

THE PASSWORD IS + 2 more

By Joanna Collins

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:

Here is a poet of great delicacy: "Besides, your trigger finger / Is somewhere left of my button / Nope, that's the off switch" "Casualties of a soggy hippocampus" Even if Georgia O'Keeffe wouldn't admit it, Collins does. Follow along, panting by numbers... (Spacing at poet's own) HS

The Password Is

My vagina is a flower!

A snapdragon.

A Venus flytrap.

With a steel reinforced drawbridge
That slams shut sometimes

Every time.

The crash of iron on iron
Reverberates across the water
The jaws of life couldn't force it open

You trace the shape of a petal with your fingertip
"I want to know"

The password is
The password is...

Uh, here it comes again
The snap snap snap

"Spread your lips apart," you said
"Closed mouth kisses make me feel alone
Like pressing my face against the glass
A department store I can't afford"

But what kind of girl come at you wide open?
Like she'll swallow you whole?

The password is

I kept it under my tongue
For as long as I could
Let it soak into my bloodstream
Swished it between my teeth
Until it activated bright red

The password is...

I thought of it later
To ground myself
Like a mantra in a hurricane
I thought of it later when I thought of you
Hoping that it would break the curse

But the trap door was rigged to shut
Trapped in a basement with dying daffodils
Desire cut short by a sudden chokehold

The password is [redacted].

The Sound of Her Voice

Inhale the sizzle and pop
Of my vocal fry
Like cheesy eggs on a griddle
At 2am

Your reward for surviving the night

I'm a nuclear test site
Deep in the desert
I could leave you faceless
Peel your skin clear off the bone

But I won't.
I only sound dangerous

Besides, your trigger finger
Is somewhere left of my button

Nope, that's the off switch

Eat my discarded jokes off the floor
You're so hungry to catch me in the act
The act of being a cunt
<Just like you suspected>
I do have a few naughty notes to self
Tucked into the hem of my skirt
A twisted joke about the king
A burning insurrection

But they all read like riddles to you
The unsophisticated, paranoid eye

"I'm a bundle of endings
With no beginning
A stack of love letters
With no quill
What am I?"

If you ever figure it out
You just might finally make me explode

Drowning in Sap

Casualties of a soggy hippocampus
Wet and porous, the memories slipped through

Maple drenched visions of matching cups
Your dry, naked hands snaking my drain

Surely you loved me
To pull my wet snarled hair from the pipes like that
A king rat, resting in your bare palm

I almost forgot all the grime you left behind

THE POET SPEAKS:

As a 90s kid, my brain marinated in a thick stew of Girl Power pop songs and West Wing quotes during my formative years. This led me to believe that, as an adult, every day would be Lilith Fair and that I would be a witty dynamo like C.J. Cregg. I was going to run shit! My president would care if I lived or died!

Out of the mouths of babes.

I grew up and watched my illusions shatter harder than the economy in 2008. Harder than the glass ceiling that shattered when we finally got our FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT. OH WAIT.

*I discovered the patriarchy, along with the truly shocking truth that not everyone in government is in it for The People, especially when those people are women! Since then, I've been riding the various tidal waves of feminism, trying to answer the age-old question: "What does it mean to be a woman in this world?". Update: I am still trying to figure that out. In the words of Britney Jean Spears, "I'm not a girl, not yet a woman" (yes, reader, I'm 34 years young at the time of this writing). I wrote *The Sound of Her Voice*, *Drowning in Sap* and *The Password Is...* as part of my continued journey to answer this question.*

*I would like to claim that my primary writing influence is THE Toni Morrison, as she is the final word on...words. However, my stylistic inspiration can probably best be described as "Islands in the Stream of Consciousness": the sweet, hopeful notes of Dolly mixed with the chaos of *The Sound and the Fury*. In other words, Very, Very Free Verse. My poetry strives to be the 20-minute Santana guitar interlude in "Smooth". What did stick from Toni is that writing is like a treasure hunt; it's a questioning; an exploration of self and others. I hope that readers revel in the quest with me and don't mind if I lead this feminist party train into a ditch filled with nothing but more questions.*

AUTHOR'S BIO:

*Joanna is a Nashville poet who moonlights (daylights?) as a government attorney. She was the Featured Poet with her poem "King for a Day" in *Nashville Poets Quarterly* 2019 Q4 publication (<https://nashvillepoetsquarterly.com/2019-q4-featured-poet>), and her poems "June" and "Dancing on the Head of a Pin" were included in *Indolent Book's "What Rough Beast Covid-19 Edition"* (<https://www.indolentbooks.com/what-rough-beast-covid-19-edition-04-10-20-joanna-collins/>). Her essay, "Reclaiming My Time" is forthcoming on the online publication, *Funky Feminist*. She is a frequent flyer at Nashville poetry open mics, with Poetry in the Brew holding a special place in her dreamy heart.*

*In February 2020, Joanna took to the stage in "My Angry Vagina" and "Beat the Girl" in *The Vagina Monologues at Exit/In*, benefiting *Thistle Farms*. She, and her original piece, "The Woman Who Made Bob", will be in the upcoming production of *The Mending Monologues*, also presented by *The Nashville Vagina Warriors*.*

Joanna graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology and American studies. She received her Juris Doctorate degree from Vanderbilt University Law School.

One day she will finish her Supreme Court musical.

