

EQUALS

Tim Ramick

She becomes. Black snow in the baby's mouth. The socket of a thought. The interior of the dome of the skull is written upon in place of a tongue's scratchings. The baby self breathes itself, sleeps in the forest of its breath. Dark waters from the dome wash away the baby's bruise. The decay of enamel, slept in linen, clasp to bone, sunlit sleeves and infant flush, shadows in the belfry. I imagine myself outside of myself, stranger to self, sparing myself as self. As Ramick, my female self—supposed, contrived, engendered, *created*—I wander the fields toward the hills, hair in hood, hands in sweatshirt pouch, the not-yet-winter air russeting my cheeks, my jeans raveled at one knee, showing pale cap, my thoughts upon Taylor, the librarian's son, his wrists, his cowlicks, his picnic, his modal voice and slumber eyes. This is the way a world is born, consciousness upon consciousness, treebreaks and star risings, leaf fall and stone shift, the hairs on the backs of necks, notions of time. I walk in my favorite boots, my favorite socks, striped pink and brown. The sky, more white than blue, stretches above me like Taylor's indecision, his fear of fathering himself. I'm pressed into the leaves; I now stride along a leaf strewn slope below the tracks toward town; I hold a loaf of bread under my arm against one breast, hearty farmbread, still warm from the oven; I'm happy, still warm from decision. I am, as my female self, half of a nation. If chance is willing, I'll



He becomes. Black glass in the baby's eyes. The cavity of a dream. The ceiling and walls in the grotto of the belly are painted with the colors of stomach juice. The everlast self overcoats the neverdo self, life opening to bloodheavy clouds. Sudden shine from the dome fades the baby's stain. The thinning of eggshell, slept in bone, joint to sinew, flooded cuffs and infant blanch, gleamings in the bowels. I separate myself from myself, othering self, making myself more than self. As Taylor, my male self—uncertained, actualized, gentrified, *rendered*—I wander the streets toward the river, hat cocked, hands in coat pockets, the dirty town air watering my eyes, my pants stained with indecision, that pale streak, my heart bent toward Ramick, the builder's daughter, her wrists, her collarbones, her chimney, her clef voice and tinder eyes. This is the way a world is born, inclination upon inclination, smokestacks and firmaments, spark rush and cinder lift, the stretch of throats, quickening space. I stroll in my favorite boots, my favorite socks, green-toed and sheep-wooled. The sky, more umber than blue, hangs over me like Ramick's projections, her pram lust. I'm pressed into service; I meander toward the river and the specialty shops; I hold a book under my arm against my ribs, a slender volume of dead language; I'm confused, slack from indecision. I am, as my male self, half of a nation. If fate insists, I'll become one third of a nation,

become one third of a nation, or one-fourth, if I must, and our nation will be built on love, not fear, our nation's image a perfect egg, our flag a white egg on a blue background, fertile clouds in our skies. Taylor will Ramick me into pleasure and I'll decide him into union. The hills stay away from me today. Mother makes bread. Father carpents. Taylor touches me true, mostly. I've got boismell on my skin, almost mansmell, and if a train were to roar past me, scattering birds, its freighty horn all up my spine, I'd have that, too, and I'd share it with the open fields and rising hills, and I'll share trains and the stronger skies with Taylor, for I have eggs in her belly. Ramick walked across the fields as if water were an attribute, as if she were moved by a beneficent pressure, not with gravity toward the lowest point, not toward the eventuality of the sea, but with seriousness toward what she most loved, a boy on the verge of manhood, a boy who could surge her into motherhood if she weren't careful, a boy who handled books as if they were bread and whose sweat smelled like sawdust. She, a girl unto womanhood, Ramick, the daughter of a contractor, alone in the fields outside of town, hair in hood, heart in coals, impervious to the autumn chill. Unable to abide most men, she put God as a god away from her bedside into nature as a natural force, and she prayed with all of her senses every outdoor day. A wren was as divine

