

# A CAT'S VIEW®

## An Original Short Story

By  
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### PROLOGUE

My name is Merlot. I am one of four cats that live with Taylor Bryan. Taylor is thirty-six years old, single, ambitious. I think she is attractive but then, I am biased. Taylor saved my life three years ago. I was a stray cat roaming her condo complex. I used to watch her at various times of the day. Stray cats often use this technique to select their new owners. It would not do to just walk to a total stranger and ask to be adopted. You need to know in advance that the human likes animals in general, cats in particular. I have seen cats I know chose their new homes poorly and live to regret it. That is, if their new owners allow them to stay at all.

Taylor would not allow that. I know because I have seen her house and watched her other cats. Their names are Cabernet, Chenin Blanc, and Pouilly Fuisse. Taylor loves wines and has named all her cats after favorite wines. She says it is because no one else has cats with such names. I think she did it out of desperation. It is hard to come up with one descriptive cat name much less four. I do not mind the name Merlot. As with all cats, I am picky. Kitty, Cat, or Fluffy would not become me.

I do not have typical cat looks. Taylor described me early on as pretty ugly but it had more to do with my physical condition than anything else. I am called a white domestic shorthair, but have neither a good coat of fur or normal cat eyes. Instead my coat is thin and my eyes are two colors, one blue, and the other gold. When I finally allowed Taylor to adopt me I was malnourished and dirty. These were just two of the reasons I made the decision to become a house cat. I was tired of the bachelor life I had been living and frankly, winter was several months away. I had already survived one winter on my own. Luckily Taylor lives in an area with a rather mild climate but I found the effort to survive winter less and less to my liking.

The day that I was adopted Taylor was on the way out of town. I could tell she did not want to take the time to pick me up but I made it difficult for her to ignore me. She told me later that she had seen me frequently over the past two months. She was not looking for a third cat, she said. She did not want a third cat but she found something compelling about me. I was white and she was partial to white cats. Chenin Blanc is white as is Pouilly (now called Pookie). Cabernet is a long haired Maine Coon Taylor adopted at the local shelter when no white cats could be found.

Taylor would have adopted me eventually, I am certain, but as I said before I made it difficult for her to miss me that day. As she was leaving her driveway, I lay my body directly in the middle of the street she had to travel. She did as expected. She stopped the car, staring at me as I stared back for several minutes. She had a determined look in her eye that I could tell meant she was hoping I would run at the sound of a car horn. Fat chance. I was hungry, dirty, and ready to come in from the cold (or hot as it may be). Her cats looked well fed and healthy. Actually Chenin looked fat but he is big boned he tells me. In order to get the situation off center, the two of us locked in a staring contest; I knew I would have to make the next move. I stood up on all four legs, stretched and meowed with as much force as I could. I am certain the neighbors thought she had hit me with her car. The curtains on several windows fluttered as the howl became more plaintive in tone. A car door opened, a hand reached out to tentatively pat my head. So far, so good, I thought. Then she left, the car still running quietly.

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Minutes later she returned with a plastic container of cat food. She put it several feet away from me and the car, in the grass off to the side of the road. Good try. I could tell she wanted me to walk over to the food and let her through. She was leaving on a trip for several days, she explained, and did not have time to sort through a stray cat situation. Could I come back in three days and we could discuss it, she asked. I looked at her with stony eyes. No, that would not do, I explained. I could be hit by a car in three days, caught by a stray dog, or I could get lost. The latter was pretty far flung but I had to let her know I was helpless and needed immediate attention.

It worked. I could see her pull at her lower lip, stare at her watch, and mentally try to figure out the time involved in rescuing this stray cat. In the meantime the neighbors continued to watch out of their windows, putting even more pressure on her. I decided further action was needed. I stretched once more and walked over to curl myself around her legs. Her face twitched and I knew I had a new home. Contentedly I closed my eyes as she picked me up and deposited me, somewhat unceremoniously into a cardboard box in the back seat of her car. I accepted this rather well considering and waited for her to carry me into her house.

The next few minutes did not turn out as planned. I was dropped off at a rather sterile building, smelling of other cats and dogs. In the background I could hear cats meowing and dogs whining for their owners. I think sometimes that dogs are not the brave animals that humans make them out to be or why else would they spend so much time crying when their owners leave them? Mature cats have more dignity and try to adapt to situations with their heads held up high, their tails in the air.

