The Plainview Flyer

Bruce Ouderkirk*
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Abstract

Today was my birthday and I’m twenty-five years old and grandpa give me this diary and he says, long as you never leave that room of yours in that gas station you might as well be doin somethin I guess...
Today was my birthday and I'm twenty-five years old and grandpa give me this diary and he says, long as you never leave that room of yours in that gas station you might as well be doin somethin I guess. Who knows, maybe it'll help you a little writin things down. Who knows, maybe it'll even get you outta that damn room, cause you start keepin a diary you gotta have somethin to write about and maybe you'll start doin things so you'll have somethin to write about, and I says I don't know.

But I'm gonna keep this diary anyway since he wants me to, cause he's always been good to me and I guess it won't be too much work anyway even though it seems like it. It kinda reminds me of school, and I never liked school much, the kids mostly always made fun of me. Except track. I always liked track and I still do. I run the half mile back in high school, and I still go to the track and do it when it's warm, only it's cold now and I can't. I wish it was spring again. When the icicles start drippin and everywhere I go it smells like mud and I run down the street with my tennis shoes slappin on my way to the track and people say, look at that guy run, he's a hell of a runner ain't he.

Grandpa says, you keep this diary now, you ain't got nothin else to write about you write about your room. You seem to like that moren anythin else in the world. Course, he ain't right. I like runnin lots moren I like to sit in here but it ain't runnin weather now and there ain't nothin else to do. So I guess I'll tell about my room now.
My room ain’t too big but it’s got everythin I need. I got my bed, my closet, my AM-FM radio, and my desk where I put my trophy I got when I come in second at the state track meet. I got my track metals on my desk too, thirteen of em, and I got my ribbons on the wall, forty-seven countin junior high.

But I’m gonna go to bed now, so good night diary.

December 8

Flew into Des Moines last night. Stayed at Holiday Inn, read over assignment papers couple more times. Still not sold on idea—first healthy reporting job, and I’ve got to cover a whole town. Billy Carter responsible for this, saying that small towns are going straight to hell. Just my luck to be sent to find out if he’s right.

Zipped over to Plainview this morning in Hertz Pinto, looked town over. Not much to see. There’s a post office, grocery store, two gas stations, bank, community building, drugstore, greasy spoon, sort of gift shop that has everything from rubber bands to cheap paintings in display window.

The greasy spoon was the only place open, so I had lunch there. (“Never again,” sayeth my stomach.) I chatted a bit with a young lipsticky waitress who was friendly and rather pretty, and who told me she lives in the same fleabag hotel I’m staying at. The food was awful, the coffee bitter, and the guy next to me kept butting in with, “How’s the weather way out there in New York, anyways, son?” But the waitress told me a little about how the town works, and about some of the businessmen and “community leaders” I need to interview later.

Took rest of day off. Not much I could do. Everything else locked up tight on Sundays. Nearest hotel in next town, ten miles away—an old run-down firetrap that I think has mice. Sure glad that waitress lives here—at least I won’t be lonely. Met her in the hall tonight, invited her down for a couple drinks, and she just might’ve stayed the night if I’d kept filling the glasses. But I’m tired and jet-laggy and need some “goll-dern shuteye,” as they say. Anyway, there’s always tomorrow.
December 9

It was cold today. When I took the money to grandpa today, he goes, it’s colder’n a welldigger’s ass. He says that all durin winter. All durin summer he goes, it’s hotter’n a horny bitch. I always take all the money outta the cash register when I close up and take it to him, cause he keeps the books. He says, you take care of the station, I’ll take care of the money. He don’t trust me with the money, nor nobody. One time I seen him put a dollar into one of them machines that gives you change, and he counted up the change to make sure he didn’t get cheated. He don’t like to get cheated.

I sure wish it was spring. I got out my track uniform today and put it on, but it’s way too cold to run so I took it off in a little while. But it sure felt good havin it on again. When it’s warm I put on my track uniform that the coach let me keep with Plainview Flyers on it, and I get out my lucky green track shoes with the three white stripes and I jog over to the high school track. I sit on the bleachers and put on them track shoes and then I take my place at the startin line. Makes it seem just like track again. I hear em say my name over the loudspeaker and everybody cheerin like mad, and then I hear the gun go off and I run to beat hell. I zip around that track once and when I go by the stands the people cheer like mad again and yell, go Flyer go, and I put on more speed and take that second lap just as fast as the first. When I get about fifty yards from the finish line there’s always another guy comin up fast on me, right at my heels, and I put out one last burst of speed and lift my arms and break the string, just winnin by a nose.

