KILLING MAESTROS

A play for radio

By

Christopher William Hill

FIRST BROADCAST: 14th AUGUST 2003

FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

F/X: PHONE RINGS. A CLICK AS THE ANSWERPHONE KICKS IN.

SERGEI: You've reached Sergei Bodanov. Unfortunately, I'm not here to take your call, but if you leave your name and message after the tone, I'll endeavour to get back at you.

F/X: A SHRILL ANSWERPHONE 'BLEEP'.

EMILE: (D) Sergei, this is Emile. If you're there, pick up the phone. (PAUSE) Sergei? *Please* pick up the phone. Look, I don't know if you're in London or out of the country, but … Sergei, it's Max. He's dead.

GRAMS: AN EXCERPT FROM THE OVERTURE TO WAGNER'S *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*.

INT. LIEBERMAN'S OFFICE. DAY.

F/X: THE QUIET HUM OF TRAFFIC FROM OUTSIDE THE OFFICE.

SERGEI: Emile Daeneker phoned to tell me Max had died. I was out at dinner, ironically just around the corner from the Royal Opera House. They'd been in rehearsal.

LIEBERMAN: You were very close to Max?

SERGEI: We trained together. In Paris. The Conservatoire. He was a year older than me.

LIEBERMAN: And his lifestyle … ?

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

LIEBERMAN: Providence?

SERGEI: My father was a Russian émigré, I have a deeply ingrained sense of fatalism. I *had* to conduct the opera.

LIEBERMAN: But Max … ?

SERGEI: I've watched him die a hundred times. Pu-pu-pum. He clutches at his chest, and bang. No more. *Salute Maestro*. The second bassoonist marked a cross in his score at the eighty-ninth bar of Act Two, and noted, 'here dies Max Blom, Maestro'. Melodramatic of course, but I'm afraid that's symptomatic of bassoonists. (PAUSE) I have six weeks, Doctor Lieberman. Six weeks before the first preview performance. Six weeks to get to the root of this 'evil' … I use the word advisedly -

LIEBERMAN: Psychotherapy is an inexact science, Sergei.

SERGEI: Six weeks for you to *cure* me.

GRAMS: A FURTHER EXTRACT FROM THE OVERTURE TO *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*.

LIEBERMAN: Sergei, in our last session you spoke about superstition. The *superstitions* surrounding certain operas -

SERGEI: When it comes to A.9t41EMC /Span /MMre9-0.003b.Sc2101 562.64014 T

EXT. HAMPSTEAD HEATH. DAY.

F/X: LIEBERMAN AND LAURA TALK AS THEY WALK THROUGH THE PARK. TRAFFIC CLOSE BY. A BUSKER PLAYS AT A DISTANCE.

LAURA: Karl, you know what my advice would be -

LIEBERMAN: Yes, I know.

LAURA: My *professional* advice.

LIEBERMAN: Laura -

LAURA: If you don't want to listen there are lots of other therapists you could talk to.

LIEBERMAN: I want to talk to *you*.

LAURA: I don't know whether to laugh or cry. It's like being back at university.

LIEBERMAN: You always took time out then.

LAURA: I'd never met an American before. You were exotic. Hampstead was such a haven of peace and tranquillity until you came back, Karl. So, your client. He's haunted by Wagner? The composer?

LIEBERMAN: Of course the composer. You see, this is my luck. This is the way God taunts me.

LAURA: God is dead, Karl, a symptom of collective hysteria. Have you eaten? I've only got a few minutes.

LIEBERMAN: I take on a new client. Is it something straightforward? Agoraphobia? Low self-esteem? No. I take on a client and he's haunted by an anti-Semite. One day a patient will walk into my office and tell me he's haunted by … I don't know, someone kosher. George and Ira Gershwin, Gertrude Stein … Woody Allen -

LAURA: A neurotic haunted by a neurotic? Anything else? Any other symptoms?

LIEBERMAN: The Wagner thing isn't enough?

LAURA: Well … ?

LIEBERMAN: There's a tendency towards …

LAURA: Yes?

LIEBERMAN: … Hypochondriasis.

LAURA: Obsessive-compulsive?

LIEBERMAN: Yes, but -

LAURA: A red letter day. Congratulations! God, is that the time?

LIEBERMAN: You're laughing.

