



... Let's Go

By LARRY MACARAY

Once upon a time, in a far off land of windmills and church-towers, there lived a well-to-do miller. This robust peasant courted and finally married a baker's daughter who was a gentle and very pious soul.

Soon, a son was born. A sensitive artistic youth whose vision was attuned to the lush countryside that he would never leave in his lifetime. "What a waste" thought the miller, "that my son forsakes book learning at the University for this crazy life of painting."

The boy grew into a man. He became as many-sided as Shakespeare, to whom he has so often been compared. Called "the Owl" by his fellow townsmen, he lived in solitude, searching the heart of darkness for the light of the invisible. He was in fact the first truly modern artist, modern in the sense that he obeyed exclusively the bidings of his artistic conscience.

WITH HIS MARRIAGE to rich young Saskia, his future seemed assured, socially and financially. He lavished jewels upon his lovely young wife and indulged his many passions. Ten years of this flamboyant high living ended with the sudden death of Saskia.

"I am painting The Blinding of Samson, and you must pose as Delilah," he asked of Saskia. He had immortalized her in the guise of many heroines — Flora, Minerva, Bellona, Susanna, and others.

His glimpses into the intimate side of his life were very revealing. In his paintings and drawings he would often show Saskia in bed—laid low by illness or the shock of child-bearing, or playing with Titus, the only one of their four children who survived.

PRINCE TITUS — or it seemed to him that Titus had become a prince because of the loss of Saskia. He would paint him as a prince and the world would know that this angelic looking child dressed in a grey-brown tunic and wearing a yellow cap topped with red and yellow plumes was his son.

A servant girl, Hendrickje, entered the house to care for Titus. She became the second wife of "the Owl" and was indeed the most devoted helpmate a man could wish for. "Let me paint your portrait so that I may show your youth and tenderness," he asked of Hendrickje.

He prospered — commissions began to come in from wealthy patrons. Still lifes, such as the "Played Ox," landscapes (but oddly enough, no seascapes), nudes with human warmth such as "Bathsheba," portraits and more portraits—but none as piercing and revealing as the many self-portraits he produced.

"THE NIGHT WATCH" — though perhaps not his greatest work, is in many ways his most revealing. In this large painting (12 ft. x 14 ft.) "the Owl" tested his painterly resources to the limit and in so doing—laid bare the face of his own genius. As the viewer starts walking toward this canvas, he must stop abruptly—the canvas is coming forward to meet him!

The painting that was to become his most valuable (three centuries later) was commissioned by a Sicilian aristocrat in a noble recognition of the importance of tradition. "Aristotle Before a Bust of Homer"—a title that has now been slightly changed. No other painter has brought out so clearly the pressure of a hand.



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