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GIVING BLOOD FOR POETRY

-For Sylvia Plath, & all

How much blood would you donate for a poem?

For a few drops, you could earn a great first line, one that pulls the reader in like a net and never lets them go.

A few ounces might be worth a well-written simile, perhaps an original metaphor, a stained line,

or two.

A quart would earn you a whole stanza, the images trickling toward insight.

For another cupful, you could have a powerful ending line, one that resonates and makes the reader's internal tides slosh back and forth with wonder.

Or you could donate even more: two quarts, perhaps, for a fine sonnet or sestina. Three quarts for a long elegy that brings stinging tears to the reader's eyes.

Then there are writers who would give everything for poetry, those who would donate the body's full six quarts for a paper-thin truth.

Those are the true poets,

those donors who would open the gates to let it flow from their thirty-seven thousand miles of capillaries and arteries to bleed on the page,

until the heart—saying everything it needs to say—is emptied, until it pumps nothing but air, and

the poet lies pale and drained on the floor, until all that's left is this poem, these red, smeared beautiful, pulsing words.

-Bill Meissner
St. Cloud, Minnesota