


2021

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Recommended Citation

Kombiyal, Ellen (2021) "Aubade as New Pastoral," *Nelle*: Vol. 4, Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/nelle/vol4/iss2021/9>

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Ellen Kombiyil

AUBADE AS NEW PASTORAL

“When waves appear on opposite shores it means / we are parting”

—dropped lines from Julio Cortázar’s Post Post-Coital, a book that has been wished into existence

We chopped beets for the borscht & all
afternoon sweet steam in the black & white kitchen:

wine glasses full, filling, up from the couch
down again, rotating spots in socked feet,

radiators hissing. The walk home
I can’t remember if I drove or with sneaker prints

in snow drifts walked alone, but the torn-down
marquee flicked out, just like the time a man

followed my sister and me (we weren’t
sure, we looked back but he’d turned

into a dime, flattened behind a lamp post.)
We played Parcheesi till dawn, yearning

for summer & swimming Lake Michigan
(which yes, we did, you kept me to it), the two

of us dressed for a picnic, thermos of ice
brought for the lake. We leapt in where waves broke

over limestone blocks, where tidal flow crashed
us toward rocks, our bodies alive with risk,

with demand, we must press on, swim, no
lady aboard a rowboat counting strokes,

no arms to reach in and lift us, dripping, out.
There was nothing erotic about it, except

the body's own pleasure & destruction. This is
what always happens, I'll stand in a museum

& my hand is a talon sketched by Michelangelo—
yes, it's the way I clutch my pen, the years

crossing & it doesn't make a difference,
you are the same friend I held hands with

at the double feature second-run
—you must understand—& when we kiss

we're kissing all the lovers
we've ever had, all the future lovers.

You must remember how water swallowed
our skin, how each stroke flung droplets hungry

for the sun. Like a scroll of instructions
delivered to manservants bearing

pomegranates (it's detailed in the letter,
the one on which the talon sketch is sent),

palm-leaf fans in marbled halls depict
flies/sweat, steadfast in what we no longer want.