

# Love Song from the Stars

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Lollia was a small, pine-clad cone of rock in the eastern Aegean. It was uninhabited, a difficult place to get to, but not quite impossible. Kinkaid rented an aluminum boat with outboard in Chios, packed in his camping equipment and, with a fair wind and a flat sea, got there in six hours, arriving just before sunset.

Kinkaid was tall and thin, with snubby features and fair, freckled skin, blotchy now in the fierce Greek summer sun. He wore a wrinkled white suit and canvas boat shoes. He was thirty-two years old. His hair was blondish-red, curly, and he was going bald on top. He was a member of an almost vanished species, the independently wealthy amateur archaeologist. He had heard of Lollia on Mykonos. A fisherman told him that the island was still visited from time to time by the old gods, and that people with any prudence stayed away. That was all Kinkaid needed to want to go there at once. He was in need of a respite from Mykonos's café amusements.

And there was always the chance he'd find antiquities. Many discoveries have been made in the open, or under an inch or two of soil. Not in the well-known places, Mycenae, Tiryns, Delphi, where scientists and tourists have been studying for hundreds of years. It was the less likely sites that yielded the lucky finds nowadays, places on the edge of a great culture. Like Lollia, perhaps.

And even if he didn't find anything, it would be fun to camp out for a night or two before flying on to meet his friends in Venice for the film festival. And there was always the chance he'd find something no one else had ever come across.

As for the fisherman's talk of the old gods, he didn't know whether to put that down to Greek love of exaggeration or Greek superstition.

Kinkaid arrived at Lollia just before sunset, when the sky of the Aegean darkens swiftly through the shades of violet into a deepening transparent blue. A light breeze ruffled the waters and the air was lucid. It was a day fit for the gods.

Kinkaid circled the little island looking for the best place to land. He found a spit of land just off the northern point. He pulled his boat ashore through light surf and tied it to a tree. Then he climbed the rugged cliff, through luxuriant underbrush scented with rosemary and thyme.

At the summit there was a small plateau. On it he found the remains of an old shrine. The altar stones were weathered and tumbled around, but he could make out the fine carving.

There was a cave nearby, slanting down into the hillside. Kinkaid walked toward it, then stopped. A human figure had appeared in the cave mouth. A girl. She was young, very pretty, red-haired, dressed in a simple linen dress. She had been watching him.

"Where did you come from?" Kinkaid asked.

"The spaceship dropped me off," she told him. Although her English was flawless, she had a faint foreign accent which he could not place, but which he found charming. And he liked her sense of humor.

He couldn't imagine how she had gotten there. Not in a spaceship, of course; that was a joke. But how *had* she come? There had been no sign of another boat. She was unlikely to have swum the seventy miles from Chios. Could she have been dropped off by helicopter? Possible but unlikely. She looked as though she was ready for a lawn party. There wasn't a mark of dirt on her, and her makeup was fresh. Whereas Kinkaid was aware that he looked sweaty and ruffled, like a man who has just finished a difficult technical rock climb.

"I don't want to seem inquisitive," Kinkaid said, "but would you mind telling me how you got here, really?"

"I told you. The spaceship dropped me off."

"Spaceship?"

"Yes. I am not a human. I am an Andar. The ship will return for me tonight."

"Well, that's really something." Kinkaid said, humoring her. "Did you come a long way?"

"Oh, I suppose it must be hundreds of millions of miles to our planet of Andar. We have ways of getting around the speed of light, of course."

"Sure, that figures," Kinkaid said. Either the girl was carrying a joke a long way or she was a loony. The latter, most likely. Her story was so ridiculous he wanted to laugh. But she was so heart-breakingly beautiful he knew he'd break down and cry if he didn't get her.

He decided to play along. "What's your name? Why did you come here?" he asked.

"You can call me Alia. This is one of the planets the Andar decided to look into, after the Disappearance forced us to leave our home planet and go out into space. But I'm not supposed to talk about the Disappearance."

She was crazy all right, but Kinkaid was so charmed by her that he didn't care.

"You wouldn't happen to be one of the old gods, would you?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I'm not one of the Olympians," she told him. "But there were stories about them in the old days, when my people visited this planet."

Kinkaid didn't care what she said or where she was from. He wanted her. He'd never made it with an extraterrestrial. It would be an important first for him. Aliens as pretty as this didn't come along every day. And who knows, maybe she *was* from another planet. It was OK with him.

Whatever she was and however she got here, she was a beautiful woman. Suddenly he wanted her desperately.

And she seemed to feel something for him, too. He considered the shy yet provocative way she kept on glancing at him, then looking away. There was a glow of color in her cheeks. Perhaps unconsciously, she moved closer to him as they talked.

