

This segment may be different than the final book. All rights reserved; copyright © Robin D. Owens. The text contained within may not be reproduced in whole or in part or distributed in any form whatsoever OR SOLD without first obtaining permission from the author.

"You need a Fam, too," the little girl, Avellana Hazel, said.

Cratag nearly rocked back on his heels at that. No one would give him a prized Fam, not a common, minimally Flaired person like him. But Avellana and her mother and the animal Healer, GreatLady D'Ash, were all nodding.

He looked at the animals, none of whom had been a threat, so he'd dismissed them without truly observing them. There was a beige cat sitting elegantly by D'Marigold's feet in a proud pose, with an interesting triangular face, white muzzle, and yellow eyes. Obviously D'Marigold's Fam.

The little girl had an arm around a big cat who was nearly limp in her arms. Two cats already.

Well, cats were more common than dogs. Maybe there would be a fox? He'd heard foxes were good Fams.

There *was* a fox, aloofly watching from a cube set in a strategically defensible area. Two housefluffs watched him and a black and white cat gazed at him from upside-down eyes, all paws in the air, with a goofy smile.

Cratag stepped toward the fox.

*I am not for you*, the fox snickered.

Cratag pivoted back . . . and nearly tripped on the goofy cat who'd thumped down from his perch and run to him. The cat fell over, between Cratag's feet, and he had to settle into his balance or windmill like a fool.

Lying on Cratag's shoes, plump side rounded, the cat gazed up at him with cheerful delight, a little drool escaping his mouth. *Greetyou, FamMan*.

He heard it clearly, as clearly as any Family mind speaking, the only sort he'd been able to hear. Maybe he had a better connection with animals.

"He gets clumsy when he's excited, but he's perfect for you." Danith D'Ash beamed.

The cat grinned. *What will you call me? I will call you FamMan*.

"Or you could call me Cratag." He nodded to each person in the room. "Please call me Cratag."

*FamMan*, the cat jumped to his paws, raced back and forth across the room, his run mixed with an occasional bow-legged hop. Then he ran around Cratag, hit the rise of his sturdy boots, and fell over, grinning again. *What will you call me?*

Damn. He had a silly Fam. Cratag searched Family names, Maytree and Hawthorn, for an appropriate one. "Beadle," he said.