

PETER YELDHAM

DRAGONS  
IN THE  
FOREST

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## PREFACE

Some years ago I spent a weekend with Alex Faure and his wife Winifred, to research part of his life that spanned the war years with Japan, from 1941 to 1945. Alex is French, but was born in Japan of a French father and Russian mother. He grew up in Yokohama. In his last year at school and about to go to Harvard University in America, the war broke out and prevented this.

He spent the entire war years in Japan, where he was classified as a neutral foreigner, and told me of his amazing life there when American planes were bombing Tokyo into ruins. My publishers at the time, Pan Macmillan wanted me to give the story an Australian flavour, so with some concern, but with Alex's permission, I added some fiction to his life. The book was published as "Land of Dreams" in 2002, and later republished by Penguin.

But I always felt it was a great pity I'd been persuaded to add fiction to what was an exciting and authentic story. So here is the original manuscript, with excerpts from Alex's diary documenting his survival as a *gaijin* — a European — in wartime Yokohama and Tokyo, and later when all foreigners were forced to take up residence in the unique mountain retreat of Karuizawa. It was here that sex became the only game in town for this colony of neutral

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Europeans, as the chances of invasion became closer, and threats to use the men and women as hostages threatened their lives. This is how Alex Faure, a schoolboy from the age of nineteen, lived just a step ahead, but always endangered by the wartime laws and the *Kempetai* police, while romancing girls in the bars of the Ginza, and seeking dragons in the enchanted forest.

Peter Yeldham

2015

## KARUIZAWA: NOVEMBER 1941

The streets of the resort were empty, the air chilly with the onset of winter, the town unnaturally silent. There were no voices, no sound of bicycles or the shared laughter of their riders in the twisting lanes. From the verandah of the house he could see far off mountain peaks, their tips powdered with snow against a gloomy sky. The landscape was bleak; peach trees bare of blossom, the slender birch abandoned by birds who would not return to nest until the spring.

For most of his life Alex had known this village. He and his friends had chased dragonflies and collected cicadas here. Since childhood it had been a haven; each July they'd migrated to Karuizawa in the long school vacation. Perched in the hills 1,000 metres above sea level, its idyllic climate had seen it transformed from a rustic community to a privileged retreat of chalets and villas, a place for him of summer memories. He had never been here at this time of year, with the gardens deprived of colour and gaunt trees stripped of their foliage.

The only familiar feature was the distant conical-shaped volcano that dominated the view. Over a century and a half ago it had detonated in a fierce eruption, and the resulting lava field — called *Onioshidashi*, the devil's discharge — had become a popular tourist

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site with its monolithic shape, like a moon crater. The volcano still erupted at times, but as if exhausted by old age it was a mild effusion sprinkling nothing more dangerous than a cascade of sand. It was a comical sight to see people huddled beneath umbrellas, taking shelter from this almost invisible discharge. But today there was no sign of people, and the volcano known as *Asama-yama* lay slumbering.

He wondered again why he and his father had come here. It was like a ghost town; the Mampei Hotel closed, restaurants vacated, their tables and chairs stacked away, and holiday houses locked until the summer. Before that time local farmers would make them ready, ensuring gardens were weeded and lawns cut before owners arrived from Tokyo, Yokohama, or distant Shanghai. Within days of this influx there would be invitations exchanged to parties and dances, likely partners picked out for the chance of a summer romance, and from June to August the tennis courts would be crowded, and the town thronged with bicycles. Everyone in Karuizawa, the very rich, the diplomats, even the various embassy staff and their ambassadors all rode bicycles, for the terrain was flat, the streets sinuous and far too narrow for easy access by cars. It was curious to be here without the bike riders or the sound of their bells. But if this winter visit felt unusual for Alex, the strangest part of it was being alone like this with his father.

