

# Blue / And My Country Loved Me

David Allan Cates



Image by Theodore Van Alst

## Blue

Under a cupped-hand sky fifty feet over a quarry pool in the deep north of childhood—who in that vast middle is on your side? You want so much so badly all you can do is jump. Falling, you watch iron ridges hump the horizon north to the arctic. Nothing ends, it seems. Yet halfway down over the depthless eye of water you understand: everything in your short life has. Crystal shatters when you hit and comes together again while you sink. You never felt a blue so cold or true and won't again until you rise and gasp the sky. Some things you don't want stay with you, but this—wherever water holds you—will too.

*When I was a boy I loved my country* – James Wright

## And My Country Loved Me

The horses my god how they could have crushed our feet and bit our hands but only lipped sugar from our palms and gaped to show tremendous tongues—and the cats too how they walked rail fences pausing to sit on posts hunting mice in grass or snow—and sometimes it seemed the horses regarded the cats and the cats regarded the horses

as I regarded them:  
beautiful in blizzards or rain or heavy  
green sickening heat of July or cool  
morning August fog, shadows  
and hooves I could feel  
through my mattress at night, eyes rolling  
and steam rising from wet  
backs solid as the smell of the tack  
that touched them hanging  
in a darkened room.

In boy dreams I'm their equal  
still, their flesh mine—  
pregnant Black Kitty again leaps  
from her box into my bed and scratches  
my leg as she pushes out  
the first of four kittens—or old Bob  
with the broad back  
who quiets as I climb on and walks me  
to the pond where he twitches  
flies and waits while I swim and fill  
my stringer with bass, waits like a gray uncle  
to take me home again.

David Allan Cates' collection of poetry, *The Mysterious Location of Kyrgyzstan*, was published by Satellite Press in April 2016. He is the author of five novels, most recently *Tom Connor's Gift*, winner of the 2015 Independent Book Publishers Books Award for best fiction in the Rocky Mountain west region. He is the executive director of Missoula Medical Aid, a non-profit that does health care and health improvement projects in Honduras, and is a part-time teacher in the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University.



