

JOHN DOE'S CLICHÉ
By George Shrewsbury

"I won't do it," John said to the foreman. "And don't worry about firing me, because I quit."

As he walked to the locker room, the moment of defiance turned on him. What have I done? Is it too late to turn back? He stopped for a couple of seconds convinced that it wasn't; that he could apologize to his boss, and everything would be fine.

What good would it do to apologize? That asshole wanted to get rid of me the first time he laid eyes on me. He fumbled for the keys to his locker, unlocked it, got changed into his street clothes without taking a shower, and left his coveralls in a pile on the floor.

The smell of the chemical refinery burned his nostrils in the cold night air. He moved quickly through the parking lot, looking at all the cars that would never belong to him. This made him laugh, as did his worn, frayed clothes. His laughter led him through his life, through the dreams he once had, the dreams that had withered, and he wondered when his luck had run out.

Not being able to bear having no luck, he began to look for clichés to change the downward waves of his fortune. That's when he saw a shooting star streak through the sky. His excitement at what he was sure was a definite change for the better, made his mind a blur: a hurricane struggling to save the objects it was destroying.

Afraid to make a choice for fear of making the wrong choice, he became confused. And the storm his mind had become grabbed his cliché of good luck and twisted it into the more recognizable form of defeat.

A car starting startled John from his defeated cliché before he could summon the courage to make a wish on the now dead star. He raced through the entrance gate, hoping he wouldn't get hassled, and headed towards the street. The neon sign of the liquor store across the street called to him, so he reached in his pocket for money, but had none. Not having any money to buy liquor and not having

the guts to mooch spare change, he was smacked with the reality that he was no one. Lost in his lack, he stepped off the curb not taking notice of the "Don't Walk" sign. He heard the car's brakes screech, and looked up to see the headlights blazing towards him.

Jordan's dream of being nobody, of dying a John Doe woke him up. He sat up in bed, full of sweat, and felt the coolness of the room on his upper body. The coolness made him even more awake, so he got up, put his robe and slippers on, took a cigarette out of the pocket of his pajama top, and lit it.

He walked into the living room, and turned the television off. His mother, an overweight scrap heap of a woman was sprawled on the couch with her mouth wide open. Her snores made him laugh, so he leaned down and held her nose shut. The piggy sounds in her throat made him laugh harder.

A shiver that was caused by his thoughts of smothering her went through him. Shaking, he took his hand away, and wiped the ashes off his sleeve. He hurried to the kitchen for something to eat, but was too frightened to turn on the

light, so he stood in the dark, the night surrounding him. He started to cry, still puffing on his cigarette, but the tears didn't make him feel any better. They just made him more aware of all the wasted time.

He drew some water from the sink to put out the cigarette, and threw it in the trashcan. He walked through the living room, past his snoring mother, the black and white TV, and went back to his bedroom. He took his robe and slippers off, sat on the edge of his bed, and held the handmade quilt that was passed down from his grandmother, and remembered that she snored too. He thought about his job at the meat processing plant and his Dad's death when he was ten. These thoughts made him sad, so he laid his head down. The sadness brought the tears again, and they streaked down his face and onto the pillow. He pleaded with God for mercy, and looked out the window.

He saw a shooting star streak through the sky.

His laughter shook his tears away, and he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

THE END