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Note: This is a rough draft. Comments are welcome. You may email me at robin@robindowens.com OR comment on my blog <http://www.robindowens.blogspot.com>

This is the second scene in the story.

SET UP:

The heroine is Arbusca Willow and the hero is Dri Paris. This is an older couple story.

Arbusca is the mother of Saille Willow (hero of Heart Dance) and is the housekeeper of the intelligent house, T'Willow Residence. Dri is a demolition expert.

Arbusca's mother was a tyrant and sent Arbusca's HeartMate (Dri Paris) away when he came to claim her twenty years ago. He travelled to the southern continent.

When Arbusca's mother died (in Heart Dance), she "tugged" on the nearly defunct link between her and her HeartMate. He returned and they set up a meeting at a private dining room of a social club.

The initial meeting did not go well. Dri believes Arbusca is a snob and they are both angry at the past. Dri stormed out of the place.

Dri's nickname for Arbusca is Blush, after a Blush rose.

Heart Story – True Love

After a shift of her shoulders to fling off introspection, Arbusca saw a footman was holding the door open for her and decided a short walk in the spring evening would be better than teleporting home. Where her whole Family waited to quiz her about what happened at this meeting.

She walked through the door, turned left toward CityCenter and ran straight into Dri's broad chest. Her ankle turned and she gritted her teeth. He grabbed her upper arms. "Steady there."

Arbusca pressed her lips together to keep more hot words from pouring from her. She wasn't an irritable person, why could being in his company distress her so? Because they were meant to be together. But they'd lost their chance.

As soon as she was back on balance he dropped his arm and stuck his hands back into his trouser pockets. Had he regretted his words like she had hers and waited for her?

Is she going to do it, is she, is she, huh? The mental voice was accompanied by a small yip. Arbusca looked down to see a scruffy dog of an unfortunate butterscotch color. He was sitting, scratching his ear with his back leg, tongue lolling cheerfully from his mouth.

She kept her face smooth. "You have a Familiar Companion, a Fam?"

He has a dog who loves him. Yes, he does! The dog hopped to his paws, shook himself which sent dusty hair flying and smiled up at her. I am Mel. I am his G'Uncle's FamDog. But I

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love Dri too!

"Of course you do."

You're going to help us, yes? Yes! We need a housekeeping expert.

She stiffened and slowly turned her head to Dri. He was scowling, his hands in his pockets had fisted, and she thought that his color had risen though it was hard to tell in the twilight. Certainly, he radiated annoyance.

"You need a housekeeping expert," Arbusca said. She put her own hands in her opposite sleeves as her throat clogged and ached with hurt. She wanted to clear it, but wouldn't. So that was the true reason he'd seen her.

"It's not like that, Blush," he said, opened his mouth, shook his head. "I have few words."

"You had plenty before."

The dog yipped again. A fly flew by and he snapped at it, caught it, swallowed and grinned. His whole body wagged with his tail. We need good spells that work, that sort things and good housekeeping! We don't know spells and we need them.

"I see," she said, even though she didn't.

"No. Ya don't," Dri said, and pulled his hands from his pockets.

"Pray tell me, then, what I don't understand."

The muscles of his jaw bunched.

A heavy, wheezing exhalation escaped the dog, he stared up at Dri with wild eyes. She is not happy! You said she would be cheerful and happy! You said all would go well! He sniffed at her trouser and the hem of her embroidered tunic. You made her angry!

"That's right," Arbusca said coolly.

FIX IT! The dog's mental projection was enough to make a few passersby stop and smile. Mel barked at Dri. You said we were lonely and we needed help and she would come and be your HeartMate and help and we would not be sad anymore and things would get better for your G'Uncle and we would have all we need. FIX IT.

Dri winced, met Arbusca's stare, hunched a shoulder. "I'm better at tearing down than fixing or restoring." He straightened and jutted his chin. "I'm the best demolition expert on two continents, but fixing...." His big, rough hands spread wide.

Mel moaned and flopped on Blush's feet.

