

THE FLEA by John Donne: annotated

MARK but this flea, and mark in this, **Take a look at this flea, and see**
How little that which thou deniest me is ; **what a small thing you are refusing me;**
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee, **First it sucked my blood and now it's sucking**
yours,

And in this flea our two bloods mingled be. **And in this flea our blood is mixed.**
Thou know'st that this cannot be said **You know this can't be called**
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead ; **A sin, or a shame, or a loss of virginity;**
Yet this enjoys before it woo, **But still the flea enjoys itself without wooing first,**
And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two ; **And swells happily with blood**
made from both of us

And this, alas ! is more than we would do. **And this, sadly, is more than we are**
willing to do.

O stay, three lives in one flea spare, **Wait, don't kill three lives in one flea**
Where we almost, yea, more than married are. **In which we are almost - in fact, more**
than - married

This flea is you and I, and this **This flea is you and I, and this**
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is. **Is our marriage bed and wedding church.**
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met, **Even if our parents are unhappy about it,**
and you are too, we are joined

And cloister'd in these living walls of jet. **And closed inside these living black walls**
(the flea)

Though use make you apt to kill me, **Although it would be normal for you to want**
to kill me,

Let not to that self-murder added be, **Don't add a suicide to that**

And sacrilege, three sins in killing three. **And also sacrilege: that would be three sins**
and three killings.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since **Cruelly and suddenly, have you just now**
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence? **Made your fingernail purple with innocent**
blood ?

Wherein could this flea guilty be, **How could this flea be called guilty**
Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee? **Apart from that drop (of blood) it took**
from you

Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou **But you are fine and say that you**
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now. **Don't find either you or me any weaker**
now.

'Tis true ; then learn how false fears be ; **That is true; so understand that fears are**
unjustified:

Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me, **When you give in to my demands, only**
as much honour

Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee. **will be lost as the death of this flea**
affected you (= only a drop).