Anyway Taylor deposited me and some untold amount of money into the hands of a veterinarian. I did not realize that the money would go to pay the vet to bathe me, give me shots, or unthinkably change my sex from "male" to "neutered". I also woke up to find my front claws were cut short, very short. When they didn't grow back, I looked up the term "declaw" in Taylor's dictionary. Rather barbaric. Considering how much time she spends on her nails it amazed me that she had so little empathy for a cat's need for nails. We never discussed the other procedure though. I had my day in the sun, so to speak, unlike Chenin who was fixed before his voice had a chance to change. He still sounds like a kitten.

I have become a part of Taylor's family after three years and even helped train the latest addition, Pookie into the ways of humans. Pookie is a nervous cat, probably due to inbreeding in my opinion. He is a white Angora with few brain cells that I can identify but he is probably my closest cat friend in the world. Cabernet is the sole female and typically female in her attitude towards the rest of the cats. Me she particularly hates as she believes I coordinate the nightly attack on her as she tries to sleep. It is true that we pick on her but it is not due to her sex as much as it is due to her patrician attitude towards the rest of us cats.

I think Cabernet sees herself as the sole heir to the dynasty of cats left after the ancient Egyptians died off. Chenin, Pookie, and I think she is rather common. Pookie is much prettier, Chenin nicer, and I am smarter. As far as we can tell, Cabernet has no talents and little to recommend her to other humans should something happen to Taylor.

Of course, I should mention that Taylor's mother likes Cabernet better than the rest of us. She even adopted her for two months but found her to be hyperactive and more than likely to leave hairballs in the most unsuspecting places. Hairballs are the curse of the cat race, disliked by cats as well as by humans. Humans take exception to cats and their hairballs, not understanding that we dislike them as well. It would be the same if I assumed that Taylor enjoys throwing up after an exceptionally while night on the town. She doesn't and neither do cats. It is just the end result of hours of grooming one's coat to be perfectly honest. Hairballs I believe just happen.

I am particularly fastidious so I perhaps find the need to barf hairballs more often than the other cats. However, I am smarter. I can always trick Chenin into being next to the hairball at the

same time Taylor discovers it. Poor Chenin. He never has figured out why she assumes it is his hairball. From his perspective hairballs have characteristics unique to their owners much like human fingerprints. I am glad Taylor does not know this.

As I mentioned before, Taylor is single. Not that she wants to be. Taylor would like to be married or at least in love right now. I can see it in her eyes, the music that she listens to, and the videos she will rent on weekends. Love is something that has a special meaning for her. It is perhaps the reason I chose her over the other humans living in the neighborhood. Taylor exudes love in a way that eludes description. Humans think she is crazy to have four cats. I realize it is because she has too much love for just one cat. She gives us the love that she would share with a man.

Taylor is selective about men, though. She has been in love twice since I have come to live with her. She is in love now. She sees this man only at work and on a professional level. He has been at her house twice, both times at her annual Christmas party. He reminds me of Charles, her first love, but he is different. It is probably in the way he treats Taylor, the way he watches her as she talks. He looks like the others that have been here before. Nearly six feet tall, brown hair, striking hazel eyes, a moustache. I looked that word up in the dictionary so as not to confuse it with their other coat of fur. As with us he would shed the beard in the spring. John, the new man, has not yet grown a beard but then, again, I have not seen him since Christmas. But Taylor would have told me. She tells me everything.

Dennis was the one man between Charles and John. I knew him better than John but not as well as Charles. Dennis was a pharmacist, divorced, and athletic. He had a beard and a moustache. He liked us, the cats, the most of any of these men. Partly I suspect because he likened me to a dog he used to have when he was still married. I will rough house with him, fetch, and most unusually of all, I will walk on a leash. Dennis and Taylor would take me for walks in the evening sometimes up to a mile or so. I never took exception to the leash. Indeed, it felt natural on my back and around my stomach. Walking on the leash was my opportunity to see the neighborhood I gave up to live indoors with Taylor. I don't miss it now that I can get back outside with these walks.

I also liked Dennis. He was kind to the cats and he respected Taylor personally as well as professionally. He was proud of her successes and when he did leave, he took her advice on graduate school. She got a card from him recently saying he had finally graduated with his MBA. She smiled while reading the letter to me. I could tell she missed Dennis, her lover, but was glad she had kept him as a friend.