Arbusca settled enough to feel the links between them all – one had snapped between her and the dog and she understood his deep mourning for his Familiar Man Companion. Dri, too, was distressed, with an underlying loneliness he'd covered with the anger she'd triggered. Depths of emotions she hadn't sensed or touched before.

Both of them were hurting.

"Blush is the one who fixes, who keeps a Family going, aren't you?" Now she could hear the lilt of the southern continent in his voice. Tenderness, understanding swept from him to her. Somehow he knew she'd kept her Family whole when her mother had done her worst by them, descended into obsession. She'd protected her Family and her son until he could claim the title.

The connection between herself and Dri had been there all along. He was a strong man. Had she drawn on his strength through the bond? She didn't know and the realization that she might have left her shaken.

Dri studied Blush, his Blush, finally within reach. Of his calloused and coarse hands. She'd gone pale and swayed a little and he didn't like that, but didn't dare touch her or he'd carry

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her away.

So many years had passed since he'd buckled under the pressure her mother had dumped on him and left the city of Druida. Too many years? No. He wouldn't let that happen. He needed her too much, and not just her damn housekeeping skills. She was a woman who made a Family, whether it was one man and his G'Uncle and FamDog, or all those who comprised a FirstFamilies GreatHouse.

Her son couldn't need her as much as Dri did. He'd done his research, T'Willow had found his HeartMate and wife. The man was a matchmaker, surely he wouldn't deny his mother her own HeartMate. Who was Dri. He was going to keep her.

Mel was on Blush's feet, trying to prevent her from walking away. The dog obviously wasn't used to a person teleporting. It would take no psi power, Flair, at all for her to teleport away from them.

Dri had to prevent that. But since she didn't flinch as the dog collapsed on her polished shoes, and his hair clung to her elegant gown, Dri figured he had another chance. A second one after the first he'd botched. Even though she didn't carry the rose he'd brought her, and that hurt. He'd screwed up good.

Keeping his eyes on hers, he tried a smile, thought it turned lopsided. "I had great hopes when I left to meet you." He shrugged. "Guy hopes...that I could sweep you off your feet, that you'd come home with me. That you'd live with me forever."

Her eyes went wide in a stare, her mouth opened a little. Lovely. She shook her head and he hoped it was simple disbelief.

"I'd give you both moons if I could," he said.

She blinked rapidly, still shaking her head. "Where did this come from?"

He touched his chest, feeling really stupid. Mel thumped his tail in encouragement. "From my heart." Dri swallowed. "From my dreams and wishes."

Blush's mouth closed and lips firmed and she narrowed her eyes. "You said nothing like that when we met."

His turn to wince. He straightened. "My fault. I messed up. I told you I was good with demolition, didn't I?" Another lopsided smile. It didn't seem to affect her the way he wanted, soften her. Who knew that he was the optimist of the two of them? But then he hadn't spent years living with her mother.

He offered his hands palms up for her to clasp. "We had hard words between us. Maybe we needed to get them out, and get them out first."

She looked at his hands, he thought a flash of yearning showed in her eyes. "You can't think that a few simple words after we revealed all this old ire between us has cleared everything up, can you?" Her beautiful breasts rose and fell with deep breaths.

"I know that we need to learn each other more. Spend the day with me tomorrow."

Her brows raised. "Doing the housekeeping spells?"

"Doing whatever you want, walking through the city, going to an art gallery or the theater or a concert. Plenty of things to do in Druida. Or we can head down to Maroon Beach. Anything."

Mel whined and she glanced at him, stood straighter. "You seem to have problems? With this G'Uncle of yours?"

He ran his fingers through his hair. "I'd like to say 'no,' that I could handle this all on my

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own. But I'm out of my depth here."

"What's the issue?"

He didn't like that her tones were all business, so he took her hand and curved it inside his arm so they linked elbows, and began walking toward the nearest park. There were sparkly lights in the trees. That would be romantic.

Or would be if Mel didn't pant with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, Dri gestured to the dog to move to his side.