In the living room of their cottage was a rarely used fireplace. Alex helped his father to gather wood in the large forest directly behind their house; it evoked memories, for this woodland had been his private playground as a child, where he'd vividly imagined that wild animals and dragons roamed. He and his father stacked the wood then lit a fire.

“Good to see the place again. Far too long since I was last here. Ever since your mother and I chose to go our separate ways.”

Hardly “chose”, Alex thought, but he said nothing. It was more than three years now since all their lives had changed. In that time he and his sister had seen little of him. The combination of distance, their mother’s hostility, their father’s devotion to the new woman in his life and his preoccupation with business had made regular encounters difficult. So the sudden invitation to take the mountain train to Karuizawa and spend a few days together, had come as a surprise. One not welcomed by his mother.

“Karuizawa? Why?” was her first question.

“I don’t know, Ma, but I’m going.”

“Ridiculous. Who in their right mind would choose to go up there in winter? It’ll be freezing.”

It was indeed — freezing. *Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass Buddha*, he thought, and grinned at the prospect of telling this to his friends when he returned to Yokohama.

“Everything all right at home?” his father asked.

“Yes, father. How is it at your home?”

Edward Faure, about to rebuke him, reminded himself his son was soon to be 19. Entitled to make such a remark.

“Peaceful,” he said, with a trace of a smile. Recalling the anger and uproar of his parents’ separation, Alex returned a smile. “But certain things are happening, which is why I needed to talk to you. We may not have another chance to meet like this.”

“What things?” Alex asked.

“I’m sure you know there’s going to be a war.”

“We know there are rumours. What we don’t know is whether to believe them.”

“Take my advice,” his father said, “believe them.”

“When? How long before it might happen?”

“Soon. No-one can predict for sure. But you’ll be safe. As French



citizens, you and Mathilde will be classified as neutrals.”

“What about Mama?”

“She’s French by marriage. White Russian by birth, and therefore considered stateless. If any petty bureaucrat tried to make trouble, my money would be on her.”

“Mine, too,” Alex said, and they both laughed. The room was becoming warmer. It was companionable in front of the fire, the late afternoon darkening outside, the wood crackling in the hearth.

“I’m going to ask you to break the news to her and your sister that I’ll be going to Saigon.”

“Another business trip?”

“No. Rather more permanent this time,” his father said.

“Permanent?” Alex was startled. “You surely can’t mean that, Papa. How long will you be away?”

“I don’t know. Certainly for as long as the war lasts. I haven’t any choice, Alex. I have to leave Japan.”

“Why?”

“To avoid being arrested. I don’t mean by ordinary police. I’m talking of the Tokko.”

Alex felt a chill. The *Tokko*, the special high police, investigated major crimes against the State. They and the Kempeitai were feared organisations with unlimited power, akin to the German Gestapo.

“Papa, for God’s sake, I asked you why?”

His father hesitated for a moment.

“In 1939, when war broke out in Europe, I formed a group to keep watch on German shipping in Kobe Harbour.” He saw Alex’s startled expression, and smiled. “Nothing spectacular, but we tried to help. When France was overrun and General de Gaulle became leader of the Free French, this came to his attention. You remember he appointed me his representative in Japan?”

"I remember. But nobody took the idea seriously. Not even you!"

"Who said?"

"You did. You told everyone you were an ambassador-at-large without a portfolio or an embassy."

"I had to give that impression. It was one of de Gaulle's typically grandiloquent gestures. But I assure you I did take it very seriously."

"What do you mean?"

"He sent me proof of terrible things happening under the German and Vichy regime in France. So I had little choice. For months I've been circulating a newsletter for members of the Free French all over the Far East. The security police suspect this. Each day I'm expecting they'll arrest me. Ingrid is terrified."

"Jesus Christ," Alex said softly. Until that moment he'd had no idea. All of a sudden he felt inarticulate but strangely proud of his father.

"Up here seemed the best place to talk about these matters. And I did want to spend some time with you ... just in case we don't see each other again ... for a while, I mean."

