

This is an A to Z book, but not in the traditional sense. Here, the reader will not learn how to combat insomnia, or develop techniques in diet and exercise, or midnight tricks, to ease them into dreamland. Actually, it contains short stories designed so a reader could read a story in one session before falling asleep.

THE A TO ZZZ OF FALLING ASLEEP SOME SHORT STORIES AND ESSAYS

by Shannon

Order the complete book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10720.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.

The A



to

Z

Z

of

f

a

l

i

n

g

asleep

Short Stories
and Essays



Shannon

Copyright © 2019 Shannon

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-64438-454-1

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-64438-455-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.

2019

First Edition

Table of Contents

Preface.....	v
A: Attack of Claustrophobia.....	1
B: Bone.....	5
C: Comets.....	11
D: Dream of Snakes.....	18
E: Earthquake.....	21
F: Fiddler on a Tidal Flat.....	26
G: Ghost Creeks.....	33
H: Hendrix!.....	39
I: Indigo Blue - The First Eclipse.....	45
J: Jupiter and Earth, Alone.....	49
K: Koffee with an Alien.....	58
L: Light Ripples.....	86
M: Mangroves.....	92
N: Noise.....	98
O: Octopus.....	101
P: Paris.....	105
Q: Quartz.....	118
R: Rusty, What a Dog!.....	121
S: Six Small Spheres.....	124
T: T, as in “Tango”.....	139
U: U-bolt.....	143
V: Victim of Africa.....	148
W: Water.....	154
X: Xantho.....	159
Y: Year of Freedom.....	163
Z: Zero Time, Onwards.....	168

Dream of Snakes

In a dream, I have a premonition alerting me that at the end of a dream I will be killed by thousands of small venomous snakes. They will be attached all over me, biting me to death. Much later in the dream, I find myself walking alone through a flat, featureless desert of orange sand, with wide views of the sand plain and its far-away horizon. Throughout the dream, I have two concurrent perspectives: one from within myself as I see the events unfolding, and one from outside myself, watching myself as the events unfold.

In the dream, I have been walking in the desert for a long time, focussed on some quest, and feel weary and a little dehydrated. I then come upon a small, square featureless room standing in the middle of nowhere, in this desert, all by itself, isolated. I have an inclination to enter this room. I see there is only one doorway to the room - it has a conspicuous wooden frame but no actual door. Barring the doorway is an old thin man standing on the wooden square stool that belongs to my office. He is naturally tanned with hairless chest, and bare-footed, with thin and wiry legs, and nearly fully naked, but for a slightly oversized loincloth. He wears a large thatched mask, with vertical thatching, that covers his face and extends a little way above his head, and to his mid-chest. His right hand is held up in a stop signal, and from his fingers issues a blue flame that extends like a thin veil of fire, like a fan, nearly touching the upper frame of the doorway. He stands in silence, motionless. I can see that he is watching me from behind the mask.

I stand there for a while a little distance from the room wondering how to get past this man barring the doorway. At the same time, the man still stands motionless, in silence, watching me. We are both motionless and both watching each other in silence, but after a time it occurs to me that since the man appears motionless, and that the fan of blue flame is directed upwards, perhaps I could take a risk and crouch

low, below the level of the man's feet, and inch forward on my hands and knees past the wooden stool. There is enough space between the stool and the door frame to do this, and I just need to take the chance that the man will remain motionless. I stand there a little while further contemplating the possibility of this manoeuvre, and then, as if he had read my mind, the man very slowly rotates his hand and the flame, inscribing a half-circle, until his arm is vertical, with his hand pointing downwards, and the flame now just touching the floor. Alas, the man has rotated the flame into the location that I wanted to slip past. All the time while doing this, the rest of him remained motionless, but he was intently watching my eyes to see my reaction, and to send me a signal that he can still bar my way. As I stand there a little while, comprehending this change of situation, the man suddenly jumps down from the wooden stool, and enters the room and goes out of my sight as though I have become an irrelevancy. The door is now unbarred and I am free to enter. Without fear, I enter the room.

The room is windowless, the walls are blank, and the orange sand forms its floor. I walk around looking at the room, and the old man is loitering all the while, and intentionally has his back to me. On the ground I notice a few small snakes like death adders, like those in my premonition, but these are not in their thousands, not nearly enough as in the forewarning which predicts that I am to be killed by thousands of them. I stand in the room thinking about this, and wondering from where will the remainder of the snakes come. I have, of course, a belief that the premonition will come true.

