

Lineage

by John Wentworth Chapin

Her bleached hair pulled into a dark-rooted ponytail, the girl in pajama bottoms pushes a stroller over a patch of brown weeds in the sidewalk and shouts upward, head tilting slightly, the arc of her invective presumably aimed at the little boy and girl ambling halfway down the block behind her, but this foghorn of animosity broadcasts widely and blankets the block with a simmering layer of teenage bile. She pushes her biracial toddler past me and her voice gets even louder; not a Doppler effect, but some insidious sociological one which demands that this childmother make up for in volume the dominion she cannot claim in life, particularly when being observed. The pair behind her shouts back, half-laughing and half-mumbling; this is no argument. This symphony is joined by a new instrument a few moments later, the bellowing of the girl's mother decrying travesty unseen. I trudge up my stoop as this long line walks by. I turn and survey them, backwards and forwards, seeing the invisible grandmother far behind, and her mother as well behind her, seeing into the future the unavoidable stroller pushed by a scowling teen scouring the same landscape with the same howl of failure born from the longing for the line to break.