Not like Charles. Charles I frequently found deserved to be scratched. He often made Taylor cry and when he left, she grieved. I worried about her during this time but found that the best any of us could do was to stay close and share our love with her. I even shared my first purr with her after Charles left. You see I didn't purr when she found me or the many months thereafter. I do not know why I did not purr before. I have always been content in this house, loved by this funny woman and two of her three other cats. Cabernet's opinion, as you can imagine, in not typically printable.

Anyway I learned to purr when Charles left. It was a moment that Taylor found especially endearing. Cats do not normally purr unless we are happy and safe. Humans assume it is because we love them. Cat love is more than purring. We can purr when we are bored and a human hand reaches out to stroke our fur. Purring should not be taken personally unless you know the particular cat. So it was with great to do that I purred for Taylor that one sunny day. I know she was amazed. She had asked the vet if my vocal cords were somehow damaged as I didn't purr. The vet correctly told her that I had not yet made that commitment to her or to my cat friends. Once I had, the purring would become a natural part of my personality.

It happened not long after Charles left. I do not understand exactly why he left but it had to do with commitment and marriage. Charles was not commitment material, I could tell from the first

time I met him. He was a second year law student, uncertain of his own destiny, confused by his love for Taylor. He had been married once before but it had ended after 7 years. His wife left him for someone else. Since that time, Charles had lived with three different women before settling in with Taylor on Memorial Day. If she had asked me, I could have told her that he would be trouble. It hasn't been until recently that she learned to trust my opinion of men.

The relationship lasted barely a year. Taylor tried hard to turn into the person Charles wanted to love – someone like the law student he was seeing on the side. I watched her struggle with the relationship and the betrayal without any way to help really. I did find it useful to pee on Charles' leather shoes that lined one side of the bedroom closet. But other than that, I could only watch him pack and leave. I think Taylor knew I peed on his things for a reason and that is why she always defended me from Charles' anger. I even think at the end, she enjoyed knowing I left lasting impressions, if not smells, on his things. I just wish I could have done more to even the score.

Dennis stayed only four months in Taylor's life. I am not certain when she figured out he was not anyway ready for a new relationship. Dennis appeared to me rather bewildered by his wife's decision to leave him. It would take him two more years and several more relationships before he was healthy enough to actually try loving someone again. Like Charles, Dennis did not handle being dumped by the former wife well.

Cats have a much more mature outlook on relationships. We do not love the females we mate with. It has not been our nature to form life long committed relationships. I think it is because unlike lion males, we domestic cat males do not need the females to catch our food. We do well on our own. I can catch a bird as well as Cabernet although I know having a white coat may give me a slight disadvantage. However in winter snow the odds are in my favor.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

Taylor would like to have a more mature outlook on love. She and I discussed this just yesterday as she got dressed for work. I curled up on the unmade bed, my eyes carefully watching her dress as her voice talked of love. I love to listen to her voice. Her voice has a deep rich quality that appeals to me. She speaks to me as one human to another. She does not demean me with "baby" talk so often used to address pets. If Taylor had ever tried that with me while I was still a stray I would have gone on my way that sunny day. I am too mature to tolerate such behavior even from someone like her.

Sometimes I think all I feel is lust, she says to me, her arms struggling to get into one of her many blouses. Taylor is a classy dresser in my opinion. She leans towards feminine designs, sheer blouses, sexy bras, slim skirts, high shoes. She is not as thin as she was during the "Charles" period but she looks better now. She constantly complains about her weight and wishes she was more athletic. But she, like me, has aged and acquitted symptoms of this process. After all, she told me, she was her best ever when she was with Charles and he left her for someone less attractive and fatter! I agreed. "That other woman was a cow." Taylor knew I was trying to make her feel better.

Lust is not bad, I tell her. It is good for the hormones and the psyche.

Not if it is unrequited lust, she explains. Lust is to be acted upon.

I listen with interest, I must admit. I never experienced sexual frustration when I was wild and single. Females were always around and generally in heat at just the right moment. I guess people don't operate the same way, I say.

"No, lust can be mental or physical," Taylor says. What I feel for John is both.

“Doesn’t he want you”, I ask.