But it ain’t runnin weather now, so I just take care of the station. Open at six in the mornin and close at six at night. I take an hour for lunch and I close up the station and go over to Ruby’s Cafe and eat. There’s a pretty waitress there, Melody Fahr. She’s got red hair and a pretty smile and brown eyes that always smile too. She calls me Flyer. What’ll it be today Flyer, she always says and smiles. She was in my class at school and I’d like to take her on a date, only I think she’d say no. Sometimes when I’m runnin I pretend she’s up in the stands cheerin for me.
Grandpa's been grumpy lately, he says we ain't gettin enough business and if I talked more to the customers like Jim Shelley who runs the Standard station maybe we'd get more. I says I do talk to the people. He says what about. I says mostly the weather, but he says that ain't good enough. He says from now on you tell the old ladies they're pretty and tell the old guys they got a fine car there, and I says I don't know.

Good night.

December 10

Melody spent the night. She gets up for work at crack of dawn, so I roused myself too, and got early start. In the morning, interviewed banker, bleach-blonde who runs gift shop, and oldest member of town's oldest family (eighty-plus, sagging in both body and mind).

This afternoon went to see old guy named Bernard Higgins. He owns the broken-down Mobil station—old stucco two-pump relic of Depression—and lives in a small frame house with peeling imitation-brick siding, but have been told he owns two more gas stations in little neighboring towns and that he's the richest guy in Plainview.

I hopscotched through the snow of his unshoveled walk, pounded on his door for almost five minutes. His first words to me were, "I ain't buyin' nothin'," but with some quick talking I managed to get my foot in the door, and followed him into his living room.

One old guy in town told me that Higgins would squeeze a nickel until the buffalo took a shit, and I tend to agree. He asked me three times in the first ten minutes what I was selling—"Ain't got no use for no goddamned tape machine, if that's what you got in mind"—before I could convince him that I just stopped by to talk to him.

He's only about five four, but strong as a locomotive. When he was finally sure I didn't have a sales pitch, he started to pick up steam, and at last was huffing and puffing away full speed. He's the best source I've had yet, because he hates everyone in town (except for Blake Eris, the druggist), and doesn't mind telling their secrets. But on the whole, he prefers to talk about himself.
Before my toes had thawed, he'd given me his life-story. He said he left home in 1917, with fifty-five cents in one pocket and seven hard-boiled eggs in the other, and by 1945 he was worth $120,000. Smiling, he told me he was worth "just a hoot more'n that now," and chewing on a cheap unlighted cigar, he leaned back in his old rocker as if it were a throne.

I was sitting across from him on a small sofa, with a sticky plastic cover. The musty old-people's smell that filled the room made me gasp a moment for air. He suddenly started rocking and said, "I see you're lookin' at my owl."

I scanned the room like an amateur detective. "Yeah, that's quite a specimen," I said, just a moment before I finally sighted a big, dusty, stuffed horned owl on top of his old TV set.

"Had that damn thing for years." He seemed to look through it, smiling with the cigar clenched between his yellow dentures. "When my grandson was just a little shit, come visit me, he used to sit across the room from that damn thing and stare at it for hours, scared shitless. Used to have a boarder live here, young guy, and when he didn't see nobody around, just outta meanness he'd go, 'Who who who who,' and John'd run outta the room screamin' like the world come to an end."

He was really breezing away on his rocker now. I forced a smile, and since I hadn't noticed anyone else in the house, I asked him if he had much of a family.

"Ain't got no relations a-tall now," he said, "'cept for my grandson John. He ain't all there" —tapping his gray temple— "if you know what I mean."

I nodded.

He stopped rocking. "Don't get me wrong. He ain't no retard. Made it through high school. Course, he was good at runnin', had that goin' for him. And he always tried hard. Anyhows, they passed him on through."

"Does he live here?"

"Not no more. Used to. His ma and pa died when he was only ten, smashed up their Ford in that big blizzard. Can't remember for sure what year it was. Anyhows, I brought him up, and he's a good kid. Does his work and don't complain and don't blow money."
He took a dirty white handkerchief from his shirt pocket, blew his short hooked nose, and examined the findings. “But coupla years ago, he decides he wants to go live on his own. Told him that was crazy as hell. Got this house here with nobody in it but me. But he says no, he wants a place of his own. Bunch of foolishness, course. Only damned reason he wanted to leave was ‘cause I was pushin’ him into goin’ out with Blake Eris’s daughter. Says he didn’t want to go out with her no more. I says why not, and he says he just don’t want to, that’s all. Bunch of foolishness. Blake, he’s got money, and I got money, and it’d make perfect sense for them two to settle down. His daughter Ida was in the same class as John. Got good sense, too, but she ain’t much of a looker and can’t even buy herself a man. Me and Blake, we decided they was a perfect match, and tried to get ’em together. He’s as dumb as a cocker spaniel and she looks like one — perfect match.”