He decided it was time for action. Masterful Kinkaid took her in his arms.

At first she responded to his embrace, then pushed him away.

"You are very attractive," she said. "I'm surprised at the strength of my feelings toward you. But love between us is impossible. I am not of your race or planet. I am of the Andar."

The alien thing again. "Do you mean that you are not a woman in the sense we would mean on Earth?" Kinkaid asked.

"No, it isn't that. It's a matter of psychology. We women of the Andar do not love lightly. For us, the act of mating means marriage and a lifetime commitment. We do not divorce. And we *do* intend to have children."

Kinkaid smiled at that. He had heard it before, from the Catholic girls he used to date back in Short Hills, New Jersey. He knew how to handle the situation.

"I really do love you," he said. For the moment, at least, it was true.

"I have—certain feelings toward you, too," she admitted. "But you can't imagine what is involved when you love an Andar woman."

"Tell me about it," Kinkaid said, slipping an arm around her waist and drawing her to him.

"I cannot," she said. "It is our sacred mystery. We are not allowed to reveal it to men. Perhaps you should leave me now, while there's still time."

Kinkaid knew it was good advice: there was something spooky about her and the way she had appeared on the island. He really ought to leave. But he couldn't. As far as women were concerned he was a danger junkie, and this lady represented an all-time high in female challenges. He was no painter or writer. His amateur archaeology would never gain him any recognition. The one thing he could leave behind was his record of sexual conquests. Let them carve it on his tombstone: Kinkaid had the best, and he took it where he found it.

He kissed her, a kiss that went on and on, a kiss that continued as they dissolved to the ground in a montage of floating clothing and the bright flash of flesh. The ecstasy he experienced as they came together went right off the scale of his ability to express it. So intense was the feeling that he barely noticed the six sharp punctures, three on either side, neatly spaced between his ribs.

It was only later, lying back, spent and contented, that he looked at the six small, clean puncture wounds in his skin. He sat up and looked at Alia. She was naked, impossibly lovely, her dark red hair a shimmering cloud around her heart-shaped face. She did have one unusual feature which he had not noticed in the passion of lovemaking. There were six small erectile structures, three on each side of her rib cage, each armed with a slender hollow fang. He thought of certain female insects on the Earth who bite off the heads of their mates during the act of love. He still didn't really believe she was an extraterrestrial. But he didn't disbelieve it quite as strongly as before. He thought of different species of insect on the Earth which resemble other species—katydids that look like dry twigs, flies that imitate wasps. Is that it? Was she about to take off her body?

He said, "It was terrific, baby, even if it *is* going to cost me my life."

She stared at him. "What are you saying?" she cried. "Do you actually think I will kill you? Impossible! I am an Andar female; you are my mate for life, and life for us lasts a very long time."

"Then what did you do to me?" Kinkaid asked.

"I've simply injected the children into you," Alia said. "They're going to be so lovely, darling. I hope they have your coloring."

Kinkaid couldn't quite grasp it at first. "Are you sure you haven't poisoned me?" he asked. "I feel very strange."

"That's just the hibernation serum. I injected it along with the babies. You'll sleep now, my sweet, here in this nice dry cave, and our children will grow safely between your ribs. In a year I'll come back and take them out of you and put them into their cocoons and take them home to Andar. That's the next stage of their development."

"And what about me?" Kinkaid asked, fighting the desire to sleep that had come powerfully over him.

"You'll be fine," Alia said. "Hibernation is perfectly safe, and I'll be back in plenty of time for the birth. Then you'll need to rest for a while. Perhaps a week. I'll be here to take care of you. And then we can make love again."

"And then?"

"Then it'll be hibernation time again, my sweet, until the next year."

Kinkaid wanted to tell her that this wasn't how he'd planned to spend his life—an hour of love, a year of sleep, then giving birth and starting all over again. He wanted to tell her that, all things considered, he'd prefer that she bite his head off. But he couldn't talk, could barely stay awake. And Alia was getting ready to leave.

"You're really cute," he managed to tell her. "But I wish you'd stayed on Andar and married your hometown sweetheart."

"I would have, darling," she said, "but something went wrong back home. The men must have been spying on our sacred mysteries. Suddenly we couldn't find them anymore. That's what we call the Great Disappearance. They went away, all of them, completely off the planet."

"It figures they'd catch on sooner or later." Kinkaid said.

"It was very wrong of them," Alia said. "I know that child-bearing makes great demands on the men, but it can't be helped; the race must go on. And we Andar women can be relied upon to keep it going, no matter what lengths we must go to. I *did* give you a sporting chance to get away. Good-bye, my darling, until next year."