“I can’t tell. Perhaps he does but I cannot read him.” She peers at me to see if I understand.

I close my eyes in acknowledgement. She continues.

“I think he is interested but is difficult to tell. You could probably tell, couldn’t you Merlot?”

“He seems interested”, I respond remind her that he comes to her parties.

Taylor has no ego about herself. She has more self doubt than anyone else, I think. She cannot accept the fact that John might actually be interested. She was different in this way before Charles. She did not doubt herself or others around her.

“You need to shape a strategy,” I say. “Cats are great strategists. After all, how else would I have gotten adopted at the exact moment and day that it happened? It was no accident.”

Taylor needs a strategy to get John to fall in love with her. Perhaps I can help.

I stand up and purr contentedly as she finishes her makeup. She sprays perfume on her neck and forearms. Obsession. I like that best on her although I am learning to like Carolina Herrera. Charles loved Oscar de la Renta, Dennis loved Giorgio. She has retired both of those scents as she has retired the relationships that went with them. She pulls out the bottles only when she is alone in the house with a glass of Chardonnay and reminiscences about love. It has been several months since we have seen her do this. I would guess tonight will be one of those nights.

She comes over to pat me on the head and scratches my neck around the collar she asks me to wear.

“I suppose I should develop a plan,” she says reading my thoughts. Love is like working the lottery. A consistent strategy has a better chance of paying off than none at all.

She leaves, closing the door tight behind her, locked. It will be at least eight hours before I see her again. I select the day’s events from my lengthy roster developed over the last three years. I check over the paper for the TV schedule. Reruns again. I select a nap, followed by lunch, and at least three rounds of cat play with my cat friends. Of course, Cabernet does not volunteer for cat play sessions. It is much like being picked for team sports. Chenin, Pookie, and I divide up into two teams, Pookie and I on one team, Chenin because of his size, his own team. In spite of the weight differences Pookie and I can usually win because we are younger than Chenin, and we cheat.

Points in cat play are accumulated by “tagging” the other cat. I am good at this game. The daily walks keep me in shape. Chenin, for example, can tolerate cat play for twenty minutes before he has to retire to the sidelines to catch his breath. Cabernet does not like this game. She believes we cheat. Of course she is right.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

Taylor came home tonight with a new project. It is called a will. She sits down on the couch and starts to explain a will to us. I remind myself to read more about it tomorrow. I can usually absorb more detail than the other cats can. I have a longer attention span.

Taylor starts off by telling us that sometimes bad things happen to good people. I stare at her carefully.

“What about bad things happening to bad people,” I ask.

Taylor ignores me. She knows who I mean. She continues to talk to us.

“And when bad things happen, it is important to have a plan in place to care for those you love. So, I have to make out a will.”

I watch her carefully. I am beginning to understand. Taylor wants someone to adopt us if something happens to her. OK, I think, that’s a good idea.

“Who?” I ask.

“Of course my family should have first choice,” she says.

I perk up my ears. Your family? You mean those guys who visited us last year? The ones with the dog, the fish and the rabbit? Not those guys, I hope.

“I know they’ll take care of you like I would. It is important that someone care for you all,” she explains.

I look at Cabernet, serenely licking her front paws.

“It is not entirely important that we all stay together,” I think.

Taylor reaches over to stroke Cabernet’s head. Cabernet rubs her face into the hand and her eyes close. Chenin and Pookie look at me for a translation. They do not have the vocabulary I have. They mew softly.

“It’s OK,” I mew back. “The plan only goes into effect if something happens to her. And it is probably challengeable in court according to what I see on The People’s Court. We would have to consenting parties to the plan,” I explain. “It is like a contract.”

The cats appear to accept my explanation. Good thing I caught the last few episodes of that show on the tube this week. Of course it did help having Charles around during contracts and torts. I was able to pick up pieces of legal lingo.

Taylor pulls out a copy of the document. It’s the will. I look at it carefully. Pretty standard format, I decide. Except for the section about giving the cats away.