or a quarter of one, if I must, and our nation will be built on trust, not fear, our nation's image a clear stream, our flag of blue motion on a blue background, our skies swept true. Ramick will Taylor me into flesh and I'll surprise her with assurance. I'll jump into the river today, into the feminine splash. Mother gardens. Father shelves. Ramick fevers me into air, mostly. I've got girlsmell on my fingers, almost woman smell, and if the trolley were to rattle past me, scattering pedestrians, its clanging bell through my thoughts ear to ear, I'd have that, too, and I'd share it with the fire escapes and rooftops, and I'll share tugboats and the strongest currents with Ramick, now that I have words in his ideas. Taylor floated through the streets as if he were paper in a breeze, as if he were carried along by the guiding principle of letting go in order to arrive, not toward destination but toward what he most desired, a girl in the foyer of womanhood, a girl who could usher him to fatherhood if he weren't careful, a girl who handled bread as if it were life and whose sweat smelled like cavern air. He, a boy unto manhood, Taylor, son of a librarian, alone in the side streets of the town, hat cocked, belly tight, anxious about the promises of winter. Reticent around most women, he put nature as a god under his pillow, as fantasy, and he prayed to have his dreams purified, eventually. A thrush was as threatening as a hedge and a bush was as

as a cloud and mist was as divine as a tree and a sapling was as divine as a baby in a nursery, although Taylor's seed could yield neither sycamore nor spruce, neither palm nor elm, nor a whole new Earth. Taylor could fill her with purpose, she believed, if he were ever of a mind to, if he so chose. Her boots, under her weight, pressed leaves into loam, kept her ankles warm, along with her socks, the pink and brown stripes collapsing with the history of her strides down to the bottom of her calves. Her body, now truly hers and not her mother's, long not her father's, was hers to do with as she wished, and she wished to match it to Taylor's, crown to toe, if he were willing to deliver his; then, under the allowance of chance, she could deliver theirs, into his arms, onto her chest, into supreme love. The rising hills made her think of Taylor's actuality, not his potential, for she knew, young as she was, she should be wary of outdistancing herself. The hills, her unefforted breasts, his unefforted shoulders, mounds of sawdust in her father's shop, mounds of dough on her mother's kitchen counter, mounds of fresh soil outside of rabbit holes, biceps, kneecaps, navels and eyelashes. She had come to the lifted levee of train tracks, hoping, as always, for a train to rumble out of the woods to surprise her and quicken my heart. I step from railroad tie to railroad tie, figmented. My thoughts on Taylor. If I, as female, were to defeat this land,

threatening as a sinkhole and a sinkhole was as threatening as a baby in a crib, although Ramick's eggs were as dangerous as feathers and air, as kindness and hope, as a gentler Earth. Ramick could pull from him his blueprints, he believed, if she ever felt she ought, if she so chose. His boots, under his weight, along with the shufflings of his fellow townspeople, wore down pavement, smoothed cobblestones, like water and wind. His body, now fully his and not his mother's, looking like his father's, was his to do with as he willed, and he would will it upon the willowy Ramick, sawdust through knothole, if she wished him to do so. Then, so be it, fate willing, she would give back his action as reaction, wondrous and banal. The smokestacks of the factories along the river made him think of Ramick's projections, not her affection, for he knew, young as he was, that he couldn't ignore the future. Chimneys, his decider, her convincer, the piles of books to be reshelved in his father's library, the stalagmites and stalactites underground, the rabbit's foot on his key chain, thighs, dimples, navels and earlobes. He had arrived at the boardwalk and the riverfront shops, eager, as always, for a tugboat to churn in the river and make me want to be her tugboat captain. I go from pavement to cobblestones to pavement to cobblestones, a product of invention. My thoughts on Ramick. If I, as male, were a progenitor of this town, considering

