

**PATRICIA  
CASPERS**

Double  
Negative

I handed over *ain't* as willingly as rain-gullied snails collected after a storm and tried to wrestle the contraction from my cousins—*ain't* too hungry, *ain't* got no milk, *ain't* gonna eat watered cereal again—but it anchored their tongues.

*Don't want no one.* I gave what I *seen*, gave my *humerd* pleases and *cee-ment* heart and turned my hard, mischievous *e* to soft ash, and then gave more: the cousins themselves with their chick-fuzz hair, our summer names spun in sparklers against the stars.

Next went their mothers; aunts with nicotine kisses and *babys* and *sissys* and sunflower seed spittle in a *Pessi* can. Finally, I sent away my siblings and their red-capped devotion, as if we had never stomped empty Buds in burnt July grass, our bare legs splattered with the hot foam of each crush.

I gave all of it for one discombobulated alphabet: *beleaguered*, *ephemeral*, *insouciance*, for a carbon-black tap dance across cellulose, for my place at the front of the class where a student says *I seen*, and the word is a dull *saw* that grates my throat *seen seen seen*—who am I to tople

that domino of loss?

Patricia Caspers is an award-winning poet, columnist, and journalist. Her poetry has been published widely, in journals such as *Ploughshares*, *PANK*, the *Cortland Review*, *Sugar House Review*, and *Quiddity*. She won the Nimrod/Hardman Pablo Neruda Prize for poetry, and her full-length poetry collection, *In the Belly of the Albatross*, was published by Glass Lyre Press (2015).

**TENNESSEE LOVELESS**

*Stay Calm and Scribble On*, 2018  
Ink overlay on giclée, 14 x 14 x 1 1/2 in



COURTESY TENNESSEE LOVELESS; MICKEY MOUSE (C) DISNEY (1)