

Klimt ran.

He was a sprinter. That's what he did. His coach said he ran fast as the wind. Coach was OK, but not that bright. You could stand in a field and actually watch a 50-mile-an-hour gust start up and move through the grass and trees. Klimt got past that in a few steps. Klimt ran faster than the wind! Klimt broke records.

Klimt's blood froze for a second: He heard dogs. Dogs were love—pure love. Why would anyone train them to hunt human beings? Klimt loved pretty much everything. Hatred was not in his blood. Why would it be in anybody's?

Graduation was in a few days, and coronavirus be damned, he was starting his adult life! He was ready. His had so many plans. Klimt breathed in the air and felt this all belonged to him—the future, wonderful things, life itself. This included beautiful women. Klimt was alive, he was powerful. Not just ordinary. Extra-ordinary!

Way back, when he was just old enough to buy a mother's day card, the store clerk asked him not to get the cards dirty. Klimt had stood in confusion for a moment. What did the clerk mean? Klimt's hands weren't dirty. He wouldn't come in to look at cards with dirty hands. Oh—his hands were black. Black and clean. Just like white, black didn't come off on things.

There were reminders, all his life—probably every day if he troubled to pay attention—that his color was not right. Not right!

The wind suffused his lungs and the sun shone on his face and he loved all the animals, all the bugs, all the people. Well...the "all the people" part was hard. The cops chasing him now were not really evil, just ignorant. Seemed to think it was fine to hunt down people. It was just a march! A peaceful protest march! The police fired tear gas at them, cornered a group in a dead-end street, and Klimt said to hell with this and sprinted through an alley about three inches wide and over an eight-foot fence and they were after him. They were after him like all the hatred congealed in him. Get him! You can't want equality in America. Stupid idea! Get him! He thinks he's special. Get him!

America—land of the free, land of equal opportunity. Slavery long past. Segregation past. Yet in 2020, doing most anything while black seemed to be a crime. And running was an admission of guilt.

Every few days, or few weeks, police shot another black man or woman. It was all over the news, commissions were formed to study the problem, there might be an investigation,

politicians waddled up to the microphone and spoke some predictable words, and then the orange cuckoo-bird that lives in the White House shit out another egg and everybody forgot. Rinse, repeat. Klimt was old enough to recognize the pattern. It had been happening all his life. It was so stupid that it was beneath his consideration.

The feel of his muscles, and the soft sound of his feet touching the earth in very quick succession, filled Klimt with a sense that things were right. Running and almost dancing and leaping and gulping in air—you know, the air tasted good as it filled your lungs, each fresh gulp tasted better than the last, it seemed. How could that be? Yet it was true. There was wonder in the world.

Klimt's Driver's Ed teacher once asked the class how many people had ever heard a bullet go past them. Several hands went up. The teacher went on to say that's what it's like when you're in a car. The other cars are like bullets. So drive defensively and avoid contacting them.

So now Klimt dodged, swirling from side-to-side. Didn't know if that made any difference. But it was worth the effort. The barking fell farther behind. He sprinted faster than dogs could. Silly dogs! He could see beautiful colors in the air, he could see atoms. Each...individual...atom! They seemed to lift him up, to embrace him. And embroidered into this absolutely stunning tapestry was a single, quick sound.

Klimt fell.