops where they eat.. .

Someday you boys going to get in trouble. All the time fighting. Whatayamean Alex. We was just de-fendin Freddy's wife. Yeah, they insulted Rosie. They roared, stamped, and banged their fists on the counter and tables. Alex grinned and said Scatah. Someday you be sorry. You should get a job. Hey, watch yalanguage Alex. Yeah. No cursin in fronna married women. They laughed and sprawled along the counter and on the chairs. All the time fuckaround. Someday you get in trouble. Ah Alex, dont talk like that. Ya makus feel bad. Yeah, man, ya hurt our feelings...

Part II

The Queen Is Dead

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God created he him;
male and female created he them.*

Genesis 1:27

GEORGETTE was a hip queer. She (he) didnt try to disguise or conceal it with marriage and mans talk, satisfying her homosexuality with the keeping of a secret scrapbook of pictures of favorite male actors or athletes or by supervising the activities of young boys or visiting Turkish baths or mens locker rooms, leering sidely while seeking protection behind a carefully guarded guise of virility (fearing that moment at a cocktail party or in a bar when this front may start crumbling from alcohol and be completely disintegrated with an attempted kiss or groping of an attractive young man and being repelled with a punch and— rotten fairy—followed with hysteria and incoherent apologies and excuses and running from the room) but, took a pride in being a homosexual by feeling intellectually and esthetically superior to those (especially women) who werent gay (look at all the great artists who were fairies!); and with the wearing of womens panties, lipstick, eye makeup (this including occasionally gold and silver—Stardust— on the lids), long marcelled hair, manicured and polished fingernails, the wearing of womens clothes complete with padded bra, high heels and wig (one of her biggest thrills was going to BOP CITY dressed as a tall stately blond (she was 6'4" in heels) in the company of a negro (He was a big beautiful black bastard and when he floated in all the cats in the place jumped and the squares bugged. We were at a crazy pad before going and were blasting like crazy and were up so high that I just didnt give a shit for anyone honey, let me tell you!)) ; and the occasional wearing of a menstrual napkin.

She was in love with Vinnie and rarely came home while he was in jail, but stayed uptown with her girl friends, high most of the time on benzedrine and marijuana. She had come home one morning with one of her friends after a three day tea party with her makeup still on and her older brother slapped her across the face and told her that if he ever came home like that again hed kill him. She and her friend ran screaming from the house calling her brother a dirty fairy. After that she always called to see if her brother was in before going home.

Her life didnt revolve, but spun centrifugally, around stimulants, opiates, johns (who paid her to dance for them in womens panties then ripped them off her; bisexuals who told their wives they were going out with the boys and spent the night with Georgette (she trying to imagine they were Vinnie)), the freakish precipitate coming to the top.