LAURA: I'm not.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

LIEBERMAN: Your mouth's twitching.

LAURA: Facial tic. Karl, I've got to get back. I've got a client in ten minutes -

LIEBERMAN: We haven't even skimmed the surface -

LAURA: There's more? Don't tell me, he's afraid of heights … pigeons. Look, take my advice. As a friend, even if you don't listen to me as a consultant. Drop him. Life's too short.

LIEBERMAN: This is interesting.

LAURA: Interesting? Have you ever met an interesting hypochondriac, Karl? Honestly?

LIEBERMAN: … Different then. The case is *different*.

LAURA: Okay, okay.

LIEBERMAN: The hypochondria is just the tip of the iceberg. The

WagnC 2s.5402eETE51 h31 Tc 0.002 T/9b9sr is4 m f eve548MC BDC

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

LIEBERMAN: Inherited was the wrong word. *Passed over*. Somebody else's neurosis … a *specific* neurosis … has somehow manifested itself in his mind. I think that's fascinating.

LAURA: Okay.

LIEBERMAN: Laura, he senses the *presence* of Wagner.

LAURA: So what is this? Some kind of auditory hallucination?

LIEBERMAN: I don't know what it is.

LAURA: Refreshingly candid for a psychotherapist.

LIEBERMAN: It's too early yet.

LAURA: So, if this is an inherited fixation … if he's taken on

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

SERGEI: Distracted. Normally we'd meet for lunch, the Dorchester perhaps. Or White's.

LIEBERMAN: But you met outside the Festival Hall?

SERGEI: He didn't want to go inside. He kept pacing … he wanted to walk. He must have lost a stone in weight, and for a man as sinewy as Max, it gave him a … sunken look. Haunted.

LIEBERMAN: Haunted?

SERGEI: He was constantly looking around him, as if he was *expecting* someone. And then a most peculiar thing happened …

LIEBERMAN: Yes?

SERGEI: My mobile phone began to ring.

LIEBERMAN: And?

SERGEI: I reached into my pocket to get the phone and …and Max wrenched it from my hand and hurled it into the river.

LIEBERMAN: Did he offer an explanation?

SERGEI: m /Span /MCID58.8s1TEMC

SERGEI: He said he was sure … *convinced* it was Richard Wagner.

LIEBERMAN: On the mobile phone?

SERGEI: On the mobile phone. On *my* mobile phone.

LIEBERMAN: What did you do?

SERGEI: What could I do? I laughed. I didn't realise, not for a moment -

LIEBERMAN: And Max …?

SERGEI: That was the last time I saw him.

LIEBERMAN: And ever since his death -

SERGEI: I've been aware of the presence of Wagner. (PAUSE) Do you like opera, Doctor?

LIEBERMAN Would you *like* me to like opera?

SERGEI: Every question answered with a question.

LIEBERMAN: Ageing ingénues and overweight lotharios.

SERGEI: Is that a yes, or a no?

LIEBERMAN: No. I do not like opera.

RUTH: I don't want to see the *building.* I want to see an opera … or the ballet.

LIEBERMAN: There's just no pleasing you, is there?

RUTH: Oh … my … *God*.

LIEBERMAN: What is it? What's wrong?

RUTH: Look.

LIEBERMAN: What?

RUTH: Over there. Isn't that Sergei Bodanov. The conductor?

LIEBERMAN: I wouldn't know.

RUTH: Look, it is!

SERGEI: (OFF) Doctor Lieberman!

RUTH: You're treating him … Sergei *Bodanov*?

LIEBERMAN: Just keep walking.

RUTH: You're treating Sergei Bodanov and you want me to just keep walking?

LIEBERMAN: Client-therapist confidentiality.

SERGEI: Doctor Lieberman!

RUTH: But he’s waving at you.

LIEBERMAN: Please, Ruth.

RUTH: Ah …

LIEBERMAN: What? What is it now?

RUTH: I’ve twisted my ankle.

LIEBERMAN: You’ve done what?

RUTH: Hereditary. Weak ankles. That’s what you get for rushing me.

LIEBERMAN: That’s what I get for marrying you. Can’t you just … *limp*?

RUTH: If you try and make me walk I’ll scream the damn place down.

SERGEI: (OUT OF BREATH) Doctor Lieberman.

