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The Note-Texter

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The Note-Texter

Abstract

I didn't used to do this, but I take notes now. By notes, I mean that I text myself cryptic messages like, "This was how I learned to court." Or: "Chase her with scissors." Or: "My mother didn't like him but felt sorry for him." In between these cryptic notes are grocery lists: "Black cherry soda, milk, Purina Cat Chow, orange juice, jelly, ear medicine for dog."

Cover Page Footnote

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The Note-Texter

Labor Practices by John McNally

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At some point, I'll try out an opening paragraph, which likely won't include anything from the notes, but then I'll type up the notes after that first paragraph and then arrange them in the order that I think they might appear in the story.

The first paragraph is usually a failure. The voice is wrong. It begins in the wrong place. There's no momentum. But if there's anything going for it—anything at all—I'll push the story ahead until I lose interest. I won't look at any of the notes until I get stuck, but once I'm stuck I'll scroll to the end and read, "This was how I learned to court," and I'll wonder why I didn't begin with that, so I'll cut-and-paste it to the top of the document, and then I'll read "Chase her with scissors" and think, oh shit, I forgot about that entirely, at which point I'll add the girl who needs to be chased with scissors. In other words, it's a clunky, imperfect process, and yet it works for me.

One problem with note-texting: My phone often sends texts that I'm sending to myself to another person. I never realize it's happening until the moment the text has been sent and then . . . *noooooo!* I recently texted to a colleague a pitch for a

screenplay I was trying to text myself. His reply was a question mark. I texted a friend a possible tagline for a book I'm writing. Without knowing why I had texted this to her, she wrote back, "I would read that book!" Okay; good; whew. The first time this happened, I was at a conference, hungover, and I used my voice-activated software to text myself. Instead the message went to someone I barely knew, a woman I had met only twice. To make matters worse, the voice-activated software turned the message into something lewd.

I often think of my own demise. I imagine it in public, on a sidewalk. When the police come, they examine my cellphone for information, and what they find are messages, thousands of them, sent to myself: lewd non sequiturs, reminders to chase girls with scissors, and grocery lists for pets who are waiting for me at home.

"Probably for the best," an officer might say before calling the first previously dialed number to break the sad news of my parting.

John McNally is the author or editor of fourteen books, including *Vivid and Continuous: Essays and Exercises for Writing Fiction*. He lives in Lafayette, Louisiana, where he teaches at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.