"Will you leave soon?"

"Very soon."

"What if they try to stop you?"

"I'll protest I'm neutral, and hope it creates a delay. Enough to give me time. It's well known I have interests in Indochine and I've leased premises for a new company. I've spread the word I'm going to Vietnam to sign contracts, and select a manager. In other words, doing everything possible to make it look like just another business trip."

"They might come to the house — question the servants."

"They've been doing it. I'm sure the gardener is their informant. So I've told them all I'll be back for Christmas. I've even made

arrangements for a New Year's Eve party by issuing invitations. If the Tokko feel I'm returning, they may wait to collect more evidence. In Saigon I hope I'll be out of their reach. At least I have protection there — some useful friends in high places.”

“When do you go?”

“In three days time. A cargo ship from Kobe, sailing via Manila. I wish we could fly, but there are no available aircraft. And it might look suspicious, too much like running away.”

“At least you can't go by train,” Alex said, unable to prevent himself. His father smiled. It was an odd smile, with almost a trace of melancholy as he gazed at the fire.

“You can't forget that day, can you?”

“Can anyone?”

“It wasn't exactly my finest hour,” Edward Faure said quietly, and Alex felt a moment of affection for him. Not his finest hour? It had been an awful and farcical day. The culmination of his parents' 15-year marriage should have been a sad event; instead, it was an occasion more memorable for its outrage and absurdity.

It was to be a secret and a surprise. Which it was, but not in quite the way anyone expected. His mother had spent a considerable time on the telephone and visiting the travel agent, finally confiding to Alex that it was definite. A cable confirmed it. His father had left Paris the previous day by train, which was to make a brief stop in Berlin, then cross Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow, and in six days time it — and he — would arrive in the port of Vladivostok.

“And from there he takes the steamer to Kobe,” she said smiling, then cautioned him to secrecy as they heard Mathilde arrive home. It was to be a surprise for his sister's 10th birthday, which happily coincided with the day of their father's return.

“Why are you both looking at me like that?” Mathilde had asked them, “Is something going on?” Their mother had told her not to be so silly; there were no secrets in this family.

But it was a difficult six days, for Alex felt the thrill of his father’s imminent arrival, and judging by the way his mother behaved, humming tunes and laughing a lot, she felt the same. Meanwhile his troublesome sister kept constantly asking when Papa would be home.

“I don’t know,” Alex had to say, “I suppose he’ll write and tell us when he’s finished all his business.”

“But it’s been ages.”

“He had lots of people to see in Paris and London, and several other countries to visit. I expect he’ll be back in about a month.”

“A month! That’s unfair! He can’t! He’ll miss my birthday!”

Alex was dying to demonstrate his superior status as an elder brother by telling her, but knew he had to remain silent. During their father’s long absence they had each received postcards extolling the virtues of the luxurious train journey to Paris, and how vast the Russian Federation was, with all its republics being twice the size of the United States. Later they’d had postcards from Berlin, where he said he had seen a Nazi parade and heard Adolph Hitler speak, and how it was all very formidable, and in fact rather chilling.

Alex managed to keep the impending news of the arrival to himself, and on the day in question his sister had been told they were going to a restaurant near the harbour for a birthday lunch. They had a window table with a view, and when she asked why they had chosen to come here, their mother said harbours were fascinating places; ships came in from all over the world, and one never knew who one might meet. It was about then the observant Mathilde realised there was more to this than just a lunch.

Alex could remember every detail. The steamer arriving at the

dock, the people disembarking, and all of a sudden a familiar figure that his sister recognised with joyous incredulity.

“It’s Papa,” she’d said, and rushed forward to hug him.

“Mathilde!” He’d been astonished by her arrival into his arms. “What a wonderful surprise!”

“Darling, darling Papa! You’re my birthday treat!”

