

# FAILURE RESPOND



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Brocade curtains, reeking of cigarette smoke, blocked out the summer sun. I felt like I was on a haunted mansion tour led by a zombie. Staring up at the femme-fatale framed in mahogany, I wondered how such a melancholy lady could light up the cinematic screen. Her skin looked soft as silk and her face reminded me of a bright full moon. But, her eyes were deep wells of sadness expressing the knife ripping pain of heartache.

According to the butler, Isabella's second husband, Roger, left messages for her at the Le Meurice in Paris, as well as, with her agent and Hollywood friends connected with the upcoming film. Roger was beyond frantic. The staff, used to his verbal assaults when he was drunk, stayed clear of him. This time, they had no idea what stirred up a rage so violent he smashed ceramic art against the walls. After he stormed out of the house, the cook, governess and butler helped the housekeeper clean up while James junior and Gwendolyn, the children from Isabella's first marriage, were sequestered in their playroom overlooking the garden.

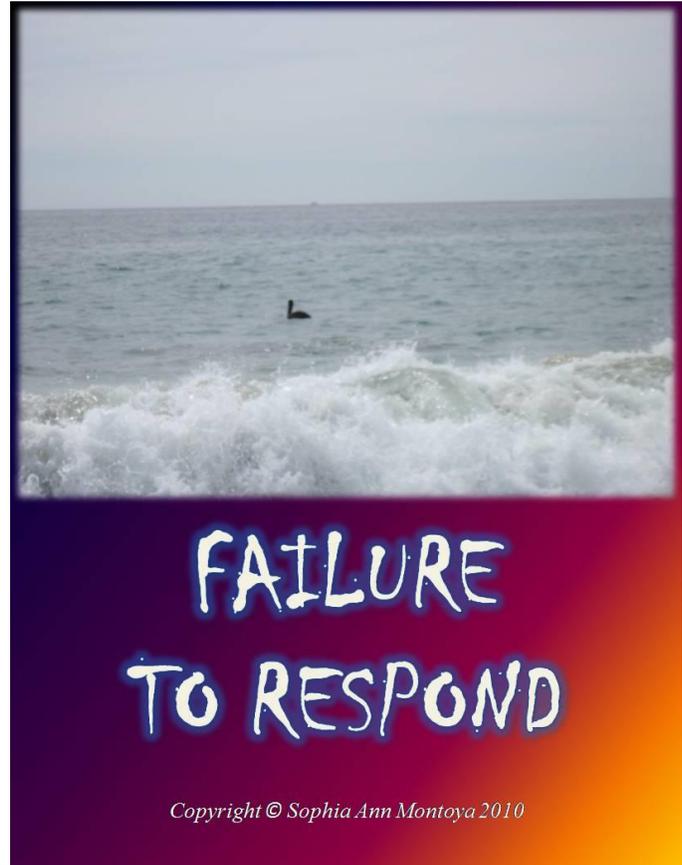
Roger returned the next morning with newspaper in hand. When told Isabella had not returned his calls, Roger sat in the office for hours dialing the phone and shouting demands. Refusing to eat, he gulped shots of whiskey and read the news while waiting for Isabella's response. Then a roar of insults pelted the household ambiance like a machine gun's rapid fire. He wanted Isabella dead.

“Where are they,” Roger snarled slapping the butler in the face with the newspaper. Rushing from room to room, Roger pushed the housekeeper aside. She fell on a Tiffany lamp and a broken shard sliced her arm. When the butler picked up the paper that had fallen to the floor, he saw the photo of Isabella embracing her director. Their foreheads were pressed together and their lips curled up in laughter. The headline read, “Passion in Paris.” Seeing the governess usher the children outside, Roger caught up to her and slugged her in the face.

Responding to the piercing screech of the governess, the butler ran to her aid as he shouted, “Call the Police!”

Through the French doors leading out to the backyard, he saw Roger squeezing the neck of each child. Like a bull, he charged outside and jumped on Roger’s back. But his slight frame was effortlessly flung off. Determined, he scrambled up and grabbed a cement swan swinging in desperation. Roger crumpled to the ground over the kids. The butler pushed the massive body off the fragile forms of the three and four year olds. It was, too, late.

Investigation uncovered Roger’s overdue gambling debts. When told of the murderous rage, Isabella’s hysteria required sedation. The funeral was held in Malibu. Playing out her most dramatic act, Isabella let waves splash against her under a moonless night as she feasted on a cornucopia of barbiturates.



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