

# Love The Bomb

Kallidora Rho

*In 32 billion years, the universe will explode.*

*Tick, tock.*

Major Tao-jian Kong accepted her conscription into the Living Ordnance Division with the same stoic forbearance she had met every other suicide mission in her storied career. She knew little of what the secretive new project might involve, but her lucky charm, her wedding ring, had kept her safe so far. Even if she was called upon to give her life, she would do so with her wife's name on her lips. Every soldier prepares themselves for it. There is honor in sacrifice.

That's what she went in believing. Then the bomb handlers started work on her, and she realized that she was in the hands of absolute psychos.

*In 11 billion years, the galaxy will explode.*

*Tick, tock.*

Acceptance was the first stage of Major Kong's agony, not the last. She knew she was doomed the moment she locked eyes with her new keeper. Denial followed, when the bomb handler told her what she was going to do to her. What she was going to become. It was nothing short of madness. What the woman with the lit cigar described to her was impossible. Major Kong laughed defiance in her face right up until the first procedure. She thought she had been through too much for it to end like that.

*In 5 billion years, the sun will explode.*

*Tick, tock.*

Anger, bargaining, and depression fell like dominoes once the bomb handler took her apart and put her back together again. Tao screamed as she felt a dozen pairs of hands groping her insides and fucking her organs, but as they drained her and stuffed her and made her body theirs, she began to feel it. The unstable energy within her, pounding like a heartbeat, begging for release. There was a rhythm to it. The same siren song that, as her handler taught her, underpins all of creation.

*The world is a countdown. Everything falls apart—but not slowly. In a flash. In a bang. The spark that lights the fuse is a lover’s kiss. The moment before detonation is sacred. Everyone is waiting for it, whether they know it or not. In the end, everything explodes.*

*Tick, tock. Tick, tock.*

The wonderful doctrine Handler Ripper imparted to her no longer sounds to Major Kong like madness. Now she believes. Now, as laughter rises from her lips once again, it’s not mockery or disdain. In her new body, Major Kong has found something far better than acceptance. Euphoria, giddy and gleeful, sings in her veins with each second marked on her internal clock. Everything explodes, and her most of all. Handler Ripper told her something else too. A blessing more than a doctrine, but Major Kong has heeded it as faithfully as all the rest.

*Time to stop worrying and love the bomb, sweetheart.*

Major Kong has and does. She stopped worrying. She loves the bomb inside her.

*In 1 hour, 16 minutes, and 41 seconds, Major Tao-jian Kong will explode.*

*Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.*

And she can’t wait.



|    |    |             |
|----|----|-------------|
| 76 | 41 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 76 | 40 | <i>Tock</i> |
| 76 | 39 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 76 | 38 | <i>Tock</i> |

The countdown is hypnotic. There are seventy-six minutes and thirty-nine seconds left in Captain Leah Mandrake’s world. Thirty-eight. Thirty-seven. It is the universe’s heartbeat. A force greater than gravity, pulling not

in some arbitrary physical direction, but along the arrow of time, towards the future. Towards the end. Leah cannot look away, and no matter how desperately she wishes to turn back the clock, she cannot suppress the anticipation that rises from her gut like bile as each second ticks over.

|    |    |             |
|----|----|-------------|
| 76 | 34 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 76 | 33 | <i>Tock</i> |
| 76 | 32 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 76 | 31 | <i>Tock</i> |

Never mind that those numbers are in her wife's eyes.

“What... did...” The enormity of a thousand awful questions robs Leah's tongue; in the end, the one that passes her lips is almost banal. “Tao—Major—what are you wearing?”

It is the bomb handler that answers. “Thought I'd dress her up something special,” the awful woman purrs between cigar puffs. “Seeing as how it's her big day.”

Major Tao-jian Kong, Leah Mandrake's commander and love, is standing in the bomb bay of the transport craft, dressed in a leather jumpsuit that covers nothing above her chest and leaves plenty uncovered beneath it thanks to the preposterous cut-outs: long slits down her thighs and around her hips, corseted shut, and a huge pocket that reveals her abdomen. The purpose, Leah can only surmise, is to put Tao's transformed body on obscene display according to the bomb handler's twisted preferences. The Tao she knew was trim and firm, as strict with herself as with every raw recruit. No longer. Now her figure is full to bursting with a hundred extra pounds of plastic explosive filler, disproportionately swelling her lower half and spilling through the holes in her leathers, giving her the kind of ludicrously full, pear-shaped figure Leah thought impossible outside of tasteless porn.

But that is just the beginning.

