



Excerpt from *Stealing Saints*

Christmas arrived, like it does. The dawn's early light saw me scooping litter boxes with Johnny and setting out food for our shelter full of cats, those in Johnny's clinic, and our house cats, now up to eleven with the addition of harlequin-patterned Havoc and her four kittens.

Litter boxes suited my mood. Our intern, the Scooper in Chief, was spending the holidays with his family. Dianne had taken off for Dallas the Sunday afternoon after our open house (the better to avoid Mass with the family). I knew she wouldn't last until New Year's, but at least she would be a Good Daughter and help prepare for the holidays. That left me as the one Johnny could count on for cat duty until the new year settled in.

With the sky sulky and the air cold, close to freezing, I set out for Houston with car heater and music system blasting. From Beauchamp to the Thompson home on Rice Boulevard takes two standard Taylor Swift albums, sandwiched between two ten-minute "All Too Wells." As Taylor moaned the last "all too well," I parked on the street and killed the ignition. I checked my phone, any excuse to delay. I was in for a full day of family, a word high on my personal list of F-words, no friend having responded to my plea from last Saturday before I left Beauchamp.

Feeling the opposite of anxious to join the family debacle inside, I scrolled through my phone. In a Christmas miracle, I found a text from an old friend.

Nick Thornton

JD, if you still want something to do this afternoon, could you come get me and my service dog? Bernie gave me until New Year's to get out, but I can't stand it anymore. My car died and I don't have any way to leave.



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