

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.