All over Tao's body, lengths of red, tightly-coiled wire protrude in hanging lengths that connect, without any apparent reason, different parts of her body. Beneath the skin and through it, Leah can make out circuits, timers, fuses; by some awful procedure, Tao has become the host body to a machine antithetical to life itself, shivering and jiggling in a gruesome parody of sexuality according to her implacable, clockwork heartbeat.

|    |    |             |
|----|----|-------------|
| 76 | 17 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 76 | 16 | <i>Tock</i> |
| 76 | 15 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 76 | 14 | <i>Tock</i> |

“This is insane,” Leah whispers. She is right. She came here to stop it and save her wife, though all the men under her command begged her not to. It would be better not to see, they said. Leah scorned their warnings. Perhaps she shouldn’t have. What is before her is madness in full bloom. A murderous duet already in motion.

“Insane?” Bomb Handler Ripper laughs. “Sounds like you just don’t know how to show a bombshell like this a good time, girlie.”

Ripper is a walking war crime. Uncompromisingly butch, her singed, ash-stricken hair is short and slicked back, and her padded blast suit is folded to the waist to expose the many burns her tank top doesn’t cover. Leah has heard of the bomb handlers. She thought it a mere waste of time and an embarrassment when the high command assented to their project and began pulling soldiers out of the line to feed to their laboratories. Doomsday cultists, mad scientists—such terms make them easy to dismiss, at a distance. Up close, Leah can see the deranged, nihilistic clarity it takes to ride the bomb shining from beneath Handler Ripper’s protective goggles. Mad? Obviously. But the world is mad too.

Major Tao-jian Kong, Leah’s wife, is perched happily in her lap, giggling absently as Handler Ripper gropes her all over. Leah searches her eyes again for any sign of fear, or indignation, or even recognition. There is none. There is only the countdown.

|       |             |
|-------|-------------|
| 16 02 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 16 01 | <i>Tock</i> |
| 16 00 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 15 59 | <i>Tock</i> |

“T-Tao?” Leah ventures. It’s still her, isn’t it? It has to be. “What did they... are you OK?”

Slowly, Tao raises her head and looks at Leah. So Leah presumes, anyway. Tao doesn’t have irises or pupils anymore. Just a red, glowing doomsday clock, and the glassy lenses over the minutes and seconds do little to suggest awareness or sentience. Leah’s wife looks more like a doll than a person, posed in her owner’s lap to be felt up and enjoyed, responding to it all with nothing but a faint smile or a pleased titter. It just so happens that her owner prefers demolition squads to tea parties.

Leah banishes the sickening impression from her skull. She will save her wife. She has made a promise. In sickness or in health, and what is this if not sickness?

|       |             |
|-------|-------------|
| 15 50 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 15 49 | <i>Tock</i> |

75 48      *Tick*  
75 47      *Tock*

“Leah?” There is only a ghostly warmth in Tao’s voice as she addresses her. Both her words and her smile are too stiff and still—but her breath hitches appallingly when Handler Ripper’s hand grips tight the taut flesh of her unnaturally soft, wide hip. “Y-y-es, of course I am. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because...” Her blissful obliviousness is even more painful than the other woman’s rapacious touch. “You’re a bomb, Tao.”

Tao emits a polite little giggle.

“You’ll die!” Leah attempts again. The thrust of her words is so obvious that the fact they are lost on Tao makes her feel, paradoxically, as though she is the crazy one here. “Tao, you’ll... explode.”

The sigh of longing that flies from Tao’s parted lips is the truest passion she has yet displayed. “I know. It’s going to be beautiful.”

Leah fights to suppress a sob.

“Time’s up, lovebirds,” Handler Ripper fires off, chomping on her cigar and exhaling a fat puff of acrid smoke in Leah’s direction. Her other hand is still all over Leah’s wife. “We’re on the clock here.” She winks at Tao. “Literally.”

The bomb handler’s naked sleaze is a strange kind of mercy. Finally, Leah has someone to explode at. “What did you do to her?” she screams. “What have you done to my wife?”

“You don’t like her?” Handler Ripper laughs and slaps Tao’s thighs, utterly enamored with the volatile fatness she has gifted her masterpiece. “I think she’s pretty easy on the eyes, myself. Packed to bursting with high explosive.” The bomb handler’s voice drops into a breathy, lusty register as her abhorrent fetishism uncoils. “TNT, RDX, napalm, a few of my special, secret ingredients, even a little nitroglycerin, cause I’m old-fashioned that way—you name it, it’s in these curves. This is the finest high-yield piece of ass money can buy.”

Nothing yet has boiled Leah’s blood like this. She steps forward, hands in fists, but pauses when she notices that the numbers in Tao’s eyes are counting down faster now. The ticking sound has quickened too, at once a pounding heartbeat and a sickening measure of Tao’s arousal.

