

Two Poems by Michael Cullen

In The Sahel, At Table

As we sit at table comfortably, digesting our food,
We discuss events, problems of this world,
The drought, malnutrition all around us,
Fertility, morbidity, parity of women's reproductive
rates, the circumference of the village children's arms,
Til all is quantified, objectified, operationalized,
Til we have all the facts that lead us all to say,
"Ain't it awful?" while to ourselves we coolly repeat,
"Better them than me." If not for an accident of birth,
that would be making the grim statistics instead of
taking them down.

Pictures

I have been hoarding a stash of pictures
No one knows I have them
I keep them hidden in a file
Locked in a drawer

My fiancée doesn't know I have them
She doesn't know that they come to the house
She doesn't know how I cut them out,
secret them in my room.

I am surprised at myself for this
I look at them sparingly
Only when she's not home
Quietly, alone

When I cut them out, I am astonished
I have become obsessed with these images
I don't want to see them
But I can't help it

Each time I see another photo
Something goes off in my brain
An animal sadness overcomes me
I feel heavy and dead

Each time I look at my growing collection
Of photos taken from the pages of
Our daily newspaper from the Gulf War
A part of me dies.

*NO ONE OVERTAKES HIM
WHO RUNS ALONE*

*A FOOL WITHHOLDS INFORMATION
EVEN FROM HIS OWN LAWYER*

*AN UNFORTUNATE RAVEN LOSES ITS SIGHT
WHEN LOCUSTS RAID*

Amhaic sayings supplied by Yonas Admassu