

# Twelve River RIPPLES

## Favourite Poem



### **The Flea**

by John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is;  
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,  
Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,  
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, nay more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;  
Though parents grudge, and you, we are met,  
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.  
Though use make you apt to kill me,  
Let not to that, self-murder added be,  
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?  
Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?  
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
Find'st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;  
'Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:  
Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

## Favourite Poem cont.

I studied the Metaphysical Poets at school and was always led to believe they were 'difficult' - but I found them easy to understand! Like this poem, which is so straightforward in its meaning. Basically, let's get on with it - it's only a small thing for the poet's lover to sleep with him, so small that the flea of the title has already set things in motion by taking blood from both of them (apologies to anyone easily offended,

but we're talking an exchange of body fluids here). It's also worth remembering that at the time the poet was writing, 'dying' was a term used to describe the point of climax during sex, which adds another layer to this very saucy poem, which I find is a real antidote to the soppy hearts and flowers verse of Valentine's cards.

*Nicola Warwick*