75 16      *Tick, tock*  
75 14      *Tick, tock*  
75 12      *Tick, tock*  
75 10      *Tick, tock*

It's too much. All of it, but the accelerating countdown most of all. It awakens in Leah a fear more primal than loss or infidelity. She is stood next to a powder keg, and her feet beg her to turn and flee from annihilation. Anger is her anchor. She wants to stub out that horrid cigar in Handler Ripper's face. She wants to conquer as she has been conquered.

"Let her go!" Leah demands.

The bomb handler licks her lips. "Oh, I don't think this little bombshell is keen to go anywhere but her target. But hey, I ain't about to keep a happy couple apart. Come and take her, if you're woman enough."

The myth every soldier clings to as they head into battle is that someone else's name is written on the bullet. It is seductively easy to imagine oneself Lady Luck's favorite. Leah has been into battle a dozen times, guided by that very conviction. This is different. A bomb does not need luck. The countdown in Tao's eyes taunts her with the knowledge that a single misfired electrical impulse is all it would take to render all of them into formless dust. You cannot survive chemistry. You cannot fight an explosion. Once the fuse is lit, it's inevitable—and Tao's fuse is lit. The timer is running. Leah's heart pounds at twice the countdown's speed. She cannot make herself approach. Anything but sprinting away feels like suicide.

75 00      *Tick, tock*  
74 58      *Tick, tock*  
74 56      *Tick, tock*  
74 54      *Tick, tock*

"What's the matter?" Handler Ripper leers. "Little too much boom for you to handle?"

"Shut up!" Leah snaps impotently.

"Your wife doesn't seem the supportive type, bombshell," Handler Ripper whispers into Tao's ear, *sotto voce*. "Ain't that a shame? Good thing I know how to treat you right."

The groping escalates. Tao's enormous ass lets her sink deep into her handler's lap, and Ripper's hand is everywhere: her neck, her chest, her plush belly, her rotund hips. Her fingers interlace with the coils of red wire, teasing them apart and stretching them taut as Tao shivers with delight. Appallingly, the countdown begins to tick faster still.

74 51      *Tick, tock. Tick, tock*  
74 48      *Tick, tock. Tick, tock*  
74 44      *Tick, tock. Tick, tock*  
74 39      *Tick, tock. Tick, tock*

Leah's eyes are glued to Tao's face. To the countdown, yes, but to the betrayal too. Every ravishment Handler Ripper inflicts is met with a twitch, a blush, a giggle, a parted lip, and each one bursts her chest with heartbreak. But somehow, something else steals her attention. There is something even more captivating.

The cigar in Handler Ripper's hand.

Now that Tao is pressed into her lap, the bomb handler's lit cigar keeps drifting carelessly close to Leah's wife. 'Playing with fire' has never been more apt. Leah feels as though she's watching some deranged lover's suicide play out in slow motion, and fear of her own mortality screams louder than her tortured heartstrings.

"H-Hey." Leah hates how different her tone is. Low. Warning. Afraid. Like she's being serious now. Like she wasn't before. "Cut that out."

"What's that now, girlie?" Handler Ripper laughs. The lit tip of her cigar scrapes against a wire. Leah flinches. Tao moans.

"Your damn cigar!" Leah hisses. She isn't sure why she's keeping her voice so suppressed—except that she is. The very air around her feels delicate and unstable, like a mountain on the brink of avalanche. No, worse. Like a church, sacrosanct, unwilling to tolerate the slightest breach of its rarefied atmosphere. No profane thing can despoil this saint of TNT. The moment before detonation is sacred. "Put it out! You'll kill us all."

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| 13 27 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |
| 13 15 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |
| 13 01 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |
| 12 44 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |

Handler Ripper again laughs off her concern. "Don't you worry." She takes another fat puff, and exhales a cloud of filthy smoke straight into Tao's face. Tao laps at the stale air like it gives her life, and the way she shivers gratefully sends her appalling new body jiggling. "It takes more than this lil' light here to set off fireworks like these. Gotta trip the fuses, get that sweet, sweet sequential detonation." Another puff. Then, she seems to reconsider. "Mind, you never know. Could always get unlucky. 'specially with these wires here. Cause don't get me wrong, she's hot to blow alright. All it'd take is one stray little spark in the wrong place."

She touches the lit tip of her cigar to one of the coiled lengths of red wiring. The sheath of insulation begins to melt and sizzle.

