



AFTER REMBRANDT'S
*PHILOSOPHE EN
MÉDITATION*, 1632

David Middleton

A pensive man sits near a table placed
Against a window-ledge, now gazing down
Upon the blank stone floor, turning away
To ponder questions prompted by his book.

Across the room a woman, bent, intense,
Shifts wood with tongs to stoke a hearth's low flames,
Bringing back heat needed for warmth and food.
Between the two a staircase spirals high,

Steps rising into dark at their first turn,
Then further steps seen only from below.
Above the book, in golden light aglow
Plain glass, far from the hearth, is stained bright-cold.

The old philosopher has paused, perplexed,
Mind winding like bare stairs up into night,
Longing for Plato's sun yet ever held
To earth by a fire's clasping iron tongs.