He glanced at his big stuffed owl, and gave a short laugh. “She was sold on the idea, too. She knows what she looks like — got ears somethin’ like that owl — and she don’t want to be no old maid. But John, he wouldn’t go for it a-tall. That’s when he says he wants to move out. I says fine, I s’pose you and Ida’ll want your own house. He says he ain’t gonna marry Ida, he’s just gonna move out. I says I wouldn’t give him no money for rent, and then he come up with the brainy idea of changin’ that little storage room in the back of the station into a bedroom. He’s run that station ever since he got outta high school, and he seems to like it more’n anythin’ else in the world. I tole him to go on ahead, but if he weren’t settled down by the time he was twenty-five he better take another long look at Ida. Well, by God, he was twenty-five coupla days ago. Give him a diary. Got it on sale at the gift shop. Here’s how I figure. He stares at enough empty pages, he’ll get that lonely, he wants to get married. Least-ways, that’s what I’m countin’ on.”

He leaned forward, lowered his voice. “He likes this little whore works in the cafe — he can’t fool me. Hell, if she wiggled her ass any more she’d make her shit dizzy.” He leaned back again, started rocking, and shook one of his curled-up fingers at me. “I ain’t about to drop dead till I see him hitched up to
Ida Eris—not if I have to live to be a hundurd. Got good money sense. That little whore'd milk the fool for all he's worth, and then run off with the milkman or the newspaper boy or whoever tickles her fancy. Well, by god, it ain't gonna happen. Me and Blake and Ida are havin' a talk tomorrow, see can we get somethin' goin' again."

He kept on rocking but didn't say any more. Could almost hear the wheels inside his head turning and grinding. It was late, so got up to leave pretty soon, but decided if I could find time I'd have a talk with his grandson tomorrow—just might add some human interest to my article.

December 11

It snowed today, great big white ugly flakes. I hate snow. Coupla things happened today. First off this guy stopped by here this afternoon. He works for some magazine or somethin and he wants to talk to me I don't know what about, but he didn't have no time today. He says he got time tomorrow and wants me to go eat supper with him over at Twin Falls and talk, cause he don't like the cafe here. I tole him I got two bald tires on my car and don't like to drive it outta town. He just kinda laughed when I says that. Ain't you got no tires here, he says. I says yeah, but grandpa don't let me put none of em on till I can pay for em cash. He says that's okay, he wants to look over the station better tomorrow anyways, so he'll pick me up. He didn't have no time today only to buy some gas. He tried to give me a tip but I wouldn't let him.

Somethin else happened too. When I took the money to grandpa he says he wants me to go on a date with Ida. I says I don't know. He says it's all set up, week from Friday I gotta take her to a movie. He made me go out with her before and I don't like it and I tole him so. He says if I don't take her out he ain't gonna let me run the gas station no more and then what would I do. I didn't know what to say. He was maddern hell, and called me dumb as a cocker spaniel and says I wouldn't be able to get no other job, I don't know how to do nothin but run a gas station. He's right about the job I think. I know Jim Shelley wouldn't hire me, he don't like me, ever since I always beat Mike Shelley all the time in track. I'm not sure nobody outta town'd hire me neither.
Last time after I went out with Ida, I took her up to my room in grandpa's house and showed her my trophy and my track ribbons and my uniform. She thought they was all dumb. She didn't say so, but she didn't fool me none. She says, course after we're married you won't want to be runnin no more, you'll probly want to throw that holey old uniform away. After that I didn't want to go out with her no more. Sides that, she always has warts on her hands and smells like mouthwash. I don't know what I'm gonna do. I sure hope I'm sick week from Friday.

I been polishin my trophy and thinkin for an hour or so, and I think I come up with what I might do. I think maybe I'll ask Melody to go out with me after all, then maybe grandpa won't make me go out with Ida. Maybe Melody won't say no after all, cause she sure did smile when I come in today and she looked out at the snow fallin and says, well Flyer, looks like spring's just around the corner, about time to be gettin out the track shoes.

I'll have to think some more on it, she might say no after all, so I don't know. I'm gonna go polish my trophy some more.

