

FIVE EX-WIVES IN ICU

By Linda Thorsen Bond

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CHARACTERS

- LISA The host of a local TV talk show and a hometown icon. She wears tailored slacks, blazers, silk shirts. Her hair has a great and expensive cut. To her, everything sounds like it should be a news story. She's never surprised when people recognize her. She considers it part of her job.
- TERRI An earth mother. She wears layers of clothing topped with scarves or exotic jewelry. Her hair is long, thick and wavy. Sometimes she wears it in a heavy braid down her back.
- JEN An aerobics teacher with two daughters who are a handful. She wears faded jeans frayed at the cuff, a little T-shirt, aerobic tennis shoes with a coat of white shoe polish on them. Her hair is cut short, so she can tousle it when she gets out of the shower. She looks as if nervous energy has burned all the fat off her body.
- PAM Owns her own Montessori school. She wears comfortable shoes and carries a canvas tote with several books and notepads. She reads a paperback novel at warp speed. She wears the same outfit she wears at the school—a denim skirt and vest over her well-padded body.
- ROSEMARY A saint. Everybody says so. She's younger than the others, with clear skin so lovely that people always comment on it. Her hair is soft and wavy, her eyes expressive. She wears soft floral dresses, or linen shirts and pants with flat sandals.
- BRANDON LAPORTE Old enough to have married five women; somewhat too young to be in a coma.
- NURSE Female.

TIME & PLACE

Inside a large hospital. The present.

SET

Scenes 1-3: Interior of a waiting room outside an intensive care unit (ICU) at a large hospital. Brandon's bed is upstage as if it is in a separate room right off the waiting room. He is always visible.

Scene 4: Brandon's bed has been brought forward to show the scene has moved inside the separate room.

Five Ex-Wives in ICU was first performed as a reading at the 2004 Festival for New American Plays at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacagdoches, Texas.

PROP LIST

Hospital bed with various life-sustaining tubes and equipment (BRANDON)
Cell phone (LISA)
Purse (TERRI)
Suitcase (TERRI)
Airline carry-on bag (TERRI)
Box of tissues (TERRI)
Lipstick (TERRI)
Canvas tote bag with paperback novel (PAM)
KUDO bars, or some other chocolate snack bar (PAM)
Metal hospital tray with various items on it (NURSE)

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SETTING: The waiting room outside an Intensive Care Unit of a hospital where BRANDON LAPORTE is in a coma. It is possible to see BRANDON in a hospital bed in the back of this room. His ex-wives have come from all over the Southwest because it seemed wrong not to. Perhaps they are here because they wonder about the other women who were foolish enough to marry him.

SCENE 1

AT RISE: TERRI is alone in the waiting room. SHE has spread out her purse, suitcase, tote bag, tissue box and so forth over several seats. SHE sobs dramatically into a tissue.

LISA: (*enters*) Terri?

TERRI: Lisa! (*leaps up and enfolds LISA in a huge hug*) Oh, thank goodness you're here! I'm so glad you came. . . (*blows her nose loudly*)

LISA: (*steps back; making sure her silk blouse didn't get crushed*) My mother insisted I come, if you can believe it. Have you seen Brandon yet?

TERRI: I've been with him all day. I came right from the airport. I dumped everything here in the waiting room and the nurse let me right in.

LISA: My mom said his liver cratered. How's he look?

TERRI: So good. I mean the machine makes it look like he's breathing. Like he might get up any minute and walk right out of here.

LISA: He'd get out if he could, that's for sure. He hated to have anyone fussing over him. . .

TERRI: He loved it when I fussed over him—he said I cared more about him than he did himself. . . (*breaks down in loud sobs*) I'm sorry, I can't stop crying. You're so cool, you're so in control. . .

LISA: Well, I only married him once. You married him twice, you must have liked him twice as much.

TERRI: I thought I wouldn't feel anything. But the minute I saw him lying there I couldn't stop kissing him. . .

(LISA's cell phone rings. SHE gestures at TERRI to "hold that thought" and answers it.)

LISA: Yes? That's all right, go ahead. No. No, both of them cancelled? Well, we're live at five—I know, you have to go—don't worry about it, I'll find someone to fill in. No, I'm not that busy, I'll do it. (*ends call, looks at TERRI*) You were saying?

(JEN enters.)

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TERRI: Jen! You made it! (*rushes over and hugs her*) Lisa, you know Jen, don't you?