I decide to let Taylor think we are fine with her decision. I move my head towards her hand, pushing Cabernet to the floor. I do not like having to think of having another home and owner. The others would adapt to anything, I think. They are less selective. They did not have the opportunity to choose Taylor. Cabernet, the pound cat, Chenin, the stray kitten, and Pookie the befuddled stray. A standard cat joke among us is that Pookie is so trusting that he would let a vivisectionist adopt him.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

I only see Taylor when she is home. She does not take me to work or on dates. On occasion she will take the four of us on trips, generally to see her mother. I tolerate the car rides well but the other cats have become scared of the car. I assume the car reminds them of the vet. Once a year each of us gets deposited into a cat carrier, then in the car, for the trip to the vet. Each time we get three shots and some pretty rude body searches. The vet tries to make light of the situation but I find the visits demeaning. Taylor explains that cats need preventive care the same as people. She tells me she dislikes her annual PAP smear as much as I hate the vet visits. I can appreciate this but I still do not have to like the vet.

Taylor has a routine when she is at home. Sometimes it will vary when she has to work late at the office. Yet she tries very hard to make time for the four of us. I am the most demanding of her evenings. Our walks give me a chance to find out what she has done that day and to bring her up to date on our experiences as well. I tell her about the other cats while she brushes her hair on the concrete bench outside. She seems to understand what I say as will nod and laugh at the appropriate moments. She will also lean over and hug me when I have had a bad day. Generally, I don't but I take advantage of her love sometimes to steal a hug or two she would normally waste on Cabernet.

It is difficult to assess her life when I see only a part of it. I do catch glimpses of it when she talks on the telephone or when she works at her computer. Taylor volunteers for several organizations and right now is working on an animal rights' bill pending in the state legislature. I help her fashion her presentation, giving her my thoughts on animal abuse, testing, and fur coats. She picks and chooses from among my comments, taking those that are sure to strike a cord in someone's heart as well as their mind. She does not use my comment that dogs are appropriate test animals for the military. But then again, she has never been chased by a pit bull (or a pond goose).

Taylor does not mention John tonight. I know she has seen him because it is Tuesday. She always sees him at staff meetings on Tuesdays. I remind her that we have not had the full report of today's encounter. Taylor looks thoughtfully at me and asks if I am hungry.

"I am not hungry," I say. "You fed us two hours ago. I want an update on this John person."

"Oh, John," she says. She finally understands my question. "Well today John and I had lunch." She falls quiet.

"Lunch? That must have been nice," I respond.

"I spilled part of my salad on my blouse. John had to wait while I washed it out in the bathroom and then waited some more while I tried to dry it under the hand dryer. We were late getting back to the office."

"Shit happens," I say. "What else?"

"I have never been more embarrassed in my life. I don't think he will talk to me again."

Chenin and I look at each other. He reaches out a paw to touch her hand. Chenin is the most empathetic cat I have ever met. He always is quick to respond to a human need. Taylor appears grateful. She leans over and whispers in his ear. He perks up. I assume she mentioned Chenin's two most important words in the world. Crab legs. Taylor did come home with a sack from the local market. She is a sucker for Chenin's love of seafood. She used to feed him scallops until I explained to her that she didn't eat them because they were too expensive but she fed them to her sixteen pound furbaby. Taylor laughed when she heard this but she stopped buying Chenin the scallops. Instead, he now gets crab legs when they are on sale. She does love to spoil us.

I do not care for crab or scallops. Taylor has a harder time finding something to spoil me with. She found it finally in a plastic green mouse. I call this my binky. It is actually a dog toy but for some reason I am attracted to the binky. I carry it from room to room so that it is always near me. I cannot help myself. It squeaks as I carry it. The squeaks spark some strange paternal instinct from me and I spend time "soothing" the binky after its journey. Taylor even lets the binky sleep with her at night.

Not all cats need a toy or a favorite treat. Cabernet has neither, preferring to chase her own tail as a form of entertainment. I have seen dogs do this and have told her so. Pookie will use

anything for a toy, a favorite being a coated rubber band from Taylor's hair. He tosses them in the air to catch them and often loses them under the couch. I have estimated at one time the couch claimed twenty or more of these things. Taylor can never seem to find them but she does have the same view of the world that cats do. We see the world from one foot off floor level most of the time. Unless of course we are prone on the floor or atop a dresser. Humans could learn a lot from seeing the world from our perspective.