By then Alex had noticed his father was accompanied by a tall, slim and good-looking lady, wrapped lavishly in furs. He also guessed his mother had noticed the lady, and that his father had not expected this family welcome. But he was doing his utmost to conceal this.

“Marie and Alex!” He embraced his wife circumspectly and shook hands with Alex. Then he introduced the woman he’d just escorted down the gangway. “This is Fraulein Ingrid Krause,” he said, “we met on the train. Fraulein, may I introduce my wife and children.”

The Fraulein said how delighted she was, as Monsieur had spoken so frequently and with such affection for his family. It was during this that a porter brought a large trolley laden with suitcases, all with labels, some belonging to their father and others to the lady. Marie Faure went and looked very closely at the cases, studied the labels on them, then turned and slapped her husband’s face.

“You bastard.” She said it quietly, but both children heard her. “Met on the train, did you, you lecherous old goat? So why does her luggage have the same Paris hotel labels as yours?”

“Ah ... well ...”

He got no further than that before she slapped him again. By then it was apparent to other disembarking passengers that a serious domestic event was taking place.

“Bastard!” she repeated, not at all quietly this time, and interest in the situation grew. Mathilde was bewildered and close to tears. Their

father was growing anxious at the attention they were creating.

“Marie please. You mustn’t misunderstand. Ingrid and I are just good friends.”

It was clearly the worst thing he could have said, and provoked a loud tirade in Russian directed at the elegant German lady. While Alex only knew scraps of the language, he did remember some words and later looked them up in the dictionary, and in this way was able to gather his mother was calling her a cheap rotten tart — as well as a two-faced harlot, a trollop and a conniving German cow.

And lots of other things, by the look on his father’s face, as he nervously switched into French and finally admitted that Ingrid was his mistress, and he was shocked by his wife’s behaviour, having never anticipated such a display in front of others, let alone their children.

“You just hoped to sneak her into a cheap hotel, as cheap as possible, so you could call in each day and play tootsie, a bit of morning glory in the afternoon. That’s what you had in mind, you oversexed treacherous rat.”

“Steady on, Marie. Don’t be absurd.” Their father was struggling to retain his dignity, ignoring the onlookers who all seemed entranced by what they were overhearing. “As a matter of fact, Ingrid and I have discussed this, and she agrees I should talk to you privately and make a personal and discreet suggestion.”

“I can just imagine!”

“No you can’t, Marie. We’ll talk of it later.”

“We’ll talk of it now. What suggestion?”

“I’d actually prefer to talk of it later.”

“Now,” she had insisted.

“Very well,” he’d shrugged. “It was never my intention to be secretive about this. If you’d take the trouble to know her, you’d

find Ingrid is a very nice person. And so what I propose is we give it a trial.”

“Give what a trial?”

“I really think we should wait for more privacy” he looked at her helplessly. “But if you don’t agree ...”

“Give what a trial?” she demanded insistently.

“The idea of Ingrid moving into our house, and the three of us living together as a family. Er ... that is ... with the children, of course.”

Alex was mesmerised, watching his mother. She seemed to have run out of words to say. Her mouth opened, but for once nothing emerged. His father appeared to think this a good omen, and hurriedly went on to explain what he had in mind.

“You see, I have to admit I’m in love with Ingrid. Mad about her, in fact. I simply can’t get enough of her.” He seemed oblivious of Alex and Mathilde gazing at him and reacting to this statement. “But then I can’t get enough of you, either. I’m very fond of you, Marie ...”

“Fond?”

“No — that’s the wrong word. Not fond.”

“Fond,” she repeated again, as if it was an obscenity.

“No, no. More than fond,” he pleaded. “I’m still in love with you — in fact I’m besotted by you. That’s the word. Besotted — by you both. I’m in a cleft stick, unable to choose between you — so the solution seems obvious. After all, a *menage a trois* is simply a love affair between three people. You and me and Ingrid ...”

“What!!!”

“All three of us ... living together in harmony.”