subjugate it horizon to horizon, I would demand more birds, songbirds, with colorful chests, flitting from tree to tree, and they would eat people's dreams out of the soil, and trains would cut through the fields to carry children from their homes, to borrow them for the night and put them back in their beds before sunup, and men would lie under women and be pressed into the roots of trees, trees reaching into skies with sufficient birds, if I, as female self, had say upon this land. Men's napes are underposed. Our lives as children as overscoped. I tightrope along the silver rail, gleaming in a burst of sunlight, fancied. My thoughts on Taylor. Now and there. I won't tire of his body until I'm tired of mine. I'll seek his soul in everything he says. His stick and stones will strengthen my bones, his lips and tongue won't burn me. His love for my body will help me not grow tired of it. If I, my female self, someday have a child, I'll teach her to love her body's flaws, to accept her body's power. If I, as mother, raise a son, I'll send him into the world erect with compassion. Taylor has no hair on his chest yet, I was thinking, pressing my thumbs into my navel, Orion's belt, horses on hills, mother's oatmeal spoon, red longjohns on men in magazines, pew polish, altar lure, organ tremor, tree reach. Awake I lie in bed under the headboard carved by my father, the woodworker, an incongruous spread of mermaids lounging under a mighty oak. I

making improvements, I'd requisition more birds, songbirds, with bright breasts, darting from poles to rooftops, and they would build nests in chimneys for children to sleep in, and the river would rise at night and drown those whose ambitions make them vulnerable to risen waters, and women would roll their seas upon the rocks of men, rocks worn smooth as eggs, if I, as male self, held sway over this town. Women's brows are underthought. Our lives as animals are overwrought. I step from curb to street to curb, gleaming from overnight rains, conjured. My thoughts on Ramick. Here and then. I won't grow weary of her body unless I've grown weary of mine. I'll seek her spirit in everything she does. Her terrain, from eyes to toes, outcropping and caves, ridges and hollows, alter my weather. Her love of my body shores up any leaks in my resolve. If I, my male self, someday father a child, I'll teach him to love his body's power, to accept his body's flaws. If I, as man, sire a daughter, I'll send her into the world loose with confidence. Ramick hasn't chosen to rid her legs of their bloneness yet, I was thinking, pressing my thumbs against my temples, Pleiades, goats on crags, father's pink and brown scarf, flannel gowns on women in windows, flashlit ushers, sprung seats, exits red, root mulch. Awake I lie in bed under my ceiling glowing with plastic stars, the seven sisters clumped above my chest. I have fever and

have fever and its accompanying chills. I am fevered self, moist and female, sore of body, spirits soaring, aware that I can imagine myself out of self, away from self toward other as self, toward Taylor, the male self. Outside is my memory. Outside, in my memory, a bird falls to the ground, a barn burns down, the fields are flooded with tears from the hills. Civil war ruins self, dividing the nation. Outside my shut window, the massive oak tambourines what's left of its leaves in the night's breeze. Tomorrow I rendezvous with Taylor in the copse beyond the river, if I fabricate it into the tapestry of likelihood, if that's what I want from my morning, if that's what my future memory holds. Now my belly button is mine to poke, to fiddle with, to press with my thumbs. Now my brow radiates fever through the roof and past the stars, as dark matter, as dark energy, the emotional semen of the cosmos. I'll populate space with feeling. It is so if I will it so. One can see stars in the sky at night, if one is lucky, if one lives away from cities. We have seen telescopic images of stars, children's drawings of stars, constellations sinking below dark horizons. We can imagine very distant stars. We can imagine planets orbiting stars. We can imagine moons orbiting planets. We can imagine, beyond images in books, galaxies and comets and empty space. The imagination struggles to do this, but it can do this nevertheless. The imagination cannot grasp

I sweat when I'm not shivering. I am a feverish self, wet with male energy, aching for release, aware that I can imagine myself elsewhere, out of the sickness of self into the health of other, into Ramick, the female self. The stars on the ceiling are for those afraid of the dark. A plastic firmament as nightlight. The Little Dipper, the Big Dipper, Mars, Orion, the Pleiades, Venus; Father is an amateur astronomer. Outside our shut windows, the town drops off to sleep. Tomorrow, before I run an errand for my father, I'll rendezvous with Ramick in the copse across the river, if she wishes, if I believe it as it unfolds. One must be open-minded until one has heard every opinion. One cannot hear every opinion, if one understands that no two opinions are identical. Therefore, one must remain open-minded one's whole life. Will requires closing one's mind enough to act. Action might be necessary. Will might be necessary. Open-mindedness unto inaction might exist in proximity to the divine. The divine, knowing every opinion and every nuance of every opinion and every distinction between every opinion, has the corresponding wisdom to act properly. If the divine—knowing all opinions and all truths—acts improperly, we are doomed or life is meaningless. If the divine—knowing all opinions and all truths—chooses not to act, we should strive to be divine, knowing all the while that striving and inaction are