Taylor is now dressing for bed. I jump up on a nearby chair to watch her. I do not do this as a voyeur but I admit I do enjoy the routine. First, the day's clothes drop to the floor, then neatly hung in the closet. Shoes go in their personal boxes, black on the left to white on the right. This she learned from Charles. Lingerie is draped over coat hangers. Taylor likes to have her lingerie available this way for early morning selection. As usual, black on the left, white on the right. A special place is set aside for red and pink lingerie. She has not worn these since Charles left.

She slips into a silky purple nightshirt and flosses her teeth. This is a leftover from her upbringing. A brother is a dentist. He used to make her and her sister floss when they were in grade school. Now Taylor flosses three times or more a day. Cats have no need for flossing. We tolerate the annual tooth cleaning so that we don't lose our teeth prematurely. Perhaps the vet flosses them. I cannot recall. I think the vet gives us drugs before doing this to us.

Taylor is now ready for bed. Bed covers are thrown back just to sheets. She slips under a single sheet covering and thus begins the nightly routine. Whiskas cat treats. A shake of the box and all of us jump on the bed, meowing softly. A hand holds a treat up for Pookie. Pookie is always first. He will sit up and beg for food. He is the only one. I am not amused by his behavior. It makes him look like a dog.

Taylor talks to us before we go to sleep. IT is perhaps a habit taken from growing up with an older sister. Sharing a room in that context is much like having litter mates. Conversation happens as a result of proximity as much as anything else. Taylor and Charles used to talk at night. Sometimes this would turn into something more. It reminds me of cat play but not quite. Taylor tried to explain it to me one time but I fell asleep. She probably thought I was being indifferent or aloof. She was correct. Anytime she talked of Charles I became aloof.

Taylor wants to talk about John tonight. She does not fill the other cats in on the lunch episode, just the feelings that she has for this man. The other cats listen politely. They sense the tone of her voice and understand love. Love is what Taylor shares with us. Now she wants to share it with John. I walk slowly to her right side and stretch out my body next to hers. Chenin does the same to her left side; Pookie curls up at her feet. Cabernet watches quietly from the floor. She will make her move once we are all situated, often only after the lights are turned out. She prefers to sleep on the extra pillow next to Taylor's head. She closes her eyes. She can tell it will be several minutes before the lights go out.

"Do you remember John, Chenin?" Taylor scratches Chenin's head and ears. This immediately causes Chenin to go into something akin to a feline orgasm. Chenin is a very tactile cat. He reacts best to direct stimuli.

I nod impatiently. This part is old hat from my perspective. I extend a paw towards her arm. She immediately begins to pet me. I shake my head and her hand drifts away. She resumes her reverie.

"I want to invite John to dinner. What do you all think?"

I look at her face. She is asking for approval. I glance at the others, who as usual want me to translate for them. I make a few statements that cause Chenin and Pookie to nod in agreement. Only Cabernet shakes her head no. She believes our family is just fine the way it is. Of course she still dreams of being the only cat again. Just her and Taylor. She did not like sharing Taylor

with Charles or Dennis either. She found it disruptive in general, especially with the moving in and moving out stuff.

“Will you help me plan this? I would like it to be perfect and he must see you all at your best!”

I adjust my posture, relaxing my back even more into the softness of the bed. I tilt my head back, allowing my eyes to catch hers quickly.

“What is best behavior?” I ask, whiskers twitching. I lick a paw as she responds.

“I just mean you all must be presentable, you know, clean. John must not see you as you really are just yet. I have appointments for you to get groomed Friday, if you are OK with this.”

Taylor knows that we understand the word “groom”. Pookie and Cabernet know it the best. They are long hairs. Taylor has found out that “grooming” means less cat fur in the house. Clipping the cats is an added bonus but cost extra. During the hot months Taylor has both Cabernet and Pookie “groomed” and clipped regularly. Cabernet will not show her bare tummy after these sessions. She thinks a hairless tummy makes her look fat. I have told her otherwise. It makes her look stupid, I say.

“Groom” is not a word I accept without a bribe. Taylor knows this and is waiting to hear the terms. I carefully consider my choices. I may be able to get three out of her tonight. She needs my approval to win over the other cats.

I decide. Taylor will have to double up on the daily walks. I want to go out in the early mornings. I want a new binky. And, last but not least, she has to rent me at least two of the three movies I want to see.

Taylor knows a good negotiator when she sees one. She reaches for my paw. We shake on it.

**THE END.**