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## What to Offer, What to Take

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## What to Offer, What to Take // Cheyenne Varner

After you passed away, after a little while, people started showing up with suggestions like you used to show up with flowers—if they were slightly wilted flowers given hesitantly in yellowed water: “Sandra, I’m sure it’s all easier said than done, and I know you’ll need your time, but maybe it would help if you would” fill in the blank here. So I started missing phone calls and sleeping through knocks on the door. Some people were harder to flat out ignore than others but generally I was getting by just fine this way. The ones I wasn’t closest too didn’t seem to mind, maybe they felt they had been spared in fact, from potentially stepping on my toes, because of the fact that I didn’t want to dance with them that way. I don’t mean to sound abrasive. I know what they say about the thought that counts. And look, take the woman I used to babysit for every Saturday in college. She showed up three Sundays after and I could hear her at the door. I stood very still with my plate in one hand, thankful my fork was in the other and not clinking on the porcelain. I heard her uncertain exhale and the rustle of her hands going through her purse. I heard the click of her pen and the subtle scraping sound of ink rolling from its metal tip. I heard the crinkle of her coat and the clamor of her keys as she squatted to the floor. I saw the little fold of paper slipping underneath my door. I waited for the sound of her to fade out down the hall and then I clenched the fork between my teeth and grabbed the little note up. I unfolded it with that one hand and read: Sandra, I am so sorry for your loss. In times like these I understand that words seems fruitless and mundane. The boys and I are keeping you uplifted in our thoughts and in our prayers. May God return to you the joy He’d given you in Warren. Just beside that there was a rectangle of ink, words taken back. And just for that reason I wanted them more than anything else. I lifted the note to the light and away from the light and sideways in the light whatever way I could to shift what I saw, hoping to get a glimpse of the lines of the letters she’d tried to un-write. When I lost Aiden, I saw. And I breathed out real long.

And I was so grateful. If I had not seen those four unwritten words I never would have known she had the battle in her mind of what to say and what to keep, tightly in her own weak fist of a heart, just beats from unraveling. Maybe it was too hard, that’s all,

fist of a heart, just beats from unraveling. Maybe it was too hard, that's all, of a sentence to finish. But I like to think she knew nothing was in it that could make a difference when I read it in my dimly lit hallway. I like to think she knew that I'd find my way as she'd found hers, and if she tried to help that she could hurt, and that the most important things to say could not be said at all.