eternity or infinity, making them nonexistent. The imagination cannot grasp existence with their lack either, making them essential. This conundrum, in different images, without articulation, might make children kick their legs under sheets everywhere. In the summer of our meeting, in the lull of squint and touch, I swam the lake to wash my face and Taylor climbed the greenest tree. I felt the water hold my body as if I weren't wrong. It could contain my flaws as easily as its indifference. Taylor struggled up the tree like a hesitant boy, deliberate and wary of ground. If I could show him how to climb and how to swim with abandon, I could captain him into ardency. If he were to abandon himself within me we could forest our breaths into a new self. Cloud barrage. The invention of maiding waters. I escape girlhood as a strand to his browsing skiff. He escapes boyhood with the leaning of his totem pole. The imagination reaches beyond the self of selves into the afterself. As female, I'm drawn toward renewal. I'll need to find friends who don't care what I resemble, and I'll need to find an other who will find me beautiful throughout my body's history, who will love my freckles and pocks and blotches from puberty to catheter, will caress me from flow to arthritis, will adore my willowy awkwardness no more than my fragile shuffle. Some girls bloom from puffiness into bombshell, some fade from womanchild into

incompatible and produce a paradox. Seek harmony in paradox. Imagine paradoxes while suns die. Imagine paradoxes while suns live. Self becomes selves become self. This is the human wrapped with the divine into specific love. Self beyond self as other than self into self. In the summer of our meeting, after the rush of stare and shove, I swam the lake to wash my face and Ramick climbed the greenest tree. She climbed into the bowers and escaped my gaze. She was skirted and barefoot, and the flex of her calves as she stretched from a lower limb to one above had moved me privately. As I floated atop the water I felt fish nibble at my toes. The sky held nothing of language, a sky whose lightest word could harrow up my soul. There are many ways to live but death is our universal landlord. Trees reach downward into the drink. I petrify the self. The self is petrified into hard memory, the self of different worlds, the one long gone and the one long going. The memory reaches beyond the self of selves toward the nonself. As male, I'm drawn toward resolution. To lie awake in one's bed, alone, as male or female, as both or neither, as widow or widower, as father or mother, as youth, is to be vulnerable to a conversation with one's god, especially if one is in fever, if one is stuck in insomnia without clarity of thought or purpose. A conversation with one's god or one's demons, whatever one's faith, whatever the depth of one's

frigidity, some never stiffen a male's imagination, nor perk a fellow female's fantast, not once. One might wonder if there are differences in the feminine and masculine imaginations. Not as fantasy, but as projection, as self-prophecy, as creative force. Self imagines the world, every self, every world. Self is imagined by other. There exist no worlds without selves to imagine them. I strive to be more than myself, and in striving, fail. I become more than myself only by becoming other as self. This isn't the way and there is no other way to be anything other than self. Other as self isn't done alone. Ramick rushes to create Taylor before Taylor creates Ramick. He is my equal. Upon my back I plank myself to his lathe, my love, in my father's woodshed, I'll smooth myself under his blade. White wind in the haunted heart. I know the world is peopled by banal miracles, organisms made in images of themselves. I am a banal miracle of unrecognizable nuance and Taylor is mine to the worms, to the cinders. The rabbits are out of their holes and have disappeared into the deeper brush. Ramick breathes Taylor into her lungs, the love of carcinogenic trust. As Taylor grows old, as he cripples himself with his vacillation and smug doubts, as his jowls droop and the lights in his eyes flicker, I'll wheel him around in a barrow of mirth. The blooms of my joy will surround him with all of the colors of feminine hope, and my genuine laughter will