Night.

December 12

When woke up this morning, Melody already awake at my side, staring at me with her chin in her hand. Always gets on my nerves to have somebody staring at me when I wake up. Just to get some talk started, asked her if she knew John Higgins—"Course. Everybody knows the Flyer." Then I asked if she ever went out with him.

She shook her head, laughing. "Nobody ever went out with the Flyer, far as I know, 'cept for this Ida Eris"—she spoke the name as if it were a venereal disease—"whose old man owns the drugstore. His grandpa won't hardly let him out of his sight. That old mule's got him earmarked for Ida Eris, and nobody but nobody tries to buck him."

In a flash, I saw the human-interest story needed to liven up my article—a young man rising up against his mulish grandfather, determined to do his own thing. I reached for a
cigarette, and blew little streams of smoke while I worked the thing out in my mind. It seemed pretty good, if John would only follow the script. I asked Melody if she'd ever considered going out with him.

"What's the point of that?" she said. "It's like considerin' what would I be like if I was an Eskimo. I wasn't born an Eskimo and I wasn't born to go out with the Flyer. My bank account's got plenty of zeroes, but none of 'em in the right places." She pushed back the wisp of hair that was falling across her cheek. A dreamy look came into her eyes. "Still, he's kind of cute, i'n't he. Got a kind of —I don't know—charm." Then she gave a smile that appeared and vanished in an instant, and started staring at me again.

It seems that half the men I mention have "a kind of charm" to her. "Wouldn't you go out with him if he asked?"

She sighed. "You sure do get stuck on one thing, don't you." She was silent a moment. "I guess, but that i'n't likely. His grandpa probably doesn't let him use the phone without permission. And I know he'd be too scared to ask me to my face."

The story seemed better to me all the time. "What if I told him not to listen to the old mule, to give you a call if he feels like it?" I ran a hand over her soft red hair. "He's really stuck on you, you know."

Her eyes lit up like a couple of rescue torches. "Course I would," she said with a smile. Slipping under my arm, she rolled out of bed, onto her feet. "I don't know about you, but some of us got to work for a livin'."

I got to work pretty soon myself. I spent all morning and most of the afternoon interviewing the last of the "community leaders." Then I went to talk to Blake Eris, the druggist. He was friendly enough, in his middle-aged white-aproned druggist's way, told me that with all the old people in Plainview he's "never lost a wink of sleep worrying about business." He wanted to introduce me to his daughter Ida, but she was too busy with her account books. I caught a look at her, though, across the way. Six gawky feet tall, with odd, rather pointed ears, she was loudly and tunelessly humming over her work, while tapping a toe slightly out of time. But her
father told me that she could (and always did) balance books to the nickel.

At six o'clock I went to get John Higgins. He was right at the window, flipping over the cardboard sign from YES, WE'RE OPEN to SORRY, WE'RE CLOSED. He was wearing baggy black slacks, a white shirt, and a thin blue tie. His short hair was slicked down as though he put Vaseline on it. He met me at the door with a somewhat self-conscious handshake.

Inside, I felt as if I were suddenly in the midst of the Great Depression. There was a big old cash register on an oil-stained wooden counter, a long dusty shelf that sagged under the weight of quart cans of oil, a forty-eight-state cardboard flag nailed to the wall next to two deeply sagging wicker chairs, and a rusty dented Coke machine that was at least forty years old. The only thing that looked out of place was this big electric clock on the back wall.

He stood with his hands folded behind him as I looked around, watching me expectantly. I wasn't sure what to say—the place kind of gave me the creeps—but at last I gave a nod toward the back wall. "You got a new clock."

"Just got it day before yesterd'y," he said, looking at it with pride. "Grandpa made me buy it myself, since 'cause he says I live here and all."

"It's a nice clock," I said. Then, after a pause: "Where do you live?"

"Back there," he said, pointing to a door behind the wooden counter. He said slowly, "I don't usually let nobody go inside, but I guess I could show it to you, if you want."

I wanted to learn as much about him and his little world as I could. He was just the character my human-interest story needed, all alone as he was, living in the past, a slave to his overbearing grandfather. "Please," I said.

I followed him behind the counter. "It ain't much," he said, as he pushed open the door and flipped on the light.

It took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the glare of the bare light bulb that dangled overhead. I looked around for something to compliment him on. There was an Army folding cot with an unzipped sleeping bag stretched out on it, a wooden desk chair that had a round varnish-bare spot on the
seat, a small cardboard closet, a cheap radio, and an old school desk on which were set some medals in little plastic cases and a loving cup he'd polished to a dazzling shine. There were ribbons all over the walls.

