

EYELIDS OF MORNING

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Zhang Guixing, one of the greatest living sinophone authors, once again returns to the lush rainforests of Sarawak, where the quest for a lost family heirloom becomes a meditation on multi-generational memory, colonial expansionism, rainforest ecology, and the evolutionary history of life on Earth.

At the close of the 1880, a beautiful young woman and her father arrive in the town of Yunlo in Sarawak. Parasol in hand rain or shine, the sophisticated Fang Wu attracts numerous suitors in the frontier town, but only develops affections for Tien Chin-Hung, an ambitious young man seeking his fortune in the resource-rich region. The happiness of the young lovers is cut short when a giant crocodile devours Fang Wu, taking with her the seventy-two carat diamond Chin-Hung has gifted to her. Chin-Hung eventually becomes a wealthy merchant, but he can never forget the lost jewel that symbolizes the love he shared with Fang Wu – a diamond known as the Star of Sarawak.

Eighty years later, various powers converge on Sarawak competing for political dominance, and seeking not only the Star of Sarawak, but also a lost British crown. The grandson of Chin-Hung, Tien Chin-Shu, inherits his grandfather's obsession with the diamond, and assembles a team of young companions to undertake an expedition to recover the family heirloom. Deep in the rainforests of Sarawak, the expedition becomes entangled in the ongoing conflict between communist insurgents and British colonial troops, only surviving through the timely interventions of a mysterious red-haired woman. Seeming to appear and vanish at will, the woman is an enigma who only deepens the foreboding sense that Chin-Shu's fate lies in the hands of forces outside of mere human affairs.



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With *Eyelids of Morning*, Zhang Guixing has once again surpassed himself, producing an epic novel that encompasses everything from rainforest ecology to the colonial history of Sarawak to a cosmological view of the evolution of all life on Earth, shuttling readers from the towns and forests of northern Borneo to the depths of interplanetary space. Under his pen, colonists deliver progress through the barrel of a gun, terrifying beasts lie in wait in the dark recesses of the rainforest, and all living things are but grist for the mill of biological and cosmological evolution. In a world where human endeavors are easily laid to waste by the forces of nature, the fearsome crocodile of Sarawak's rivers, survivor of five mass extinctions throughout ecological history, is perhaps the one fitting symbol of hope, renewal, and self-determination.

With his feet firmly planted in the tropical rainforest – the lungs of the planet – Zhang Guixing, one of the great novelists of the global south, casts his gaze across a century of intercultural commerce and conflict in Sarawak, situates it within a grand vision of ecological and cosmological destiny, and, in relating the tale of an inheritance lost and regained, points the way to humanity's future.

Zhang Guixing 張貴興

Born in Sarawak, Malaysia in 1956, Zhang Guixing came to Taiwan in 1976 to attend university, and has made Taiwan his home ever since. His writing centers on his native land of Borneo, detailing in particular the lives and history of Chinese Borneans. His novels have been awarded every major literature prize in Taiwan, and praised by scholars of sinophone literature worldwide. His previous novel, *Wild Boars Cross the River*, has been translated into French, Albanian, Korean, and Japanese.

EYELIDS OF MORNING

By Zhang Guixing

Translated by Brian Skerratt

Chapter 1

I

It was the grandest coronation ceremony of the twentieth century. In order to leave ample time for planning and preparation on the one hand and to allow a year's time to mourn the late King on the other, Queen Elizabeth II's coronation was held at Westminster Abbey on June 2nd, 1953, fully four hundred seventy-three days after King George VI died and the Queen inherited the throne. The coronation ceremony was planned and managed by the grand Coronation Commission, chaired by the Queen's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh. The coronation was broadcast by television and radio in forty-four languages to thirty million homes worldwide. Sales of television sets in the United Kingdom exploded; one quarter of the population of the world observed a holiday in celebration of the event. Six thousand regional trains and six thousand five hundred long-distance trains brought over two million members of the public to London. Forty-four kilometers of seats were installed along the procession route. Factories in Glasgow raced to weave the longest carpet in history, 57.3 meters long and 5.18 meters wide. Thirty-thousand soldiers from the Commonwealth countries were deployed at the ceremony; public parks air raid shelters left over from the war were repurposed as barracks, temporarily leaving London's children with nowhere to play. To ensure the dignity and orderliness of the ceremony, signs posted in red letters on white backgrounds prohibited soldiers from drinking or engaging in sexual congress during the forty-eight hours preceding the ceremony.