LISA: Of course. After you, but before Pam.

JEN: I got here as fast as I could. I can't believe he's. . .

TERRI: You'll have to go in and see him. He looks so good.

LISA: Good? Isn't he in a coma? (*her phone rings and SHE walks to the other side of the room to talk on it*)

TERRI: (*to JEN*) I thought I wouldn't feel anything. But the minute I saw him lying there I couldn't stop kissing him. . .

JEN: I had to force myself to come. I hate hospitals. Brandon and I met in a hospital.

TERRI: I know. When he was in the motorcycle wreck. And you were in for—bulimia, was it?

JEN: Anorexia. Well, okay, and bulimia. He used to come in and make me laugh. He was so funny.

TERRI: Really? You thought so? I never thought he was. We were still married then.

JEN: You mean the second time?

TERRI: Well, yes.

(PAM and ROSEMARY enter.)

TERRI: Pam! Rosemary!

(TERRI rushes to enfold them both in a hug. ROSEMARY puts her arms around TERRI and pats her on the back. SHE looks at TERRI's face then hugs her again.)

ROSEMARY: Oh, Terri, you poor thing. Are you all right?

TERRI: I thought I wouldn't feel anything. But the minute I saw him lying there I couldn't stop kissing him. . .

JEN: (*to PAM*) You drove?

PAM: Flew. Rosemary picked me up at the airport.

LISA: (*folds up her phone and walks back to the group*) Well, isn't this nice. Everybody's here. All Brandon LaPorte's ex-wives. I can't believe it.

TERRI: I called everyone and here you are. It was easy to find everyone. Everybody still LaPorte. Even you, Lisa, you still go by LaPorte. I'm really surprised.

LISA: It's better for television. Lisa LaPorte. Sounds better than Lisa Schwamkrug, right? My new husband says Brandon's wives got sweeter with each marriage. Which is unfortunate, since I was number one.

TERRI: Lisa, do you know everybody?

LISA: Everyone but—ah. . . (*looks toward PAM*)

PAM: Pam. From Albuquerque.

LISA: You were—fourth?

PAM: Yes. Unless you're counting Terri twice. To be precise, you could say we had the fifth wedding.

LISA: And of course we all know Rosemary, the ultimate positive thinker. To be the fifth wife in such an illustrious line up! My, you must be quite the optimist.

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ROSEMARY: I . . . I guess I was just hopeful.

LISA: How dear. Well, here we are. A tribute to hope and naivety. We should have coordinated our outfits. We could have all worn the same color, white maybe. Each of us, the same color but a different style.

JEN: Oh, Lisa. What a funny idea.

TERRI: He'll be so glad we're all here.

(NURSE pokes her head in the door and startles them.)

NURSE: Mrs. LaPorte?

ALL: ***(In one voice, they answer.)*** Yes?

NURSE: Uh, Mr. LaPorte's CURRENT wife can come in.

LISA: Nobody current here. And if you narrow it down to just the women he's been faithful to, you won't have anybody.

ROSEMARY: ***(softly)*** Lisa. He is dying. ***(to NURSE)*** We'll take turns, if you don't mind.

NURSE: I don't mind if you don't. Who's, uh, first?

LISA: Technically, that's me. But somebody take my turn. I've got to run.

JEN: You have to go? Now???

LISA: I'll come back later to claim my rightful place in the line-up. Go ahead, Terri, you can go in twice. ***(exits)***

PAM: My, oh my, that was fun. I can't wait to meet her new husband and tell him how much I agree with him.

SCENE 2

AT RISE: That evening. TERRI is alone, asleep in a chair. SHE wears the same clothes, that are now disheveled and wrinkled. LISA stands by BRANDON's bed dressed in a neat blazer and slacks, looking ready for a close-up. SHE starts to exit, but TERRI wakes up.

TERRI: Lisa. I didn't know you came back.

LISA: And I didn't know you never left.

TERRI: I could have gone to a hotel, but I didn't want to leave him. What do you think?

LISA: I'd have gone for the hotel.

TERRI: No, I mean about Brandon.

LISA: I went in to see him, but that nurse followed me in and watched me the whole time I was in there.

TERRI: She's seen you on TV. She wants your autograph.

LISA: Local TV. What can you do. I don't even go out in sweatpants anymore.

TERRI: How was he?

