

JOURNAL ENTRY:
Gabriela Rusack

I swear that I would never have approached her. She came to me entirely on her own.

I'd thought that after Elzbieta's death I'd gone dead sexually. None of the women here were remotely interested in me—even if they had been, the biological imperative that drove every decision here would have precluded a relationship with me. I'd already been told, in no uncertain terms, when they shunned me: *we won't tolerate behavior that could lead to a decline in the birth rate.*

I thought that the precept was so strong that no one would dare break it. Yet...there were those I watched, and those I wondered about. And yes, she was one of them....

It happened this evening. I'm almost afraid to write this down, afraid that it all might disappear if I examine it too closely.

I'd bartered some free time from the network detail, my pottery had finished firing, and I was waiting for the kiln to cool. I'd put half of my latest composition into the synth, but the rest of the music had gone wandering off somewhere in my head and I couldn't hear it. So I'd gone up to the top of the Rock to do some restoration on the Miccail stelae there. I was so absorbed in the task that I didn't notice her until her shadow fell over the stele. I jumped, startled. The brush I was using went flying out of my hand, I yelped like a dog whose tail had been stepped on (there's a metaphor that no one in the next generation will understand), and my feet went out from under me when I tried to stand up. I landed ass first, kicking up dust that immediately sent me coughing.

She laughed, a sound like glass chimes, dear and bright.

"I'm sorry, Gabriela," she said. "I didn't mean to scare you. I'm really sorry. Are you okay?"

Against the sun, her hair burned jet. I could barely see her smile, but I heard it in her voice. "I'm fine, Adari. Just a little...well...embarrassed. I don't usually put on that kind of show. At least you were the only one to see it."