**Delft** *by Tanya Parker*

The wider the horizon, the less you fear. This is a place of huge skies and low clouds, of new

town houses, confident stone. This is the painted scene. Come in.

A woman sits at the virginals. Her blurred face plays to a looking glass. Her chevalier in courtly black sings the tune. She is his accomplished wren, to be heard not seen. The artist sees both of them.

He paints from behind a lens, lent him by a draper of the town, a chamberlain he knows by sight. This is one he can spare. He cannot spare much time.

Closer now, closer still. In his private space, the chamberlain heats glass. Stretched to a whisker, broken in two, the tips he makes are the smallest yet. Magnified five hundred times, in one caught drop, little animals, little atomies. More populous than the crowded town, they run and swim and spin, angels on the tip of a pin, more devils than he can name.

Never near enough, his sons are wrapped in cloth. Four parcels of white silk under the elm tree he chose. Its muscles are their branches, their roots its veins. Seals unciphered, wax cups emptied of blood, their cells strengthen the earth.

So he awaits the dignitaries. The Russian tsar, the English king, dons of the Royal Society jealous of his monopoly. Fearing thieves, he trusts truth to secrecy. But no, it’s his wife’s tread on the stair, and with her his daughter, carrying carefully, in case he is thirsty, a glass of water.