I stepped over to the trophy, picked it up, and read the inscription. "You used to run?"

"Yeah." He hesitated a moment. "I still do sometimes."

He was watching me like a hawk, so I set the thing down as carefully as I could.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"Sure. It's a dandy." I saw a pennant on the wall above the desk that said PLAINVIEW FLYERS. He noticed that I was looking at it.

"That's the name of the high school track team," he said. "One time, after I set the school record in the conference meet over at Riverfield, they had a headline in the paper that says, 'Plainview Flyer Sets New School Record.' After that, that's the name people used to call me, 'cause they said the rest of the team wasn't worth the name."

I thought it rather odd that he still had that nickname at twenty-five, so I asked him later on, when we were eating at Twin Falls, how often he ran now.

"I run every day in the summer," he said. "I get up at five o'clock and jog over to the track, and do a coupla miles before I open the station. Then, after I close up, I go back over there and do a half-mile full speed. That's what I like best. Seems just like it used to be."

"You really like to run, don't you?"

He looked down, tapping his fork rhythmically, and said, "You don't think it's dumb, do you?"

"No," I said. "It's a good idea. You probably keep in good shape."

He smiled. "Some people think it's dumb. Ida Eris thinks it's dumb, but I don't care. I ain't goin' out with her no more. This one girl I know, I been thinkin' of askin' her out, but I'm afraid maybe she thinks it's dumb, too." He took a couple packets of sugar from a rack on the table and slipped them into his pocket. "Anyways, grandpa don't want me to go out with her."

It was time to make a move for the sake of my story.
Besides, I felt sorry for him. He deserved better than Ida Eris—anybody did. "You got to do what you want," I said. "When he tells you to do something, you got to think of yourself first, what you want to do."

His face lit up. "That's what I think, too," he said. "And that's what I'm gonna tell him. I'm gettin' tired of him and his old owl." Then he was silent, and began drawing on his empty plate with his fork. At last he looked up. "She might say no."

"Maybe I shouldn't have done this," I said cautiously, "but I already talked to her about you. She said she'd be glad to go out with you."

He smiled like a jack-o'-lantern, nodded his head up and down, up and down. "That's just what I'm gonna do then," he said. "First thing tomorrow mornin'."

After we talked a little about the gas station business, I took him home. Then I came back to the hotel and started getting some of my notes in order. In an hour or so I got a phone call—old Higgins.

"What the hell you been tellin' John?" he yelled. I moved the receiver a few inches from my ear. "He just come by here and tells me he don't have to do nothin' I say, he's gonna please hisself. Started in again with that damn track foolishness. Why the hell couldn't you just keep out of it? Now I got my work cut out for me. I'm gonna have to call that little whore and tell her to stay away from him. I never heard him talk to me like that even when he was a kid. I'm gonna have to straighten him out. And you better believe I will. Me and Ida don't give up easy, you mark my word. Now on, you just keep your nose on your face, you hear?"

So I guess I've worn out my welcome, and will take off in morning. Got enough material now, anyway, though a pity human-interest angle fizzled out. Article should turn out all right. Billy C. wasn't wrong. Sure be glad to get home. No longer any doubt about mice—when packing up tonight found a hole chewed out of assignment papers.

*December 13*

This mornin' I called up Melody Fahr and asked her if she'd go out with me. I wisht I hadn't done it now, cause she
says no, she's sorry but she's engaged, so she can't go out with me never. I guess I wouldn't of been too surprised, only that guy that works for that magazine told me she'd say yes, so I sure was hopin. But I guess he just said that to play a trick on me, like the kids used to always do at school. I didn't feel too good the rest of the mornin, and I'm glad there wasn't much business cause I sure didn't feel like tellin no old ladies how pretty they are.

Just before noon Ida Eris come into the station carryin a big thin book in her hands. She says, hi John, you sit down here, I sure got somethin to show you. She smelled like mouthwash and her eyes was glowin like fire. She plopped down in one of them wicker chairs and I eased down in the other one. Then I seen what that book was. It was our high school yearbook. I wanted to get one myself only I couldn't cause grandpa just says, them things cost too damn much money, people in hell want ice water too.