faith, is an act of imagination. One's god isn't one's self. One's god is other than self, more than self. I am my god's other as self. Imagination is replenishable. It's a renewable resource, that's obvious. It feeds off of itself without consuming itself. It isn't bound by time; it creates its own space. The self imagines the self and the self imagines the other. This happens automatically, like breathing, and like breathing, one can improve one's capacities. One with the fever, pursuing self as other and other as self, moves toward ascension. Taylor rushes to create Ramick before Ramick creates Taylor. She is my equal. If she desires, if she requests severing, I'll rape her in her father's woodshed, and she will wish I were a saw. White noise in the grounded soul. The self sleeps beside the self in a bed of infinite range. The I, they say, dies into the we. I refute this as a we unto myself, as dead as alive and available to unbecoming. The beast awaits in the bushes for little mammals out in search of life. Taylor breathes Ramick into his lungs, the trust of carcinogenic love. I want to dispense such strange majesty, but the saliva burns and my lips are sealed and I can't spit and I can't drool and I must swallow and my stomach is undefended against acid of this magnitude and the juices will seep down into my sacs and arouse my ambition and I will rape myself with sudden fury and I will give birth to a beast that will roar into the world with zero understanding

melody the static of what is left of his ambition, will lilt his twilight into starlight and beyond captain sleep into the deepest sleep of the irresponsible. I'll outlast him because he has absorbed the blows of compromised living. Some will call me courageous when the truth is that I cared. He raped me more than he should have, I suppose, but he didn't steal my maps. The ant on the pavement cannot anticipate the shoe. Ramick wrestles Taylor to the ground. Under the massive oak, near the rising hills and lifts of land, in the air of autumn chill, in the aftermath of leaf fall, I wrestle him to the ground. No bird makes a sound. I've caught him unaware and I have enough internal strength to go with the surprise to swoon him to earth. In the sudden absence of organ chords and sermon words and lumbering hymns, the weather burning in my heart, sun to retinas, the clarifying sky, the isolating shadows, I will have his secret half of the mysterious whole. All I know to be true is refraction. I will be unselfed, lifted from reality into the real. I will abdicate the I and trust he won't mutiny the we. I will create him. To create is to separate self from what is created. A god separates itself from its creation. If one could create a bird out of mud, the bird might claim to have created one out of thin air. Through creation we deny the immortality of the self. I wish I could remember creating myself. I express Taylor almost as well as he expresses

of its origins. Some will think me fervent when the truth is that I flinched. The beast will destroy occasional hearts in the swollen darknesses of their puny rooms. We are rabbits, indistinguishable to fate, and the hungry beast lurks. Ramick wrestles Taylor to the ground. Outside the sanctuary, under a sky about to weep snow, in the air of organ strains, in the aftermath of congregational flow, Ramick wrestles Taylor to the ground. The watching birds are hushed. Ramick is ground ready. The words from the pulpit and the pews stained her winter dress. Taylor, caught unaware, his thoughts upon stained glass shapes and colors, simple thoughts, his balance no match for her verve, goes down in a heap on the hard frost ground. She would verge him into continuity, right there in front of everybody, those who straggled out of church and the fluffed birds and the unleafing trees. She stood next to him, Ramick to her Taylor, smiling without showing teeth, before hooking her ankle, clad in a pink and brown striped sock within her shoe, around his ankle, leveraging him through gravity toward earth. She would draw life from him. A milking, not a bloodletting. She hasn't any wish to widow herself by devouring him or his imagination. Ramick, a strong swimmer, has shoulders and thighs equal to Taylor, who is bookish, as well as the advantage of surprise. Taylor falls, the fall of a young man unsure of his equilibrium. The

himself. Pure expression isn't created. Supreme love isn't created. I understand, I do believe, in my naive clumsiness, the verb *destroy*. I have not and will not pretend to comprehend the possible meaning of *uncreate*. Taylor struggles to free himself from under me in his intellectual way. His coat sleeve is torn. His hair is mussed. The observing birds don't care. I aspire to completeness. I am complete. God help my incompleteness! I hold myself above the pride of angled privilege, the gathered remorse, the sanctioned scape of my longing. I adjust to perceptions of myself. I dominate the view. I will ride the flood of self to higher ground and I will dry off in my own light. I absolve myself of myself. I will watch the hills turn to dust and blow away. All observed occasions develop out of the subjective I, the subjective we, the absolute present. The absolute present is the fulcrum of supreme love, the unfathomable now. Ramick is given a cancerous breast and Taylor is given a cancerous prostate to tether them to earth, to remind them that death is the far end of creation, the remarkable roundabout able to send them back to their origins, back to an alternate boulevard with alternate structures along its way. Ramick could be male and Taylor could be female or they could both be female or both be male and they would still be similar but not the same. It isn't clear who is speaking. Sameness is the failure of differentiation. As far as

