

# **The Viper**

*Written by*

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## Chapter One

10...9...8...

*High on a hill, in a lush grassy clearing in the jungle above Pearl Harbour, sitting on a picnic blanket, Haruko and Mike's eyes lock.*

...7...6...5...

*Shy smiles, more confident seeing them reflected in each other's faces.*

...4...3...

*Leaning toward each other seems as natural as gravity.*

...2...

*Brushing lips, not knowing 'how' to kiss, but knowing this kiss is already perfect.*

...1.

*The sound of planes, common above the Harbour, is drowned out by the first bombs.*

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We assume the explosions are Navy exercises.

I don't want that kiss to end but, for a few moments, the distant, muffled bangs break the tension a little.

Our first kiss. My first ever.

In the harbour far below, the United States Pacific Fleet lies at anchor, Mike's dad is on duty aboard the *Arizona*, and a swarm of planes are droning in from the west.

**Commented [CH1]:** In a nutshell, we have a stylized snapshot of the opening premise: a lover's tryst, broken by a military attack.

Let's look at pros and cons. Pro: attention-grabbing and efficient. It also tells the reader this journey is going to take us to unpredictable places.

Potential cons: we need to balance these kinds of creative risks on the following:

- Does it make us too aware of the mechanics of the writing and potential author intrusion, when we should instead be lost in the story? Are we embellishing or distracting? What are your thoughts?

- How does this support our central aim in an opening scene: connecting with the characters, and presenting an intriguing plot premise?

Let's keep reading.

We hear distant, muffled bangs. Puffs of white on blue water as something explodes.

Mike is bemused. “Dad didn’t say anything about a live ammo exercise this morning.”

I tap the side of my nose, wry. “Loose lips sink ships etcetera.”

He doesn’t register my humour because he’s looking down to the harbour, confused. “It hit the ship...” He points. Black smoke, and gouts of orange flame, spurts from one of the ships.

I don’t understand. Naval exercises don’t use smoke-bombs and fireworks, do they? This is like something out of a Hollywood movie.

Mike stands. “That’s the *Arizona*! That’s Dad’s ship!”

He’s seventeen but suddenly he seems like a scared ten-year old. I respond to his panic, standing. “They’re bombing the harbour!”

“Who? The Germans?” I wonder, but then a khaki-coloured plane with red circles under the wings dunes past at our elevation. It’s so close we can see the single pilot.

To him we must be blobs of colour, tiny figures on a green hillside. He’s close enough for us to read his expression - stony, resolute as any statue. He looks at us, registers my face, frowns - troubled, looks away. Then he is gone, sweeping around with the other planes, a Japanese Airforce pilot, **joining the carnage.**

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*For the United States, the Pacific War has just begun.*

**Commented [CH2]:** Here we have the bombing of Pearl Harbour, combined with the excitement of a first kiss. But with so much covered in just 277 words, I question if we’re skating along the surface, without having enough time and context to sink deeper. How does that kiss feel? What are the deeper dynamics of the relationship? Is it a big secret? The happiest day of her life? The culmination of weeks of waiting? A totally unplanned, surprise?

We hint at trouble to come, as Haruko is Japanese. But potentially we’re covering a little too much here. It also feels slightly redundant coming straight off the scene prior.

**Commented [CH3]:** Potentially redundant. Code word!

## Chapter Two

*There are few things more dull than watching two people fall in love.*

*There's the stilted conversation that wanders aimlessly - clueless and silly, drunk on feelings. There's the couple's oblivion to all around them – nothing else exists to the hapless pair. Their hormones surge, fogging their brains. Their emotions jump between soaring hope, crushing fear, raging lust and enchanted wonder at the sheer magic that another person – out of all the billions on Earth – somehow feels exactly the same way at exactly the same time.*

*Santa Maria – such a miracle!*

*Love makes idiots of us, and no further proof is needed than to look at tanned, muscular Mike and slim pale-skinned Haruko a week ago, during high school lunch-break, strolling through the trees by the fence.*

*Haruko casually mentions she's 'thinking about maybe going for a walk up x hill on Sunday morning'.*

*Mike casually 'wonders' - because he 'likes walking too' - if perhaps-just-maybe Haruko 'might like some company'.*

*It will surprise none of us that Haruko 'maybe-kinda-yeah' would like his company and they 'could maybe' have a picnic while they engage in this 'walk'.*

*We shouldn't judge. They're not kids but neither are they adults, and this is new territory - an emotional frontier littered with land-mines, rugged terrain, tough*

*climbs, difficult descents. A single wrong word can ruin a moment - a moment that could kill love before it can flower; a love that might've lasted a lifetime.*

*A single wrong gesture, and hopes could be dashed, worst fears realised.*

*We sympathise with and pity them. We understand the pain and the joy of new love, and how fragile it can be.*

*So how can this dumb, foolish love, tottering like a new-born foal, be stronger than the steel and bombs and radiation sickness and piled corpses of implacable, indiscriminate murder?*

*How can the love between two kids transcend the all-powerful hate of war?*

**Commented [CH4]:** Ideally, every scene should feel pivotal, especially at the start of a novel. So how have we learned more about the characters or story in this scene? Keep in mind: we've already established that they're awkward teens, and the war has begun.

Also look at the message we're sending the reader here. Small flashes of intense action, followed by extended analysis of the story. How might we keep the pace up and get the story started, faster.

Ultimately, we're deciding if we like these characters. They're young and in love, but who is impulsive, angry, dangerous, funny, cheeky, motivated, bold, courageous. We connect with values, goals and desires. Love is important, but we're going to need to invest in the characters first, before we care about their relationship.