LIEBERMAN: Sergei.

SERGEI: I was calling.

LIEBERMAN: I didn’t see you.

SERGEI: I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY.

F/X: LAURA IS ON THE PHONE. DISTANT TRAFFIC OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

LAURA: She did what?

LIEBERMAN: (D) She invited him to dinner.

LAURA: Couldn't you have stopped her?

LIEBERMAN: It happened so quickly.

LAURA: She invited a *client* to dinner?

LIEBERMAN: Before I knew what had happened, they were exchanging numbers and now she wants to go shopping and get special food … (FADE)

INT. LIEBERMAN'S LOUNGE. NIGHT.

GRAMS: 'NIGHTFALL' BY BENNY CARTER PLAYS

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

ANSWERPHONE: Message three.

SERGEI: I can’t seem to find a pulse. I’ve been trying for twenty minutes … I’ve tried both wrists, and nothing … em -

ANSWERPHONE: End of messages. To delete all messages, press delete.

LIEBERMAN: You see, Ruth? This is why wp

LIEBERMAN: You felt a twinge in your neck?

SERGEI: It was a spasm.

LIEBERMAN: I'm sorry?

SERGEI: A shooting pain, right across the larynx and stretching back to the nape of my neck. As if -

LIEBERMAN: As if your neck were suddenly to become bereft of -

SERGEI: My head. As if my neck were suddenly to become bereft of my head.

LIEBERMAN: Ah-ha.

SERGEI: Please don't humour me, Doctor Lieberman. Irrational, I kept telling myself. Completely and utterly irrational. My neck and head arrived at the opera attached and there was no rational hypothesis that would suggest an untimely interruption of the status quo.

LIEBERMAN: Neck and head in perfect harmony.

SERGEI: Exactly.

LIEBERMAN: I see.

SERGEI: But is it that simple?

LIEBERMAN: Perhaps not?

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

SERGEI: Oh God, you think?

LIEBERMAN: No. No, I meant -

SERGEI: Some ominous undertone of … something … perhaps?

LIEBERMAN: No.

SERGEI: That was a certain, absolute, non-rhetorical, ‘no’.

LIEBERMAN: Was it?

SERGEI: And back we go to square one. (PAUSE) Do I look well?

LIEBERMAN: Do you *feel* well?

SERGEI:

LIEBERMAN: Why don't you?

SERGEI: Have you ever been 'cheered up' by a town with an umlaut?

LIEBERMAN: Ah …

SERGEI: The air is too cold. The chocolate, artery-clogging. Even the cuckoo clocks are potentially life-threatening.

LIEBERMAN: The water's good.

SERGEI: I am deeply suspicious of 'good water'. (PAUSE) George Bernard Shaw was a friend of Wagner. Did you know that?

LIEBERMAN: George Bernard Shaw was friends with everybody. Hitler, Mussolini. You only had to be in the same room as George Bernard Shaw and he would befriend you.

SERGEI: But what a talent. Socially I mean.

LIEBERMAN: It was an obsessive-compulsive disorder.

SERGEI: A fellow sufferer. How reassuring. (PAUSE) I'm very much looking forward to dinner tomorrow, Doctor Lieberman. It was so kind of your wife to invite me.

LIEBERMAN: Sergei, I'm sorry. Could we get back to -

SERGEI: Yes, of course. To the matter in hand.

LIEBERMAN: Thank you.

SERGEI: (PAUSE) I once bought a self help video on obsessive-compulsive disorders.

LIEBERMAN: Did it help?

SERGEI: I watched it again, and again, and again … (FADE)

INT. LIEBERMAN'S KITCHEN. NIGHT.

F/X: THE KITCHEN IS A HIVE OF PRE-DINNER ACTIVITY. IN THE BACKGROUND, THIRTIES JAZZ PLAYS ON THE STEREO.

RUTH: Pass the pesto, Karl.

LIEBERMAN: Is this the pesto?

RUTH: Does it say pesto on the label?

LIEBERMAN: Yes.

RUTH: Then it's the pesto.

LIEBERMAN: This is why we moved to London. To avoid cranks like Sergei Bodanov.

RUTH: You always tell me off when I call them cranks.

LIEBERMAN: When I call them cranks it's a clinical term.

RUTH: He's just a little sick. That's all.