sermon—the interior service of must and chime—seeped out of the sanctuary across the near land, the church lot steeped in human doubt. Now Taylor, face to soil, girl on top, can smell the frozen mold of faith. The onlookers linger. Birds in branches hunker. Sporadic flakes drift down from low clouds to bare ground, the beginnings of a white occupation. Ramick, now that she has tumbled Taylor, puffs her breath into the air while sitting atop her love, as if wondering what to do next, as if her plans for the future were ungathered. Her breath smells of communion, of a fermented act. She wishes to survive her origins, to imagine multiple perspectives. Multiple perspectives glimpse God, begin to glimpse God, become God glimpsing. One must escape self by seeing self from outside of self. Taylor ceases to struggle out from under her devoted weight. This split isn't a schism. This isn't two as one. This is two out of one as childbirth is one out of two. When I separate self from self I am alone with myself; I am alone without myself. This isn't a paradox; this is a situation. As I leave myself I am left. It isn't equally difficult to leave as to be left, but if one feels them simultaneously, the world has equilibrium. The world needs every perspective to be the observed world. There is no excess or lack. One is able to watch oneself observe oneself. We could think that life becomes death becomes life again. Or we could think

either is aware of the other, they create one another by being aware of one another. Ramick, who has been grown by Taylor from a sparrow of a thought, wishes to observe Taylor as an elk in her headlights. This is the reality of consciousness. She hears the laden coughs of a brute choir of dismissal. I am wrestled to the ground. Taylor found me at the copse where the river twists into the hills and I am pressed into the dead leaves between tree roots. Taylor's weight has merit. The trees reach into a snow prone sky. Skin upon skin, cheeks and brows, fingers in pockets and the lift of risk. My spine follows a root to its water table. My pink and brown striped socks will still static from collusion tonight. Taylor's breath on my throat carries the scent of his father's library, the lower shelves with the thicker books, and his overthought shoulders atlas on the verge of resolution, the relinquishment of autonomy into my bloodstream, the seed of consciousness. The shudder shifts into a shrug and the sky is unblocked and the earliest flakes of winter drift down upon my shins and thighs and belly and chest and throat and underkissed brow and I will persist in pursuing love outside of sheer self. One's truest love, if not identified by name, is identified by pure expression, toward the headwaters of the self, the self's source, the collision of want and want, the tragedy of purpose. Any self's imagination is vanishingly small to any other than self.

unbeing becomes being becomes unbeing again. Or the endless cycle or the near endless cycle or the linear obfuscation of the now. I let myself leave and tell myself to stay. I tell myself to go and make myself stay. The splitting of the atom and the splitting of the self release energy. I wrestle Ramick to the ground. My hat has fallen and my coat sleeve is torn and Ramick grabs at my hair and the bread loaf rests atop the slender book in the dying grass. This is the Taylor of my father and my father's father and Taylor fathers stretching back to caverns and this is my Ramick hearth, dead leaves sparking flame within the moist taste. Her chest is flattened into recollection. The hair in her hood harbors my brow and her earlobe hole is vacant in its softness. The earth is not a cold dead place. Ramick's neck tendons are taut with learning and her jaw is clenched at the edge of release and her breath is alive with wood. If I could give her myself and keep myself for myself I would, far into her heart, the equivalent of a salvation death, but her woman's will bleeds me into the air and I dissipate like snow on her tongue, leaving her to her primary self, her self-created self of imagination and childlike belief. God's wonder. Leaving self as self will bear consequences; leaving self to self will bear consequences. Either is a small futile step toward becoming God. Self and other are one phenomenon, two distinguished moments: the self of selves, the self unselfed.