The main ceremony of the coronation took place at Westminster Abbey. Starting with King Harold II in 1066, Westminster Abbey had witnessed the coronations of thirty-nine English monarchs. The abbey was closed for six months, during which time a tramway was built right into the middle of the ancient structure for the delivery of tons of timber and steel. A platform was installed to seat seven thousand, five hundred guests, but the sheer numbers meant that each person had to squeeze into a seat just forty-six centimeters wide. Prime Minister Churchill had his own opinion on matters; in the days leading up to the coronation he gave out chocolates. Homes were painted the colors of the Union Jack. London's streets were decked out in crowns and the symbols of the monarchy. Children played tag wearing paper crowns. The streets were filled with citizens celebrating, sometimes all night long, and others camping out, bundled up against the cold, in order to secure a place where they could feel the proximity of the queen's royal presence.

On May 29th, 1953, the British Commonwealth climbing expedition, guided by the Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, reached the summit of Mt. Everest, the rooftop of the world, becoming the first humans to set foot on the highest mountain peak in the world. The news reached home on the morning of the coronation, sparking off the festivities ahead of schedule.

The *Times* declared: The Empire Stands at the Summit of the World.

II

1953: Queen Elizabeth II of England is crowned; humankind ascends to the summit of Everest for the first time; Stalin passes away; Khrushchev assumes the leadership of the Soviet Union; the Korean Armistice Agreement is signed in Panmunjeom; Cambodia gains independence; Egypt becomes a republic; the Cuban Revolution breaks out; Canada executes a female prisoner (Marguerite Pitre) for the last time; Hollywood releases the first 3D movies; Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck star in *Roman Holiday*; Superman appears as a live-action television show; Pierre Cardin introduces his bubble dress; Winston Churchill and Hemingway take home the Nobel Prize in Literature and Pulitzer Prize, respectively; Wei Jianguo oversees the editing of the first standardized dictionary of modern Chinese, the *Xinhua Dictionary*; Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* premieres in Paris; Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño is born; the English-language literary magazine *Paris Review* prints its first issue; the third volume of Mao Zedong's selected works is published; Osamu Tezuka's *Sapphire Princess* ignites the craze for girls' manga; Ian Fleming publishes his first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*; painter Xu Beihong begins his eternal slumber, the black ink horses from his brush galloping off the page towards distant Himalayan peaks; Ray Bradbury publishes his dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*; Isaac Asimov's first science fiction detective novel featuring Elijah Baley as protagonist, *The Caves of Steel*, appears serialized in *Galaxy* magazine; Shirō Ishii, retired director of the germ warfare division Unit 731, converts his home into a "bang-bang girl club" for servicing American GIs, meanwhile undertaking intensive study of Zen Buddhism; New York Yankee Mickey Mantle hits the longest home run ever recorded; Hugh Hefner founds the men's magazine *Playboy*; a Macau martial arts bout pitting masters of the tai-chi and White Crane styles against each other sets off a wave of new-style martial arts fiction; Kinsey publishes his second report on human sexuality, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*; John Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier marry; the giant oil painting *The Founding of the Nation* is unveiled in Beijing; the Sarawak Liberation League is established on Marxist and Maoist ideals in Malaysia; the General Assembly of the United Nations refuses membership to China; Chinese refugees swarm into Hong Kong; French paratroopers land on the Laotian border; the Soviet Union acquires the hydrogen bomb, and the U.S. and Soviet arms race compels the University of Chicago's *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* to set their "Doomsday Clock" to two minutes before midnight; some fifty thousand cats in Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan, drown themselves in the ocean after eating fish contaminated with methylmercury from a nearby factory; British explorers search for the legendary Himalayan yeti; the Natural History Museum in London announces that the Piltdown Man is a great archaeological hoax, nothing but a human cranium