LIEBERMAN: We're all of us sick, Ruth. Just some are sicker than others.

RUTH: Is that a scientific analysis?

LIEBERMAN: I'm a doctor. Everything I say is scientific analysis.

RUTH: So this is a no win situation? Trust you, you're a Doctor? The pasta's boiling over.

LIEBERMAN: Well help me!

RUTH: Drain it … drain it … it's pasta, this is not rocket science. Tip it in the bowl. No, the blue one … the *blue* one.

LIEBERMAN: The bowl's green. This is a green bowl. (PAUSE) Oh God.

RUTH: What?

LIEBERMAN: We shouldn't be doing this. *I* shouldn't be doing this.

RUTH: Even patients have to eat.

LIEBERMAN: Client, Ruth. He's a *client*.

RUTH: Whatever.

LIEBERMAN: You know that's not the point. You do know that?

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

RUTH: Fine, I'll eat here, you go eat someplace else.

LIEBERMAN: I'm not leaving you on your own with him.

RUTH: Is he dangerous? Psychotic?

LIEBERMAN: If he was, I'd happily leave you on your own.

F/X: THE DOORBELL RINGS

RUTH: Well go on, Karl. Answer the door.

LIEBERMAN: This is wrong. All wrong. On so many levels-

RUTH: Door.

LIEBERMAN: He's my *client*.

RUTH: Well tonight he's our guest. Do I look okay? RUTH:

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT

SERGEI: The food was wonderful, Ruth.

RUTH: Thank you. More wine, Sergei?

SERGEI: Perhaps another glass.

RUTH: Karl?

LIEBERMAN: No. Thank you.

RUTH: (READING) Château Cant-

SERGEI: Château Cantemerle, ’96.

RUTH: You know, I really marvel at people who can distinguish between wines. Not just, ‘this is red, that is white’. Connoisseurs.

SERGEI: What do you do, Ruth?

RUTH: I’m a lawyer.

SERGEI: A lawyer?

RUTH: Matrimonial law.

SERGEI: That must be very satisfying work.

RUTH: It can be.

SERGEI: When I divorced my wife it was the most satisfying thing I'd ever done.

RUTH: I haven't practiced since we left the States.

SERGEI: How long have you been living in London?

RUTH: Almost eight months. We moved over last Fall.

LIEBERMAN: I studied here, in the eighties.

RUTH: So what happened? Why did you divorce?

SERGEI: Irreconcilable similarities. I was a neurotic and so was she. She also had an irritating habit of referring to herself in the third person. Sergei did not like this.

RUTH: Karl does a lot of marriage guidance counselling.

SERGEI: I'll bear that in mind if I ever get married again.

LIEBERMAN: Coffee?

RUTH: Later.

SERGEI: How did you both meet? Sorry, that was rude -

RUTH: No. Karl was treating me.

LIEBERMAN: I didn't just take my work home with me, I married it. Her.

RUTH: Panic attacks. Very mild.

SERGEI: But you seem so -

RUTH: Sane?

LIEBERMAN: Sane?

SERGEI: Calm. I was going to say calm.

RUTH: You're very kind.

SERGEI: Very honest.

RUTH: (BEAT) Karl, you can make the coffee now.

INT. LIEBERMAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

F/X: LIEBERMAN CLIMBS INTO BED.

LIEBERMAN: You were all over the man.

RUTH: Flattering, Karl. Very flattering.

LIEBERMAN: I'm surprised you didn't just … copulate … on the table.

RUTH: There was food on the table.

LIEBERMAN: I'm being serious.

RUTH: Sergei was very charming. I just wanted him to have a good evening. I was being a good hostess.

LIEBERMAN: A hooker would have been less accommodating.

RUTH: Thank you for that, honey. (PAUSE) The Pearlmans called today.

LIEBERMAN: Don't change the subject. Good night, Ruth.

RUTH: We never talk anymore, Karl.

LIEBERMAN: Ruth, we've never talked. Not together. You talk, I listen.

RUTH: Like therapy.

LIEBERMAN: No, with therapy I get to walk away.

RUTH: Sergei talked to me.

LIEBERMAN: Sergei had been drinking. He had an excuse.

RUTH: He invited me to the Opera House. To watch rehearsals.