What happens next happens very quickly, and I am caught unawares as my reflexes acted instinctively. While standing thinking, the old man from behind me taps me on the shoulder, and I turn around in surprise with both my two hands open. He, holding one of the snakes, places it against the palm of my left hand, and I instinctively close it around the snake in a grip, and at the same time he releases his grip of the snake, and takes a quick step back. Now I have a snake in my hand that I can't let go. As long as I hold it in hand, it can't bite me, so there is no danger there, but it is an extra bit of baggage I will now have to

carry. I stand there for a while thinking that this still is not the scene of the premonition, that one snake in my hand is not going to kill me, and anyhow, it is not thousands of snakes attached to me and biting me. Perplexed, after a short while I walk out of the room, and start a long trek across the sand in the direction that I had come.

I then have a view of myself walking away towards the horizon and being nearly out of sight. I also have a view of a trail of my foot prints in the sand, from the most freshly formed set to the oldest ones where I had commenced my journey from the room. The fresh set shows clearly an outline of a shoe, with a flat depression in the sand, and a raised rim of sand outlining the print. However, the older ones show progressive and ominous changes. The next older set has rims still composed of sand but the rims have taken on an organic form. The next set, older still, has sand rims that are now clearly discernible as small snakes. Each snake is still in place around the depression formed by the sole of the shoe, but is stationary and fixed as a ringlet around this depression. The next set has the snakes slightly moved from their position ringing the depression. And the last set, nearest the room, shows depressions in the sand, but with the snakes gone - they have moved off somewhere. Looking at the long string of foot prints starting at the room and disappearing in the distance over the horizon, I see thousands of footprints, and I come to realise that these will be the source of the snakes that were part of the premonition.

Xantho

My name is Xantho. I live along a beautiful tropical seashore, spending most of my time between the crevices of boulders that are covered each day by tides. The shore where I live is richly colourful with brown rocks, black crystals, green crystals, all overlaid with iridescent green high on the shore, and bright yellow green turf of algae low on the shore, with clear warm water on the high tide and a deep blue sky. While I have been here for nearly three years, and have survived to be able to watch two warm summers pass, I have seen many of my tribe and my community eaten by fish and octopus, or attacked by scavenging crabs, and sometimes even captured by people and then carted to cold climates further north to be displayed as freaks in aquaria.

My first recollection here was arriving very, very small, and being swirled by the tide into and around the rocks that were to become my home. I remember grasping a sprig of green turf, as I drifted past, and then settling down between its blades. There were many other small creatures that also got caught up in the forest of turf. Some of these grew larger and moved on. Some died. And some stayed the same size. The microscopic world that I knew then has gone, because since that time I have grown so large. At that time, being so small, the turf was like a forest to me, and I easily hid in its canopy, waiting for each tide to come and go, and evading all the bizarre creatures that wanted to make me their meal. I myself became hungry, and took my first taste of the green turf, finding it to my liking, I made a diet exclusively of it. There has been no need to migrate, as all that I wanted was here, sufficient sunlight, warm water, crevices within which to hide, and plenty of turf to eat. So I stayed, and I grew.

When I was young, I grew and grew, each time discarding the shell that I had outgrown. Somehow this came naturally to me. I remember that as I filled my shell, I eventually would feel cramped, so in a very

safe hiding place, I would pull myself away from it backwards, leaving the husk empty and lifeless, with my new soft shell exposed. Inflating myself from the inside with water, I would wait, undersized, within the soft shell, until it hardened. It always did. And then I had an oversized hard shell which I could slowly fill as I grew. I got to be quite an expert at doing all of this, but I found that as I got older, the need for the moulting of my undersized shell became less. Early on, I saw subtle changes in my shape and colours over the time that I have moulted because, in effect, when I look at the empty husk of my former self, I was able to see myself as others see me. As I grew older, the changes became less noticeable

As a shore crab, I guess I am quite ordinary. I am petite, and female of course, with beautiful yellow patches on my rusty brown shell, and shiny black tips to my claws. What I like most about my claws is the row of small sharp spines arranged along their crest. They give me a sense of ornamentation. I spend my day wandering a short way from the labyrinth of the crevices, searching for fresh turf of green algae to eat. I find that my spade-shaped claw tips are just perfect for cutting the turf, and I can work them like clippers, hold the cut turf, and put it in my mouth.

My community, if one could call it that, is a mixed bunch of creatures, all mostly doing the same as me - eating the turf. Some are crabs, some that I see from a distance are just like me, some are snails, some are fastened to the rocks and look like little tents, with a shrimp-like creature inside. Some eat too much, leaving large swathes of turf decimated, so that the other members of the community and myself have to wander a little from our homes to obtain fresh supplies. Some are indiscriminate in the way they harvest the turf, leaving untidy parts of it here eaten, or there half eaten. I have some favourites amongst the community though, if only for the aesthetics of the surface they leave after they have finished their meal for the day. My favourite is a grazer, a snail, who leaves a meandering path of cut turf. Walking amongst the turf after this snail has eaten, I can see a pathway of neatly trimmed turf, cut to the rock, and showing beautiful patterns of

rasp marks, the patterned path always being neatly bordered by the bright green uncut turf. As you can tell, I am a vegetarian, and I pride myself on leaving an even cut of turf. I can work a large lawn in one day, move on to another patch the next day, and shortly, when I return a few days later, the turf has all regrown!

