

# **Panic Room**

**Crimson Rose**

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When my good friend Alex called and asked if I could house sit for three weeks while he and his husband Ben went on an extended honeymoon, I jumped all over it. Having made enough playing the stock market to last a lifetime, they added another cool \$400 million by hitting the lottery. Fearing someone coming after them for their money, they bought an old ninety acre farm, demolished the buildings on it and rebuild their dream home with security in mind.

Sparing no expense, Alex and Ben had a ten foot high stone wall built around the entire property while their nearly four-thousand square foot home sat smack dab in the middle with a long, winding driveway leading up to it. The house itself was ranch style with steel-reinforced walls, bulletproof windows and the most high-tech security system I've ever seen – not to mention the sweet remote that controlled everything from the heating and cooling to the TV and build-in stereo system.

I arrived shortly after seven in the morning – a good two hours before I was used to getting out of bed, but they offered me a hell of a deal on watching the place so I was more than happy to be inconvenienced. I was greeted at the door by Ben who gave me a quick hug – one of his habits I never got used to, but did not complain about because I did not want to offend.

"Hey Brad, come on in, Alex is just finishing up in the bathroom and we'll be out of your hair."

"Thanks. And don't hurry on my account," I said stepping into a living room that was nearly as big as my entire house. "So, three weeks in Spain, huh? Sounds like a dream come true," I said a little envious. I've never been on a honeymoon, but the last vacation I took was to Yellowstone and it took me six months to save for it.

"Oh my god! You have no idea!" Ben squealed. "We've been talking about this for the last two years! Anyways, we're glad you could watch the house for us. We've added your requested code to the main gate and the security system so you should have no trouble getting in, and your payment is in the envelope on the kitchen counter."

"I told you that you didn't have to pay me. I'd stay here for three weeks for free."

"Nonsense. Besides, you've got to have money to eat on, right?"

"I suppose so."

"Hey Brad!" Alex said as he entered the living room from the hallway leading to the bedrooms and bathrooms. "Man, you look like shit! You feeling okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just not used to getting up this early."

"I hate you greet and run, but we've got to go if we're to make our flight on time."

"No problem. Enjoy your honeymoon."

Alex and Ben both gave me a quick hug and were off to the airport. Though they had been together for nearly a decade, they were now officially married and wanted to start the rest of their life together in style. I watched on the monitor as the car pulled up to the gate, Alex input the code to get out and then they drove off. I kicked off my shoes so as not to track dirt on their pristine carpets and went into the kitchen where I picked the envelope up off of the counter. Opening it up, my eyes nearly bulged out of my head.

Inside the white envelope was a huge stack of bills and a folded up piece of paper. Taking both out, I opened the paper and read it first.

*I know we agreed on \$2,000 for the three weeks, but Alex and I talked about it and didn't think that was enough. You've been a good friend and have asked for nothing from us despite our extreme wealth and so we thought you deserved a little something extra. This is only the first part*

*of the payment we're going to give you. Thanks again for watching the house and see you in three weeks.*

Sitting the note on the counter, I picked up the stack of money, removed the rubber band from around the middle and began counting. I counted it again and again and again – each time coming up with the same amount: \$75,000 in fifties and hundreds. I could feel my heart beginning to race and for a moment I thought I might be having a heart attack, but it settled into shocked surprise as I took a seat before falling to the floor.

I was going to go to bed once they left, but that stack of money on the kitchen counter was enough to wake me right up so I grabbed a coke from the fridge and went to the living room to see what the early birds watched on TV. As it turned out I had my choice between news and cartoons. Opting for neither, I shut the TV off and began pacing back and forth thinking what I was going to do with their generous gift.

In hindsight, I should have taken stock and gone to the store, but hindsight was a bitch and I was not making it to the store before I messed myself so I ran down the hall, entered Alex and Ben's master bedroom and looked in their bathroom for some toilet paper. My stomach churning, I closed the door and took care of business. I don't know if it was the Mexican food I ate the night before, or the shock at coming into some much needed money, but it hit me like a ton of bricks.

When I was done, I left the bathroom taking a pack of toilet paper with me. When I got to the bedroom door to leave I noticed a small red button next to a keypad and wondered what it was for. Figuring it was an automatic door opener – not outside the realm of possibilities for their home, I pushed it. THUNK! THUNK! THUNK! Heavy steel plates dropped over the windows blocking out the sunlight and causing me to nearly crap my pants. Grabbing the door knob, I gave it a turn but it did not budge. *GREAT!* I thought. *I've been here seven hours and already I've fucked something up!*