fitted with a Bornean orangutan's teeth and an African chimpanzee's lower jaw; African American mathematical genius Katherine Johnson joins a working group at NASA; the CIA-sponsored Robertson Panel meets for the first time to discuss UFOs; artificial insemination is successfully carried out using frozen sperm; the double helix structure of DNA is discovered; Edwin Hubble, father of galactic astronomy, passes away; using an asteroid collected at Diablo Canyon, geologist Clair Cameron Patterson measures the age of the earth to be 4.55 billion years old; a 66 million-year-old, gigantic dinosaur fossil is discovered in Brazil; Hugh Everett III, future proponent of the "many-worlds interpretation" of quantum mechanics, graduates from Catholic University of America with a degree in chemical engineering; the Miller-Urey experiment, the classic experiment on the origins of life found in textbooks, is carried out by Stanley Miller and Harold Urey of the University of Chicago and published as "Production of Amino Acids Under Possible Primitive Earth Conditions", sending shockwaves through the scientific community.

III

The sacred objects of the monarchy – the coronation gown, the crown, the scepter, the orb, the spurs, the sword of state, the ring, Saint Edward's Chair, the urn full of anointing oil, the spoon for the oil, and so on – were taken out of storage at the Jewel House in the Tower of London. Meanwhile, the ceremonial gun salutes performed by the Royal Artillery along the riverbank by the Tower's south wall gave this ancient castle, the residence of kings from William the Conqueror until James I, a boisterous yet eerie quality, which lasted from the eve of the coronation to the day of the event.

The Tower, constructed in 1087, was not only a royal residence, palace, and castle of Her Majesty the Queen, a witness to the succession of dynasties from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance; it was also a fortress, armory, treasury, mint, palace, astronomical observatory, bunker, chapel, menagerie, and prison. Every slab of granite, every massive stone imported from France, had a story of palace intrigue, a bloody feud, buried beneath it. Ordinarily the spirits of those imprisoned ministers and executed courtiers, the ghosts of political dissidents, wouldn't make themselves known. But over the course of those several days, they couldn't be contained.

The most frequently sighted was the mother of Queen Elizabeth I, Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn. Charged with eighty-one counts of treason and adultery, she was decapitated by a French executioner. English executioners were often unable to perform the deed with a single stroke; they would chop and chop with their axe before the head would fall off. Since Anne was sensitive to pain, King Henry hired a French swordsman at great expense to perform the execution with a keen sword. The night before Elizabeth II's coronation, Anne Boleyn appeared holding her head under her arm, riding circles around the Tower in a coach driven by a headless horseman, stopping occasionally to chat with the guards, who strove to maintain their composure. When someone asked the guard what the queen talked to him about, he said the queen asked him the name of the French swordsman, saying she felt she was right to choose death by the sword.

Of course, no matter how deft the Frenchman's stroke, she had still felt the agony as her body was mutilated. Still, as she had been able to suppress the convulsions of her butchered flesh spasming outward from her severed spine, and prevent the urine from spraying out from her crotch, she had at least preserved a modicum of dignity.

Another headless ghost of noble birth was Henry VIII's charming fifth wife, Catherine Howard, another adulteress. When she strolled about the Tower's yards and corridors clad in a white robe, her head held in place precariously by her two hands, even the guards had to admire her bearing and beauty. With her head swollen up like a hag's cauldron and her delicate neck dangling below it, she looked like an hourglass, the blood spurting from her severed head down to her lovely body like the fine sands within.

When Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, saw the executioner coming for her on May 28th, 1541, she turned and ran. The executioner pursued her, hacking at random, and the beautiful, resolute, nearly seventy-year-old countess died a grisly death. Every year on May 28th, for over five hundred years, the Tower guards have heard the countess's wailing. In 1953, the year of the coronation, the countess wailed from May 28th until June 3rd, seven nights.

