

From *Dream Lives of Butterflies*:

The manager's son hovers behind the leafless oak, huddling there as if it could cover him, shade him, though it's January and there's no shade or any need for it. He scratches at the baby fat on his cheek, tugs it a bit, both cheeks, in the upward direction; up and away, like being lifted by his face one moment, and when he's set back down he's magically older, more fully formed, the sculpted perfection of the man he wishes he could see himself becoming.

He's watching the pregnant girl from 211-D, who's staring at an empty wooden crib stuck there between his father's prairie garden and the garbage dumpsters. The crib is white, a knot of little yellow ducks painted at the head. She's just standing, leaning up against nothing at all, though her posture is thrust back a little as if she really is leaning, short pale hands anchored on her narrow hips, maybe to support the weight of the baby, he thinks, poking out in front. Otherwise, she's the slick straight shape of a pencil. You'd never guess a baby's there. In fact, the first time he saw her from the back, that sort of jaunty walk of hers, no hips, sleek hair streaming off her neck, dark yellow arrow of it pointing down at nothing in particular, he had thoughts about her and immediately needed to see her face. It's in the face you can tell about a person. But her face, when he saw it, was blank.

A cat leaps from out of nowhere into the crib and it startles them both, she jumping back a little, he letting out a sound he should've (oh man, why didn't he?) kept to himself. Because then, of course, she whips around and sees him there, watching her. And it's not the first time.

She sucks in her lower lip, You again? I've seen you before. Whose cat is this anyway? I've seen this cat before.

He walks over to her stiffly, a scratchy, uncomfortable sort of walk propelled by something stronger than his shyness, his reluctance, but not too close. He feels his own heart pounding like it's been unleashed in his chest; don't look at her! he warns himself. They both gaze inside the crib at the black and white cat, the long ears and golden eyes, lounging about on the plastic mattress with its yellow ducks, its blue daisies, its puffy, cheery red steam engines; the cat lolling on his back like all of this is his, his personal world, white belly exposed. The manager's son has a sudden longing to be there himself, contained and safe, eyes shut.