

**Just Give Cash**  
*By Alexander Saxton*

Day after the wedding. They were both incredibly hungover, and the room-service mimosas they'd drunk with breakfast had only made things worse. Now, too hungover to go outside, but drunk enough to feel energetic, they'd decided to break open the great white-wrapped cardboard box and start sorting through the pile of wedding envelopes.

Of course they hadn't had a registry. They were adults with an apartment of their own and no storage space for desperate & unwanted gifts. Like any newly-married couple, the only wedding gift they really needed was a bit of help to underwrite the wedding's massive cost.

Now they sat between two piles: one, a heap of torn envelopes and discarded cards, the other, a mound of succulent, delicious cash.

More cash than either of them had ever seen in one place in their life. Far less than they'd spent on the wedding, of course, but so much in one place that it made them feel giddy & rich, so they took it in turns to gather up the cash and toss it in the air like autumn leaves.

Now, having made money angels, they lay laughing amid the green banks of twenty dollar bills. The bride shifted. Something was digging into her spine, and when she reached back to remove it, she came away with one final envelope. The couples' names written across its blank face in neat cursive.

"One last envelope."

"Who's it from?" he asked.

She shrugged.

"No name."

"Looks like a good one, though."

He was right: the envelope strained slightly with the bulk of its contents, and bride & groom grinned at one another in innocent greed.

"Do you want to do the honours?" She offered.

"No no, all yours."

She laughed, called him 'a gentleman', and crawled over to the hotel-room desk, where she groped for a cheap pen to use as letter-opener.

“Ready?”

The groom nodded, and she lifted the pen with a flourish, before dropping its point to rip the envelope’s seal.

A sudden reek burst from the envelope. A smell of swamps decaying in the summer; of rotten vegetation.

“What *is* that?”

The groom flung a sleeve across his face, and the envelope slipped from the bride’s fingers as she recoiled.

It landed on the carpet with a wet thud, spilling forth more rotten leaves and putrid moss than should have been able to fit inside: several fistfuls-worth of forest floor, replete with silverfish & earwigs that boiled out and slithered underneath the furniture.

“What the *hell*?”

The bride leaped back onto the bed, gagging as one of the insects raced close to her bare foot.

But though he was disgusted as well, something caught the groom’s eye amidst the pile of leaves. He leaned forward, still covering his mouth and nose, and from the leaves, he gingerly pried away a piece of wet card. Inside it was a note, and a folded heap of soaking US hundred-dollar bills.

“Dear Angelo and Emily,” he read, unfolding the wet paper. “Congratulations on your wedding. It’s plain to see on your faces just how much you love each other. Treasure that love. It’s the only thing worth living for.

Yours, with all my dearest love,

Aunt Marie.”

He let the card fall from his fingers. Looked for a long time at the pile of soaking leaves. Uncounted in his left hand, the soaking bills. Almost twenty-six hundred dollars with which to start their life together.

Only after a long moment had passed did the bride have the courage to whisper.

“Who’s Aunt Marie?”

But on some level she already knew.

“She died when I was very young,” he said, reaching out one hand to touch the damp mulch. His palm came away stained. “They found her body in the woods.”