Twelve-year-old Edward V and his ten-year-old brother the Duke of York walked through the Tower grounds holding hands, dressed only in their nightgowns. Towards the end of their short lives they were imprisoned in the infamous Bloody Tower. This time, the ghosts of the two boys expressed their agitation in novel ways: every traveler visiting the Tower on the day of the coronation found two ghostly boys in nightgowns appearing in their holiday photographs.

On the eve of the coronation, the polar bears, wolves, rhinoceroses, tigers, leopards, and cougars once held captive in the Royal Menagerie also roamed the Tower, while the stone lions and baboons at the entrance and atop the walls were repeatedly seen to change postures and howl at the sky. The guards witnessed a group of Victorian travelers feeding live cats and dogs to the caged lions and tigers. A visitor from the age of Henry III danced with excitement in front of the leopard's cage, calling for the keeper to wash off those dirty spots. Some tourists from the time of King John – it was King John who founded the menagerie – were earnestly debating in front of a particularly humungous beast, whose long, fleshy nose and soft, oversized ears led them to suspect the monster's penis was located on its head.

Seven ravens, their secondary flight feathers clipped, walked the Tower Green with heads raised; they were in the care of the royal Assistant Ravenmasters, a group of functionaries clad in tall hats and black and red uniforms. According to legend, if the ravens ever left the Tower, the kingdom would collapse, so Charles II issued an edict that the Tower should always keep at least seven ravens on its premises, to ensure British prosperity and prevent subjugation to foreign powers. Over the course of several hundred years of power struggles, executed royals and nobles often became morsels for their delectation. Fed on a diet of fresh meat, the seven grotesquely fat ravens, with their sleek, lustrous feathers, led a privileged life much like that of the royal family, and like the members of the royal family each raven had a noble name. They were capable of uncanny imitations of a dog's barking. The Ravenmaster charged with their care was able unflinchingly to identify each one by name from its appearance and call. On June 2nd, 1953, they

roved the green as usual, their life of ease unaffected by the coronation of the queen, and the grisly ghosts and ceremonial fusillade that created such an uproar in London generally did nothing to diminish their fondness for barking.

Throughout the whole of the Tower, it was only the planetrees and elms swaying in the warm evening breeze, along with the ivy scaling the Bloody Tower, that contributed some small touch of festivity to the scene.

IV

A shepherd lugged a sheep under each arm, looking for the best spot to allow the queen to view his ovine companions, painted red, white and blue for the occasion, as she rode from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey in her golden carriage. He wore a straw hat with a broad brim that covered his ears and half his face. His features were indistinct, further obscured by a chest-length beard and stringy hair that reached to his knees. He wore patched denim trousers and a tan hunting vest covered in pockets. His arms and chest were bare, revealing numerous tattoos. He seemed to be very tall, though he was constantly stooping in order to appear less conspicuous in the crowd, and yet people were constantly gaping up this giant, like ostriches craning their necks to get a look at a bashful giraffe. He made the sheep tucked under his arms look like rabbits. Still, it wasn't his physique that attracted so much attention as it was the pipe stuck between his lips: its bowl was the size of an ale glass and its stem was like the root of an old tree, as long as the shepherd's arm, resembling a Neanderthal's bone weapon. Although he was clenching the bit in his mouth, the shepherd kept propping up the bowl with his palm, suggesting the even the giant's jaw couldn't support the pipe's weight. A dense, acrid smoke redolent of excrement was emitting from the shepherd's mouth, causing those nearby to scramble clear. A few old folks who were unable to get away in time simply gave up, plopping down on the sidewalk. As the shepherd continued to puff enormous mouthfuls of smoke, the excremental odor intensified. A wave of agitation began to grow in the crowd; obscenities were uttered. It was speculated that the sheep in the giant's embrace must have long since lost consciousness in the haze.

A child borne on the back of a passing carpenter reached out his hand and poked the shepherd's arm. The shepherd didn't react. The child poked harder, accidentally stabbing the buttocks of the sheep under the shepherd's arm. The sheep suddenly came to, bleating coquettishly: *baa*. Its partner responded, equally coquettish, with two bleats of its own: *baa, baa*. The shepherd turned back to look at the child, but the boy couldn't make out any features beneath the shepherd's broad straw hat, apart from a nose floating like an iceberg in the shadows.