LIEBERMAN: Now look here. I said, 'no'. That's it. Over. Nada. No telephone calls. No dinners-

RUTH: I said I'd love to go.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

INT. LIEBERMAN'S OFFICE. DAY

SERGEI: I had another dream.

LIEBERMAN: What happened in the dream?

SERGEI: I was in an office, much like your office. This office.

LIEBERMAN: But it wasn't me, was it, sitting in the chair?

SERGEI: No.

LIEBERMAN: No. It was Wagner.

SERGEI: Yes.

LIEBERMAN: Who else could it have been?

SERGEI: You mean … you knew?

LIEBERMAN: Yes. It's always Wagner. Every dream is Wagner-

SERGEI: You think I'm mad?

LIEBERMAN: Do *you* think you're mad?

SERGEI: (WRYLY) Is it very difficult to become a psychotherapist?

LIEBERMAN: Rhetoric?

SERGEI: Do you think so?

LIEBERMAN: (PAUSE) Do you often think about death? Your own death?

SERGEI: Sometimes. Naturally.

LIEBERMAN: And sometimes *unnaturally*?

SERGEI: Perhaps.

LIEBERMAN: Your time's very nearly up -

SERGEI: A wonderful bedside manner for treating a hypochondriac, Doctor Lieberman.

LIEBERMAN: Your *session*.

SERGEI: Three minutes. We have another three minutes. Is everything alright, Doctor …?

LIEBERMAN: How are you feeling, Sergei?

SERGEI: Feeling?

LIEBERMAN: Yes. You were concerned that you might have been experiencing a mild … heart attack … when you called last night. Late last night.

SERGEI: Tragedy averted.

LIEBERMAN: Right. I think we need to talk.

SERGEI: That's what we've been doing. For the past hour. That's all we've been doing. *Talking*.

LIEBERMAN: About your telephone calls-

SERGEI: My … ?

LIEBERMAN: I know my wife gave you our telephone number, which in hindsight … she maybe shouldn't have done, but -

SERGEI: Is there a problem?

LIEBERMAN: No, not a problem … exactly. It's just … if it's a medical concern … a genuine *medical emergency* … it might make sense to speak to your GP.

SERGEI: I see.

LIEBERMAN: So we have an … *understanding*?

SERGEI: Certainly.

LIEBERMAN: Good.

INT. LIEBERMAN'S LOUNGE. NIGHT.

F/X: A 'BLEEP' FROM THE ANSWERPHONE.

SERGEI: (D) Doctor Lieberman … it's Sergei Bodanov. I'm sorry to call so late. I know you suggested I shouldn't call … so much … but I wondered … as this is an emergency. I can't seem to feel my left hand.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

EXT. HAMPSTEAD HEATH. DAY.

LAURA: I hate to say I told you so.

LIEBERMAN: But you're going to, right? That's what you're going to say?

LAURA: I'll just think it then. You'll never know. (PAUSE) Karl?

GRAMS: THE BUSKER, NOW CLOSE BY, PLAYS WAGNER'S *FLIGHT OF THE VALKYRIES.*

KARL: (SHAKEN) It's Wagner. He's playing Wagner.

INT. OPERA REHEARSAL ROOM. DAY

F/X: A REHEARSAL PIANIST PLAYS AN EXTRACT FROM 'O SINK HERNIEDER, NACHT DER LIEBE' FROM *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*.

SERGEI: Good afternoon everybody.

F/X: THE PIANIST STOPS PLAYING.

Thank you. May I introduce Ruth Lieberman, who'll be sitting in on this afternoon's rehearsal. Ruth, this is Emile Daeneker …

EMILE: Very pleased to meet you.

RUTH: I heard you sing Tristan in '96. I'm a big fan, Mr Daeneker.

EMILE: Thank you.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

RUTH: Up and down my neck. It was … overwhelming. You know he's bilingual in four languages?

LIEBERMAN: Who?

RUTH: Sergei. Are you listening?

LIEBERMAN: I'm trying very hard not to honey. Anyway, you can't be bilingual in *four* languages.

RUTH: Please stop calling me honey, it makes my flesh creep. It's intensive cardiovascular exercise, conducting. They have to be supremely fit.

LIEBERMAN: So he's an athlete now?

RUTH: You can laugh. You're out of condition.

LIEBERMAN: I'm not *out* of condition. I've never been *in* condition.

