

C.M.:

After the Workshop

Mr. Vonnegut, a woman said before the last workshop, *I've never seen a dead body*. The novelist replied, *Just wait*. Meanwhile the janitor, an economist by training, vacuumed the stairwell in the parking garage, cursing the dry wind coming off the mountain, thick with dust and the voices of the missionaries lost on a star-crossed expedition—three old men who could not keep up with the reconnaissance team sent out at dusk to guide the planes dropping humanitarian supplies behind enemy lines; their prayers reminded the janitor of the equations corrected by his thesis director, which were in fact connected to the laws of supply and demand. *Try again*, the professor advised—words the janitor repeated as he emptied the vacuum cleaner. There was nothing more to say about the story of the lost mission—the woman realized that, yes, it was only a sketch, an idea to be developed, perhaps, in another medium—and so the novelist dismissed the class. The students made their way outside in time to see the funeral cortege of a soldier killed by friendly fire begin to circle the block. A trumpet blew, the crowd emerging from the church surged toward the riot police at the entrance to the park, and over the base of the monument to the unknown a priest poured from a silver bowl the blood of the lambs. *Just wait*, he said.