LISA: His eyes were wandering around. Yick. It gave me the creeps. Like he was going to sit up any minute. I didn't know what to do.

TERRI: I just talk to him, and say positive things—maybe he can hear us. And I kiss him and rub his hands. . .

LISA: I did—I did touch him on the face.

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TERRI: His color is good, don't you think? Lots of times hepatitis makes people kinda yellow.

LISA: Hepatitis! He has hepatitis? *(holds her hands out in front of her and looks at them in dismay)*

TERRI: I thought you knew that.

LISA: I've got to wash up.

TERRI: It's not contagious.

LISA: Are you sure?

TERRI: The nurse said so. They'd have given us gloves or something if it were.

(LISA rushes out of the room to wash her hands and probably scrub her arms. TERRI tries to straighten herself up, rearranging her clothes, putting on lipstick.)

LISA: *(returns)* Brandon's revenge. We all get hepatitis, without the fun of the dirty needles.

(TERRI pats the seat beside herself and LISA reluctantly sits.)

TERRI: It breaks my heart to see him like this.

LISA: He stopped breaking my heart a hundred years ago.

TERRI: I still miss him. I still. . . How'd you get over him?

LISA: I got bored. Bored with all the lies and the games and the bull. One day I woke up and said to myself, "Boooring," and threw a broom at him and told him to get out.

TERRI: I'd take him back today if I could.

LISA: Boring. This whole thing bores me.

TERRI: Lisa! How can you say that?

LISA: There was a time in my life when I only wanted those things I couldn't have. If a man was a challenge, he was worth the work. I thought the only relationships worth having were those I had to keep fighting for.

TERRI: I still feel that way.

LISA: Here's a novel idea, Terri. Why marry a man who doesn't think as much of you as you do?

TERRI: There is so much good in him.

LISA: There must be something. But I don't know if it's good. He married five good women and screwed us all. Literally and figuratively.

TERRI: He's a little lost boy. . .

LISA: Who cheated his way from marriage to marriage, smiling to our faces and screwing somebody else while we had his baby.

TERRI: *(pause, apologetically)* I didn't realize then that you were still married.

LISA: Well, Terri, did you ever ask? You think people who live together in three-bedroom houses and drive matching Pontiacs are just good buddies?

TERRI: You never had time for him.

LISA: I didn't have time for liars and cheats. I still don't. When I took the baby to my parents' house for the first time, he hung pictures of you in the kitchen. Photos he took in our bedroom while I was gone.

TERRI: He had that photo of you in our living room.

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LISA: And you didn't think that was a little sick? Do you suppose all the other wives had pictures of each other in their living rooms? (**TERRI begins to cry.**) Come on, let's get out of here. I'll drive you to a hotel, and you can sleep in a bed instead of a chair.

TERRI: I don't know. . .

LISA: Come on. I'll bet you he'll be right where you left him when you come back.

TERRI: I could use a shower. So I'll look nice for him.

(They exit.)

SCENE 3

AT RISE: JEN and PAM are in the waiting room of ICU. JEN is pacing, PAM is reading. Finally PAM puts down her book.

PAM: Yes?

JEN: What?

PAM: Do you want to talk about something?

JEN: No, I just can't sit very long.

PAM: Nervous energy? I haven't got any.

JEN: No, I mean padding. I can't sit in these chairs.

PAM: That I've got. If you sat more, you'd have it, too.

JEN: (**shudders**) I couldn't stand it. I'm sorry; I didn't mean that against you or anything.

PAM: I accumulate adipose tissue like some people accumulate material possessions.

JEN: (**sighs**) It must be nice to know everything.

PAM: Thanks. I think.

JEN: Brandon used to say he liked that about me.

PAM: What?

JEN: That I didn't have weighty, uh, thoughts.

PAM: Hmm. He said what he liked about me was my brilliant mind. That's the way he would say it, brilliant.

JEN: I'm so hungry.

PAM: Want a Kudo bar? I have plenty in my purse.

JEN: Is that like an energy bar?

PAM: Like that but with chocolate chips and a thick coating of milk chocolate.

JEN: You could just strap that to my thighs. That's where it would go.

PAM: As opposed to, say, your head?

JEN: (**looks at PAM sharply to see if SHE's being teased**) Right.

(They are both quiet for awhile. PAM goes back to reading.)

JEN: You think he's going to die?

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