RUTH: You're dribbling toothpaste.

LIEBERMAN: I know. I *know*.

RUTH: You try holding a baton in the air for three hours. Try holding anything up for more than three minutes.

LIEBERMAN: I heard that. I did *hear* that.

RUTH: Spit, Karl. You're foaming at the mouth.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

F/X: LIEBERMAN SPITS IN THE SINK.

LIEBERMAN: Look, you've had your fun. You've flown in the face of psychotherapeutic protocol -

RUTH: So that's what I'm doing … I'm flying in the face of … yeh, right.

LIEBERMAN: You're obviously trying to punish me for … for something. For some *perceived* wrong I've done you. For bringing you to England … for not spending enough time with you … for introducing you to the Pearlmans. *Something*.

RUTH: So this is all about you?

LIEBERMAN: Clearly. It's elementary psychology, Ruth. We were studying this in high school.

RUTH: Okay. So … if I said I was meeting Sergei again tomorrow?

LIEBERMAN: I'd say you were bluffing.

RUTH: And I'd say you were a quack. Don't wait up for me.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM. DAY.

F/X: EMILE SINGS THE END OF 'LAUSCH, GELIEBTER! – LASS MICH STERBEN!' FROM *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE,* ACCOMPANIED BY THE REHEARSAL PIANIST. AS HE FINISHES,

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

EMILE: He drowned.

SERGEI: Good. Marvellous. Dinner?

EMILE: Good night, Ruth. Sergei.

SERGEI: Good night.

RUTH: Dinner?

SERGEI: You are hungry?

RUTH: Yes.

SERGEI: Good. Good.

INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT.

RUTH: I'm sorry. I feel …

SERGEI: Nervous?

RUTH: Yes. I don't know why.

SERGEI: Is it me?

RUTH: No. Yes. I don't know.

SERGEI: I'll take that as a compliment.

RUTH: You're so … *cultured*. For God's sake, you're a conductor. You're famous. Of course I'm nervous.

SERGEI: Any fool can become a conductor. Thankfully, not every fool wants to.

RUTH: Not just opera. Food, wine, theatre … you … you speak Italian.

SERGEI: Would you like to speak Italian?

RUTH: Oh yes. Very much.

SERGEI: It's extremely easy.

RUTH: Now I know you're just saying that.

SERGEI: No. *Parlo* …

RUTH: Look at me. I'm going red. I know, I can just feel -

SERGEI: *Parlo.*

RUTH: Parlo.

SERGEI: … *l'Italiano* …

RUTH: *Italiano* … I know I'm getting it all wrong.

SERGEI: No, no. *Parlo l'Italiano Bellamente*.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

RUTH: *Parlo l'Italiono* … Bellamente?

SERGEI: Bella!

RUTH: Great. What did I say?

SERGEI: You told me that you speak Italian beautifully.

RUTH: You're laughing at me.

SERGEI: No. You do everything beautifully. Do you speak any languages?

RUTH: I speak a little French.

SERGEI: All my languages have been learnt from hotel bedrooms.

RUTH: You're teasing me.

SERGEI: No, I'm serious. I can say 'Fire action' in four different languages. Nothing else. *En caso de Incendio*

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

RUTH: Availability. (SHE LAUGHS)

SERGEI: I'm available.

RUTH: Well, enjoy me with my clothes on, it's as good asit gets. (SHE LAUGHS) Oh my God, you're not joking are you?

SERGEI: I never joke. Come home with me?

INT. LIEBERMAN'S LOUNGE. NIGHT.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

INT. SERGEI'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

GRAMS: A CLASSIC RECORDING OF 'MILD UND LEISE WIE ER LACHELT' FROM *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE* PLAYS QUIETLY ON THE STEREO.

RUTH: (WALKING) It's a beautiful apartment, Sergei.

SERGEI: My wife had exquisite taste.

RUTH: Well, she married you.

SERGEI: She also divorced me.

RUTH: I want to know everything about you.

SERGEI: What do you want to know?

RUTH: Everything. Your family …

SERGEI: My relationship with my parents was satisfactory. My father defected from Russia and married a second rate flautist. I was conceived in the orchestra pit at the Royal Opera House during a matinee performance of *Der Rosen Kavalier.* It was Spring and the production received appalling notices -

RUTH: You had two children?