"The problem is that my great uncle, G'Uncle – on my mother's side – is not living...well." Dri whooshed out a breath. "I didn't realize how he, and his home, had deteriorated, and there's no one else on that side of the family to take care of him. He's my responsibility."

"Caretaker," Blush said in an odd little voice. But he knew what she meant and squeezed her arm with his. "Yes, you've been one all your life and valued by your family. Not me, I'm coming extremely late to this job and I don't think it's one I've an aptitude for. I like to clear problems out of the way and get on with life."

"Um-hmm."

Now her mind and emotions, even her body, had gone opaque to him, just as if she'd been any other woman and not his HeartMate, a fated lover and partner.

"Our planet, Celta, has not been easy on us. Low birth rates, sterility. Families die out all the time," she said.

"Yeah, and he's the last of the cadet branch of the Conyzas."

"Your family, the Parises, won't take him in?"

"Nope. He and my grandfather argued before my brother and I were born. Dad says he stole a family heirloom, though he doesn't know what it was, only that the offense was great and he won't have the old thief in the house."

"And your G'Uncle says?"

"That my grandmother, his sister, loaned him something of the Paris' for as long as he wanted and he still wants it."

"I hear doubt in your voice," Blush said, and she was right.

"I think he still has it but has...uh...misplaced it and won't admit that."

Mel snorted beside Dri.

"Ah. And you'd like me to try and find it with housekeeping spells?"

Dri couldn't suppress his flinch. "Yes." He sucked in the spring air and the scent of her and he didn't want to burden her with his problems. He hesitated, then decided to reveal all. Get everything out, at least they'd be able to deal with stuff then. "He's my responsibility. My grandmother left G'Uncle Bonar an inheritance that my grandfather and father have blocked until they get the item back."

Blush turned to him, they were in the park now, near a low tree dripping with spring blossoms of sweet scent that tickled his nose.

"What else?" Blush asked.

He couldn't help it. She was there, and his HeartMate and her manner had softened just enough toward him. He reached out and pulled her close and kissed her.

They fit. She was soft and womanly against him, and he was aware that he'd led a hard life that had toughened his skin and muscles. Her lips were sweeter than any other woman's, any

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imagining, any recollection of their dream loving so long ago.

Through their link he felt a soft yearning. Long-suppressed need in both of them opened.

She broke the kiss before passion fogged his brain and stepped back, her cheeks flushed pinker than ever. He ached for her, and if he followed up now he could make another mistake. She was already quietly turning away.

A flash of inspiration sparked in his brain and he sank into his psi power and visualized the rose he'd given her, the vase she'd placed it. He calculated the spatial dimensions between vase and table and table and room and room and first floor of the building. He held out his hand palm up and pulled...and the rose appeared on his palm. He closed his fingers gently around it, bowed, and held it out to her again. "Please spend tomorrow with me, Blush."

"How did you do that?" Her eyes were wide. "You weren't in the restaurant more than a few minutes."

The time had seemed a lot longer to him. "I'm a demolition expert. I know building space, can figure coordinates well enough to summon a rose."

Her glance had turned admiring and his chest puffed with pride. She stroked a petal around the rose and said, "I know where everything is in T'Willow Residence and can translocate items there but nowhere else."

"Part of my Flair."

"Yes."

"And I want you to have the rose. Please," he persisted, "be with me tomorrow."

She glanced down at Mel, who was sitting beside Dri. The dog gazed up at her and said mentally, We need you.

That softened her more. Leave it to a dog. Mel even whined a little and pawed at her shoe. Dri thought he was overdoing it until Blush said, "All right."

"Maroon beach?" he asked.

She shook her head, her cheeks less pink than the rose now. "I'll help you – and Mel – with your G'Uncle."

"I'm disappointed."

That made her chuckle richly and he smiled in relief, added, "It's true. Something more romantic would be better."

Mel coughed.

"Perhaps." She glanced around and her color deepened again. "But a first kiss in a spring evening is romantic enough."

"For now," he said. Before he could take her hand again, she'd teleported away from him.