She opened that book up and took a little slip of paper and hands it to me. She says, this mornin I went over to the hotel to have a talk with that magazine writer and I found that note on the door. Read it, she says, so I did. It says, WISH YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO LEAVE SO SOON. REMEMBER THE BEAUTIFUL NIGHTS WE SPENT TOGETHER. AND TRY NOT TO FEEL BAD ABOUT THE FLYER. LOVE, MELODY. I read through it a couppla times, and then I just sat there starin at it. Ida says, I guess you know what that means. I still didn't move nor nothin. I couldn't hardly think. Ida snatched the note right outta my hand and then she shoves that yearbook in my face. It was opened to the first page where people in the class had wrote little poems and things, and she points to one and says, look at that. I didn't feel like readin no poems but I went ahead and did it so maybe she'd leave. It says, ROSES ARE RED, VIOLETS ARE BLUE, SUGAR'S SWEET, WHICH IS MORE THAN YOU—MELODY FAHR. Ida almost jumped outta her seat. She holds the note right next to that poem. You see she says, you see. You probly thought I wrote that note myself, but now you see don't you, it's the same handwritin, it's hers all right.

I guess Ida was right about that. There was the same big writin with a little circle over every i. Ida slammed the book
and hopped up on her feet. I'm glad that's settled she says, now you know what kind of a person Melody Fahr is. Then she says good-bye and goes.

I just kept sittin there in that wicker chair, my throat felt hard as a rock and my mouth was dry like full of sawdust. I couldn't move for a long time I felt so heavy. I just didn't know what to think. That magazine guy always seemed so nice, but I guess he was laughin at me behind my back all the time. But I didn't even mind that so much as thinkin that Melody must of been laughin right along with him. I just couldn't hardly think I felt so bad.

Finally I looked up and I seen it was time to eat. I wasn't hungry but I knowed I had a long day ahead of me and I better eat somethin anyway. I didn't feel like goin to the cafe cause I didn't want to have to see Melody, she probly thinks I'm a fool, so I just went to the grocery store and bought some stuff I could bring back to the station and eat. The grocery store was awful busy and it was a long time before I got back. I took the food into my room to eat, and right away I seen my trophy was gone and my ribbons and metals too. There was a note on my desk and it says, NOW YOU FORGET ALL THIS TRACK FOOLISHNESS. I THREW ALL THAT JUNK IN THE TRASH BARREL AND BURNT IT. NOW YOU DO AS I SAY AND GO OUT WITH IDA, SHE'S GOT GOOD SENSE AND YOU AIN'T. YOU WON'T DO NO BETTER—GRANDPA.

I didn't put on my coat nor nothin, I just run right outside, and it was coldern a penguin's ears and startin to snow, and I run around the back of the station to the trash barrel. I bent over and looked down in that trash barrel, and there was all ashes except for my trophy and it was all black, and he must of throwed it in there pretty hard cause it was all busted up too. I knowed I couldn't never fix it, and I didn't know what to do, and I went back into the station almost bawlin.

I just stood inside, I couldn't think nor nothin, and all I seen was that big new clock with the hand goin round and round. All a sudden I wanted to yank the cord out just hard as I could. I walked over there and reached down but then I remembered it didn't have no cord, it run on batteries or some
damn thing, and I wanted to smash it all over the floor but I
knewed if I did grandpa'd raise hell.

So I went back into my room, it looked awful bare, and
then I thought about my uniform and looked in my closet and
he must not of seen it cause it was still there, my shoes too. I
picked up my shoes, I hadn't worn em since last fall, and I
cleaned em good, and when I was cleanin em one of the white
stripes come off but I was in too much of a hurry to worry
about it. I put on my uniform and I put on my shoes too, cause
I figured with all the snow on the ground it wouldn't hurt em
none to wear em. I went outside and it was snowin great big
white ugly flakes, and I jogged over to the track, my shoes goin
clickety-clack when I hit a dry spot in the street.

When I got just about there I heard that other runner
huffin and puffin at my heels, and then he passed me goin like
the wind and flew right over that snow fence that circles the
track. I didn't know what to do, that ain't never happened
before, so I just forgot about the gate and went lickety-split for
that snow fence myself. But I couldn't see too good with the
snow fallin, and it kept comin down harder all the time, and
my first leg went over the fence okay but my trailin leg caught
the top of the fence and I went fallin to the ground. I looked
but I couldn't see that other runner no more, so I just got back
up and I brushed that cold snow off my legs and jogged up to
the startin line.

I took my place at the startin line and I waited for the
cheer that always come when they say my name over the
loudspeaker. But they didn't say my name and there wasn't no
cheer, and when I looked up at the stands hopin to find
Melody all I could see was a great big owl with ears like Ida
Eris, goin who who who who.