The biggest danger for me comes at high tide. Just before the high tide arrives, I descend deeply into crevices between the boulders. High tide brings a host of creatures swimming through the water or crawling over the rocks. My biggest fear is the octopus. It comes seeking my kind, sending out feelers and suckers, tasting everything in its path. I try to get wedged in as deeply as I can within the crevices, and even then, there is danger. Octopus can move rocks out of the way to expose any hidden tasty food. So far, I have managed to elude octopus by always being deep in a crevice, with shoulders of rock that can't be budged when it comes hunting. Once I couldn't get deep enough because my favourite place was already taken by another, and I had to remain motionless, secluded and partly exposed in a cavity near the surface. Not an octopus, but a large fish came by, saw my exposed claw, and bit. I shed my claw instinctively, and contracted as tight as I could in the cavity, clasping its walls with my spiny leg tips. The fish moved on. And I had to wait for my next moult before a new, though smaller, claw appeared.

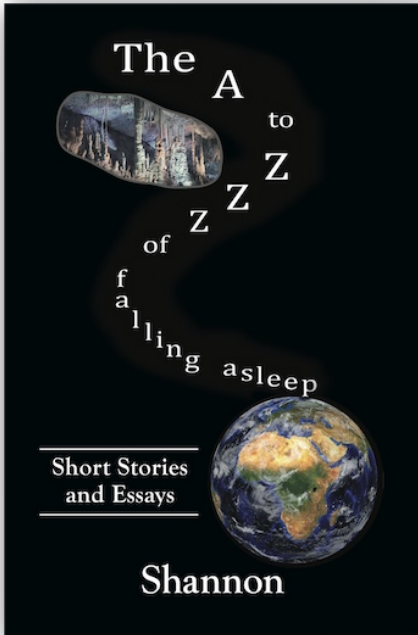
I can remember another time that an octopus came hunting. I could see it from my corner, and it saw me and then ignored all the other creatures of my community and quickly approached me. It tried to evict me from the crevice, but I was tightly wedged in. It tried to slide its feeler behind me to prise me out, but couldn't do so because I was flush against the rock on all sides. That was a lucky escape. Since then, I make sure that I am first into the crevices before the high tide comes, and that I am firmly wedged in there so that no feelers can squeeze past to get behind me.

In spite of the creatures that arrive to try and make a meal of me, I do like the time of high tide. With the rushing water and waves crashing

on the shore, I hear a cacophony of jostling boulders and a regular heartbeat of the sea that gives me a sense of familiarity and belonging. Many small fish come to forage on the turf. I see them when they partly enter the labyrinth. They are blue-and-striped, yellow with black spots, or matt black, each with differently coloured fins. Sometimes, there are brightly-coloured sea snakes, poking their head in, looking for food. When I am safe in my crevice, I can afford to gaze at them.

One day, while I was moulting again, a large crab arrived at the opening of my labyrinth. It also had a rusty brown shell with yellow patches, and shiny black tips to its claws. It was one of my kind, but somehow different - it was larger than me, and its spines were longer and sharper. There was a taste about this crab I had not experienced before. We mated. Later, I found I was bearing thousands of tiny eggs on my feather-like appendages that lay within my folded under-belly. I was in berry. I sensed the tiny eggs grow until they were ready to be cast into the ocean currents. I released them. Who knows how far they went, and whether any returned to my home? It was all an unknown to me, but I repeated this mating once again the following year.

Another year has passed of daily turf harvesting, escaping octopus and fish, and watching the patterns of turf art made by other creatures and I am now quite aged and robust. My moulting has become so infrequent that my colours have faded. My shell also has had time to have a thin film of algae on it, and some barnacles have settled on me, just out of reach of my claws. The barnacles wouldn't be there if I moulted more frequently, and their presence makes life a bit more difficult and dangerous. I cannot lodge into tight crevices as I used to, and I am afraid one day an octopus will be able to squeeze its feeler to behind me. High tide now is full of tension, more than it used to be. Still, I am alive. And each day is still special with the green turf, blue sky, warm water, and the cacophony of the jostling boulders and the rolling sea. And I am glad to be alive, even if it is from day to day.



This is an A to Z book, but not in the traditional sense. Here, the reader will not learn how to combat insomnia, or develop techniques in diet and exercise, or midnight tricks, to ease them into dreamland. Actually, it contains short stories designed so a reader could read a story in one session before falling asleep.

THE A TO ZZZ OF FALLING ASLEEP SOME SHORT STORIES AND ESSAYS

by Shannon

Order the complete book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10720.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.