“Harmony!” Alex gazed at the fire in the grate, vividly recalling his mother’s outrage and every moment of that bizarre day. He could still hear the fury of her reply. He had not realised the extent of her vocabulary or capacity for action. By nightfall she’d made arrangements; their belongings were packed, a taxi was waiting. She had gathered her two children, and left him.

“Alex?”

He turned from his study of the flickering flames. His father was looking at him curiously. “Yes, Papa?”

“I thought you were asleep.”

“No, just watching the firelight. Thinking.”

“A lot to think about — with this damned war so certain.”

“Yes.”

“Ingrid and I will miss Kobe. God knows when we’ll be back.”

“Ingrid’s going with you?”

“Of course. I wanted her to stay here, but she refused.”

“I thought she didn’t care for Saigon.”

“She cares for me,” his father said. And indeed she did, for after the fury of the separation, he and Ingrid had lived together ever since, and seemed happy. Although it was difficult to say so — in fact, downright dangerous to even mention at home — but Alex quite liked her.

“Time we got some sleep. About Saigon, it might be best not to tell your mother yet.”

“You think she’ll mind?”

“Not in the least. But she has lots of friends at the Yokohama Country Club, and enjoys a gossip. I’ll send a message when we’re safe in Indochina.”





Alex slept badly that night, aware of the house growing damp and cold after midnight when the supply of firewood was exhausted. Long before dawn, he lay awake and restless, uneasily visualising his father under arrest and facing interrogation. The *Tokko* were a unit known for their brutality. It was definitely not a time to come to the attention of them or any other police authority.

Although his family were not really involved, there had already been one rather alarming incident. Less than a month earlier the Kempeitai, the feared military police, had arrested a friend of his mother's. Richard Sorge, a leading journalist and prominent figure in the cloistered foreign circles of Tokyo and Yokohama, was now in Sugamo Prison awaiting trial, charged with espionage.

It had come as a bombshell to the European community, but all the facts seemed to indicate he had spent years posing as a spy for his native Germany, working as a double agent for the Soviet Union and feeding information to Moscow. Rumour abounded that with his social connections he was an intimate of the German Ambassador, and believed to have alerted Stalin to Hitler's planned invasion of Russia. If true, it would mean his certain execution.

Sorge had several times visited their home, and once, about six months ago, Alex had arrived home from school earlier than usual, and met him as he was about to leave. The journalist had expressed a rather breezy surprise at Marie having brought up a son. Alex had not liked his patronising manner, or what seemed a possessive attitude towards his mother. He knew that Sorge, chief correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, was known for his sexual exploits and hedonistic lifestyle.

He'd watched as his mother walked him to their front gate, and how she stood there waving as he left. Later, she commented that he was an amusing and interesting man whom she sometimes met at

the Yokohama Country Club. He had come for afternoon tea. After asking why, Alex was told he was hoping to improve his Russian, hence his reason for the visit, she explained. When news of his arrest swept the foreign community she openly expressed her belief it was a mistake. But in the weeks since, as it became apparent he was not just a journalist — and certainly not an innocent — she had stopped mentioning his name. Alex wondered if his father knew about the amusing and interesting Richard Sorge.

Early next morning they boarded the train to Tokyo. They bought food and newspapers at the station, and for much of the journey each was immersed in the English language version of the *Nippon Times*. As so often in the past two years, the war in Europe occupied the headlines. It seemed as if Hitler had victory in his grasp. His armies were at the gates of Leningrad, his air force bombing Britain into submission, while his fleet of U-boats were cutting British supply lines. It was a matter of time, according to the editorial of the day, before he ruled the entire continent.

There was no news of an impending Pacific conflict; on the contrary, the paper was optimistic. The visit of Japanese diplomats to Washington for talks with the State Department was considered a significant move towards peace, and given great prominence.

