

Saint Jerome in love

by [John Poch](#) in the [January 29, 2020](#) issue

*after George de la Tour*

While Saint Jerome was reading by candlelight  
some letter from God knows who or God himself,  
judging by the way the consistent script shines  
through the transparency of the illuminated paper  
and even the red mozzetta bleeds through,  
a Bible lay close by, and pen and ink and seal.

While everyone in Rome was sleeping, for once  
he found himself not writing or copying, but reading  
this letter, brief, you can tell, and again, you can tell,  
from the folds creased crisp and dark with handling.

While the candle may light foremost his forehead  
and force us to think he thinks, it's the page at the center  
that glows so we know he feels the calling of the letter  
not to go to Constantinople, but to stay because  
some highborn woman wants him to—to more  
articulately tell her how to be chaste and lovely  
in God's eyes, and he thinks of her, this woman  
in whom he finds the mountain of a little girl's charm  
when she speaks of a flower color, speaking  
while laughing, of the softest poppy's joy.

You can almost see through it, like Wednesday,  
she says, midday when most of the swallows  
rest from writing on the sky. *Stay and you will see,*  
she writes. *Find and you will seek. And help me*  
*make it to Sunday.* He contemplates his letter  
written back from Constantinople.

