

Poetry

Cherise A. Pollard
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That's Right

So, this sister throws herself against
the vending machine, enacting the *Oh
hell no* that shoots out of her mouth as she
slams her ass into the machine, redoubles
her efforts, shoving her shoulder into
it. The force is enough to rock it back,
but the bag of chips doesn't fall. *Goddamn,*
she grunts, laughs. *This shit is stuck again.*
Her girlfriends laugh with her, say proudly, *Look
at this bitch!* The fifth time, the snacks drop
into the trough. She will begin to ache
on the way home. After sitting
on the bus for three hours, she might
regret this aggression, but right now, she's
waited such a long time just to get these
damn snacks for her man and her kids that her
body becomes the fist she would thrust
into any prison guards' gut: *Don't
nobody mess with this bitch.*

Diversion

For two hours I have been listening
to the women chatter all around us
when my mom turns, whispers, *Did you see those
boots?* I say *No.* But, follow the others'
gaze to the young sister rocking yellow
snake skin stiletto boots and a matching
outfit: tight school bus bright pants and black tank
top. Our line hums with comments: *Who wears that
to see they man in jail?* Another girl
snickers, *I bet they man say why you wasting
my money on those damn boots?* But some girls
bite their dry lips as they watch her tip on
down to the bus stop. She leans up against
the shelter, so that every man can see.

Old Maid's Rules

I look up to the girl who's stuck
with me. I want to tell her that my fate

should not be feared
'cause I get to do
what I want when I want.
But I don't.
Go 'head, shuffle the deck again.
Let me out.
I move with viral speed
from hand to hand. Each girl
tries to play off disappointment
when she gets me. They wince,
shift me around, a foolish attempt
to make me like all the others.
Don't they know that the deck
is stacked against us?
All of these cards have matches—
the same color, the same number.
Every time we play this game
I watch them go off in pairs,
happy to be chosen.
I could give a damn.

Bio

Cherise A. Pollard, PhD, is an Associate Professor of English at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, where she teaches African American literature, composition, and creative writing. A Cave Canem Fellow, she attended the workshop retreat for African American poets from 1997 to 1999. She also attended the *Callaloo* Poetry Workshop in 2004. Her poetry has appeared in several journals, including *5 AM*, *African American Review*, *Connotations Press*, and *Poem Memoir Story*. In 2006, she was awarded a grant from the Money for Women/Barbara Deming Memorial Fund to support research toward the completion of her first poetry manuscript. Address correspondence to her at cpollard@wcupa.edu.