“Don’t believe a word of that,” his father said, leaning across to tap the story Alex was reading. “Now Prince Konoe has been ousted and General Tojo is prime minister, there’s no chance of peace. This is a war cabinet Tojo has chosen. He’s a militarist, not a peacemaker or diplomat.”

It was noon when they reached Tokyo Central, and Alex accompanied his father to the waiting Kobe express. The train was

hissing steam, the guard's flag poised to signal departure.

"Take care," his father said.

"You too, Papa. You and Ingrid, both of you take good care."

"We will. Look after your mother. My love to Mathilde."

Carriage doors slammed. The engine belched smoke. Alex watched the train leave, wondering how long it would be before they met again.

That night at home he wrote about their meeting in his diary. It was safe to express personal opinions, for the diary was a new acquisition, one with a lock and key that kept it safe from any intrusion by his mother or sister. He recorded his hope for their safe arrival, and when news came that the freighter they travelled on had reached Saigon, the diary expressed his relief at their escape.

In another part of the Pacific a large fleet had already been at sea for eight days. An armada of warships and aircraft carriers, it grouped north of the Volcano Islands, then bypassed Midway, and headed in the direction of Hawaii with great caution. Every vessel's radio transmitter was sealed to preserve strict silence. Protected by the massive convoy of battleships, the aircraft carriers were laden with a strike force of 350 bombers with fighter escorts. As Alex was to write in his new diary, the Japanese had long ago turned from making toys.

At dawn of Sunday, December 7th, they stood in their allotted positions to the north of the Hawaiian island of O'ahu. The sun was soon to rise over the unsuspecting playgrounds of Waikiki beach and Diamond Head. As it did, coded orders launched the first wave of aircraft in a surprise attack. A second and a third strike were to follow.

Before the morning was gone, the fortified US bases with its

aircraft and the American Pacific fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbour had been almost totally destroyed.

ALEX'S DIARY: DECEMBER 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941

*Today the war began! I've just heard the news on the radio. I was trying to finish my homework in English, and at the same time listen to a talk to improve my Japanese. I often use the radio for this purpose. The Marianist Brothers at St Joseph's teach us in English and French, but speaking Japanese at school is forbidden. Which is a pretty stupid rule, since this is where I was born and where my family lives, and on leaving school I want to get a job here. But all the best jobs in the East go to those fluent in languages, and if you only speak coolie Japanese picked up from the cook or an amah — then you won't get far.*

*So this is why I was listening to the radio and heard the program interrupted by a fanfare. Then came a speech by the Prime Minister, General Tojo. He said the Americans had attacked the Japanese fleet without warning, so the navy and air force had responded bravely and inflicted a resounding blow on the enemy. Their fleet had been crippled and it was a glorious victory. He finished by saying the war would be over in a few months, and Japan would triumph because they had the divine blessing of the Emperor.*

*I went looking for my mother and sister to break the news. They were not in the house, so I went to the kitchen to ask our cook where they were. Before I could speak I realised that Cook-san was sitting without her blouse, feeding her daughter Junko. I'd heard about this, but it was the first time I'd seen her large tits, and Junko chewing away at them like a big calf hanging on an udder. Junko is nearly six years old! I said "Excuse me cook-san," and backed out of there as fast as I could.*

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“Dreadful,” Mama said when I broke the news.

“You mean the war or cook-san?” I asked.

“Both. The war’s terrible, but we expected it. Cook-san is disgusting and I’ve told her so. Haven’t I, Mathilde?”

“Yes, Mama,” my sister said, “but she takes no notice.”

“She’ll have to go.”

“You’ve been telling her that, too. For years. She never takes any notice.”

“It’s a pity, she’s such a good cook,” was my mother’s stock answer.

The news, of course, was all through St Joseph’s next day. The teachers assured us there was no cause for panic. Our Catholic school and its staff were completely safe, they said. Our American teachers were considered non-combatants. Life would continue as before. The war would be no excuse for not attending school on time, nor for not doing our homework.