"Excuse me sir, might you be visiting from abroad?" asked a photographer in a smart-looking suit at the shepherd's side, inspecting the tattoos on the shepherd's arm with curiosity.

The shepherd cast the photographer a wordless glance, and when the photographer raised his camera, the shepherd reached out, covered the lens with his hand, and shook his head. As the shepherd walked away, though, the photographer aimed at his back and pressed the shutter. The shepherd whirled around and once again seized hold of the camera. With one

squeeze of his five fingers, there came the sound of shearing metal, and when the shepherd released his grip, the lens fell to the pavement in shards. The photographer could only watch the shepherd walk away in silent astonishment.

V

The weather was poor on the day of the coronation, and the hoped for sun and blue skies failed to appear. At eight in the morning, a fine drizzle still floated on the breeze. The carriage of the Lord Mayor of London was the first to set out from Buckingham Palace for Westminster Abbey, accompanied by a guard holding a spear. The lengthy procession following behind the golden carriage of Queen and Prince Philip included members of the royal family, the Speaker of the House of Commons with his ceremonial staff, the Royal Governors of various colonies, the Prime Minister, and the heads of state of the Commonwealth nations. The roadway was packed on both sides with citizens waving Union Jacks. The Queen rode a carriage produced for George III in 1762, plated in twenty-four-carat gold, weighing four tonnes, and pulled by eight Windsor Greys. It set out from Buckingham Palace at a speed of five kilometers per hour, clustered around by an escort of Royal Guards and representatives of the armies of Commonwealth nations, and slowly proceeded to Westminster Abbey. Like Santa Claus's twelve reindeer, the Windsor Greys each had an elegant name: Cunningham, Tovey, Noah, Ted, Eisenhower, Snow White, Tipperary, and McCreery. Some enthusiasts in the crowd were even able to call out to the horses by name.

The Queen's white gown was embroidered with the symbols of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the Commonwealth, and decorated with gold and precious stones, just as her wedding gown had been six years earlier. She wore a crimson velvet mantle around her shoulders and King George IV's State Diadem, which was inlaid with diamonds and pearls. Queen Victoria's diamond necklace rested on her neck, and she carried a bouquet of white flowers native to England – lilies of the valley, orchids, and carnations – with the addition of tropical *stephanotis*.

The weight of the opulent decorations adorning the carriage forced the horses to shuffle their gait, and although the wheels were wrapped in shock-absorbing plastic, the body of the carriage and the leather straps hanging off it still shook considerably, like a fleck of duckweed drifting on the waves. Not ten minutes into the journey, the haughty young woman riding on the carriage furrowed her brows, dizzy with nausea. Although the golden carriage spent four hours winding across most of London, any television viewer tuned to the event could attest that the Queen remained bolt upright throughout, and even nodded and smiled to the crowd on occasion.

George IV has commissioned the new crown to be made in 1820, at age fifty-seven, when his long wait for the throne had ended. The new crown was inlaid with 1,333 diamonds, arranged into a rose, a thistle, and a clover leaf, symbolizing England, Scotland, and Ireland; their total weight came to three hundred twenty-five carats. One hundred sixty-nine pearls were embedded in the crown's base. When George IV walked into Westminster Abbey, the crown looked like a phoenix sleeping upon a hat of swan's down. King George's train was carried by eight sons of high

nobility and attendants, providing a frame in which the crown looked even more delicate and enchanting.

Among the multitude of precious objects in the Queen's collection, George IV's crown was in a class of its own. It was made for a king's coronation, but it was so gorgeous and feminine that it was rarely worn by subsequent kings; it was rather queens and queen consorts who treasured it. The portrait on the first postage stamp in history was a profile of Queen Victoria wearing George IV's crown. The crown also made appearances with the reigning queen in all kinds of different settings: departing Buckingham Palace to attend the yearly State Opening of Parliament, taking official portraits, designing new stamps, minting new coins, etc. The image of the Queen in George IV's crown had become the personification of the ancient, magnificent empire deeply implanted in the hearts of people around the world.