

A Lesson

by John Wentworth Chapin

"We never know what you're saying to us," she says. I laugh, because this should be funny, but it's not.

"What a pleasure to know that my pearls of wisdom fall on deaf ears," I say.

"Like that," she says. She's the worst student in my Modern Film class and we're alone at a bar.

She is just a few years younger than I, back in college. She doesn't know how to organize or articulate her thoughts, but she has killer instincts. We watched a film in class and she said something brilliant; the sheep surrounding her stared blankly. So I educated, elaborated, expounded — all the verbs necessary to make her observation an insight.

"No," she said, when I reframed her observation, "that's not what I meant."

The rest of the class chewed its cud. I was left to elucidate or shut up.

"Perhaps you could clarify your point," I offered. She repeated, eerily verbatim, her observation that prompted my diatribe.

"Baaa."

"Moo."

They understood what she was saying. I understood it; but no one understands me. This is what prompted me to follow her after class to this bar and act surprised when I walked in and saw her there. She didn't look surprised; in fact, she casually nodded me over.

"You act as though you expected me," I said.

She shrugged. I understood exactly what she meant.