Leah recoils backward. Her flight response is greater than ever. She can practically sense it about to happen. The heat is going to melt through the

red insulation, spark against the conductive copper inside, and they'll all be blown to hell. There is no use pretending that this is a bluff. Handler Ripper lives for this. Her eyes shine with longing. The thought of becoming part of her choreographed performance art excites her. A sadist, yes. A sleazeball, certainly. But beyond all that, Handler Ripper yearns for the consuming Gehenna-fires of the apocalypse, and she has not once imagined that will be spared.

And then there's Tao.

|    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 71 | 35 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |
| 71 | 09 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |
| 70 | 46 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |
| 70 | 07 | <i>Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock</i> |

Tao is in a state of rapture even more appalling than her previous girlish, doll-like demeanor. She shivers and shudders ecstatically as her eyes count down, digits spinning, minutes erased from her remaining life span in mere seconds. Her skin is flushed, her new flesh heaving, her entire body thrumming with promise and potential as the electronics embedded in her flesh prime themselves to blow. She is on the verge of annihilation. She looks like she's about to cum.

"What are you doing?" Leah pleads. "You're insane!"

"You know what your problem is, girlie?" Handler Ripper speaks to Leah but has eyes only for Tao. Her gaze is aglow with the coming fire. "Don't know how to handle a real, wild thing like this one. Always the safe option, eh? No wonder she's gonna pass you over in exchange for some real chemistry.

Tao's answering giggle is maddening. It drools from her lips, long and keening. She wants this. They both do. They have a mission, an assigned target, but if they meet their ends here, they'll be just as happy. Just as euphoric. The bomb Tao-jian Kong has become only has one purpose in this world, and she aches to fulfill it. The numbers in Leah's wife's eyes move so fast they are unreadable. The groping hasn't stopped. Far from it; as Tao writhes and squirms in Handler Ripper's lap, the bomb handler matches her eagerness, hands ravenous, pinching, slapping, squeezing, evidently possessed by that same irrational urge to pull the trigger.

"W-we c-c-can't keep d-d-doing this," Tao moans to her handler, eyes flashing, clockwork heart ticking madly. "W-w-we need to go. T-t-t-they're waiting for me. I-it's my b-big day."

She doesn't mean it. She wants to hit zero now, in her handler's arms. Everyone can tell. Even Leah.

“I know, bombshell,” Handler Ripper coos. “But I just can’t help myself. Look at you. You’re practically asking for it.”

Something in Leah snaps.

Nothing could put her at more risk of exploding than standing here, watching this. Forgetting her fear, Leah strides forward, seizes Tao by the arm, and drags her onto her feet and away from Handler Ripper. Neither of them bother to resist. The bomb handler seems impressed by her moxie; Tao remains unnaturally compliant, despite the volatile potential swelling within her body. As Leah embraces her, the ticking slows and the countdown in her eyes returns to a regular rhythm.

|    |    |             |
|----|----|-------------|
| 88 | 22 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 88 | 21 | <i>Tock</i> |
| 88 | 20 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 88 | 19 | <i>Tock</i> |

“Till death do us part,” Leah begs. She lets her captaincy slip away from her. Just a wife now, in need of her beloved. “That’s what you promised me on our wedding day—and I know you’ve never meant anything more. I know you still mean it, even now. You’re still in there somewhere, Tao, and I love you. Remember that day for me, my love. *Our* big day. Remember... remember the dancing. Remember that old song we had playing. Our song. Remember our promise. Don’t leave me alone, Tao. Please.”

Of all the dark thoughts that press in on Leah in that moment, the greatest by far is that she is wrong, and the words rising from her heart to her lips cannot reach the strange, pornographic bomb doll her arms are wrapped around. But when Tao’s arms close around her back in turn, that too melts away. For a moment, Tao’s embrace feels as it ever did.

“Till death do us part,” Tao echoes. She is distant, but she is there. It means something to her.

“Yes,” Leah sobs. “Yes.”

“My love.” Tao’s embrace tightens. Leah closes her eyes in relief. “Come with us.”

Leah’s eyes open. An infernal sound emanating from her beloved creeps into her ears, a doomsday drum beat that becomes an itch against the inside of Leah’s skull.

Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick tock.

“T-Tao?”

“I don’t have long left,” Tao whispers. “Won’t you be with me, Leah?”

Won't you hold my hand until the end? Remember our promise."

Leah fights her way just far enough free of Tao to meet her gaze, and when she does, she sees, sure enough, that awful number in her eyes.

|       |             |
|-------|-------------|
| 68 07 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 68 06 | <i>Tock</i> |
| 68 05 | <i>Tick</i> |
| 68 04 | <i>Tock</i> |

"T-t-that's not..." Leah sobs. It has returned, the nameless, hypnotic, annihilation-dread that drowns out every other feeling. "No, Tao, no, no, no, n-no—"

"Come with me," Tao beckons again. Her doll-voice is a still song, a call of the void, appallingly alluring. "Don't be afraid, my love. I was scared at first, but now I understand. Mutually assured destruction is a beautiful wedding vow. Won't you kiss me as I ignite? Won't you mix your ashes with mine upon the wind? Let me show you how brightly I can shine."

And just for a moment, Leah gets it.

There is a tension at the heart of her being. She's always been aware of it. Every living creature has. The stress of living and the burden of sentience is bound into a tight knot that screams to burst free, bright and fiery and glorious. *Tick, tock. Tick, tock.* Within Leah's every cell, mitochondria blast apart molecules and nutrients like sappers with dynamite. Her muscles burn energy for fuel. Her stomach, a furnace. Her brain, a live wire. Combustion is a miracle. Detonation is destiny. *Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.* Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. Why rot into an elderly dud, when you can embrace it, here and now? The end times are a blessing in disguise. Become fire, a hymn to high explosives on your lips. Stop worrying. Love the bomb. *Tick, tock. Tick, tock. TICK, TOCK.*

But Leah does not want to die.

Her sanity recoils from the impending explosion's unborn scream. Leah Mandrake is a soldier, but this is one threshold she has yet to cross. She is a small woman with small dreams of a life full of small and happy things. She has not succumbed to the hateful battle-fever that transforms every field and town she sees into an ash heap in the making. Her will to life becomes a firebreak against infection, but to do so, it carves a swathe between her and Tao. She sees now: this sickness is incurable. Nobody who has fucked nitrocellulose and phosphorous will be satisfied with anything less, and Tao-jian Kong has forgotten every other old flame. She is a bomb, this doll. And nothing more.

67 38      *Tick*  
68 37      *Tock*  
68 36      *Tick*  
68 35      *Tock*

Leah steps away, shaking her head. “I c-can’t,” she mutters, as she breaks her wedding vows. “I c-c-can’t. I can’t. I’m s-sorry, I...”

For the first time in her military career, Captain Leah Mandrake turns her back and flees the field. The last thing she hears before the transport craft’s engines begin to sing is Bomb Handler Ripper.

“Guess you’re just too hot for that one to ride, bombshell. Alright, time to fly. I know you lost a few minutes there, but don’t worry. I know just how to keep a sweet thing like you riding the edge. You ain’t gonna miss a thing. It’s your big day.”



*Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.*

Major Tao-jian Kong, bomb doll, living weapon, walks across the blasted battlefield like a goddess, and feels destiny walking at her side.

She is not fast. She does not need to be. Her countdown is the only rhythm that counts. The enemy soldiers, with all their guns, cannot stop her. Some of them have seen bombs like her before. They know that a bullet is as likely to damn them as save them, so they flee from her path. Others merely sense her true nature and find themselves hypnotized by her ticking countdown, or her apocalyptic presence, or perhaps simply by her soft, undulating body and seductive, swaying gait as she waltzes into position.

*Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.*

Tao’s entire life culminates here. Her beloved handler helped her understand; in this moment, there is no denying it. Raw potentiality stains the air all around her. The song of Armageddon thrums in her veins, and its music is reaching one final crescendo. Tao looks about her as she walks. The mud, the bodies, the vegetation and broken buildings. All of them, soon, will be part of her, the same way food becomes flesh. She will shatter them and spread them across the world’s canvas. Destruction and creation. She is a thing divine. An avatar. She has become death.

*Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.*

The target site is already upon her. Its great ramparts of reinforced concrete will break on the bow wave of her passion. It will be her last and greatest love affair. How long now, until the moment? She does not know. There is no mirror for her to check. But it must be close. It must be mere moments away.

*Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.*

The moment before detonation is sacred. This is the holiest moment of Major Tao-jian Kong's life. It commands her utmost reverence. It stains her porcelain-pale cheeks pink. Her heart—her old one, vestigial and useless—pounds ten times a second within her chest. The end comes. It is going to be beautiful.

*Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.*

But there was another sacred moment, once. That strange, sad girl from earlier, already half-forgotten, stirred a memory within her. A perfect day. A vow exchanged. And some old song, playing while they danced. How did it go again?

*We'll meet again  
Don't know where  
Don't know when*

A happy thought. Tao thinks so, anyway. The doll-thing she has become has little concept of happiness like that. But for somebody else, perhaps. Tao decides to hum the melody to herself. It keeps her warm while she waits for her wish to come true.

*But I know we'll meet again some sunny day  
Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Ti-*

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