SERGEI: Yes.

RUTH: Are you close?

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

SERGEI: They aren’t musical.

RUTH: What are you doing?

SERGEI: I’m unbuttoning your blouse.

RUTH: I can see that.

SERGEI: I will then remove your skirt, your bra and -

RUTH: Panties?

SERGEI: … in that order, and spend the night with you.

RUTH: Okay. I just we8 Tmht with you.

SERGEI: Sylvia Plath arrives with a portable cooker … electric, not gas, which is surprising. Ernest Hemingway is flicking through a well-thumbed copy of *Horse and Hound*, and sucking meditatively on a double-barrelled shotgun. It's clearly a celebrity bash. Sylvia Plath, Ernest Hemingway … and Virginia Woolf staring wistfully at the ornamental pond -

LIEBERMAN: Ah.

SERGEI: I dislike it intensely when you do that.

LIEBERMAN: Do what?

SERGEI: Say, 'ah', like you know something I don't.

LIEBERMAN: Isn't that what you pay me for?

SERGEI: I don't pay you to say, 'ah'.

LIEBERMAN: The dream is sexual. Obviously.

SERGEI: Uncharacteristically candid, Doctor Lieberman.

LIEBERMAN: Any impaired sexual activity? Impotence?

SERGEI: I'm sorry?

LIEBERMAN: Have you ever used a prostitute?

SERGEI: For what?

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

LIEBERMAN: Look, Sergei …

SERGEI: Are you all right?

F/X: LIEBERMAN POURS A GLASS OF WATER.

SERGEI: I don't think so, do you?

LIEBERMAN: Re-birthing?

SERGEI: I'm claustrophobic.

LIEBERMAN: Shock therapy?

SERGEI: I dislike surprises.

LIEBERMAN: Look -

SERGEI: What?

LIEBERMAN: Leave. Please. You're happy.

SERGEI: I'm not.

LIEBERMAN: I've cured you.

SERGEI: No you haven't.

LIEBERMAN: Go.

SERGEI: Should I call for somebody?

INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY.

LAURA: I don't know why you bother coming to me. I keep telling you. There are other therapists whose brains you could pick and spit out.

LIEBERMAN: Laura … we're friends -

LAURA: Why didn't you refer him when I told you?

LIEBERMAN: I think he's having an affair with Ruth.

LAURA: (PAUSE) Oh my God.

LIEBERMAN: I don't know what to do.

LAURA: Karl, there's only one thing you can -

LIEBERMAN: I can't refer him. Not now.

LAURA: Listen to yourself. That's … completely -

LIEBERMAN: What? Completely what?

LAURA: Unethical. For God's sake -

LIEBERMAN: Nobody else knows, apart from you.

LAURA: You're putting me in a really difficult position.

LIEBERMAN: I tried to refer him but he just wouldn't go.

LAURA: I told you from the start. 'Avoid hypochondriacs'. Psychotherapist beware. The 'Wagner Complex', thatcould have been interesting, something to get your

LIEBERMAN: Who's sleeping with my wife. (PAUSE) A terminal hypochondriac?

LAURA: You want a cup of coffee?

LIEBERMAN: (TRAVELLING ON LINE) Sorry Laura, I gotta go. I've got a client at three.

LAURA: Phone me. Anytime.

LIEBERMAN: I will. (HE EXITS)

LAURA: I know.

INT. SERGEI'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

F/X: A RUSTLE OF POST-COITAL ACTIVITY. AN ORGASMIC ARIA FROM *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE* PLAYS ON THE STEREO.

RUTH: Oh my God!

SERGEI: Are you all right?

RUTH: All right? That was *incredible*. Spiritual almost. Wow!

F/X: RUTH ROLLS OVER IN BED.

RUTH: For a hypochondriac, you're very good in bed.

SERGEI: What did you tell Karl?

RUTH: I told him that I was spending the night at Eva Pearlman's.

SERGEI: Again?

RUTH: Again. (PAUSE) When we're making love … you never get the feeling you're going to have a heart attack … or anything?

SERGEI: Oh God.

RUTH: Sorry. I just thought … you know … being a hypochondriac -

SERGEI: Well. You've said it now.

F/X: SERGEI DIALS OUT ON HIS MOBILE PHONE.

RUTH: Who are you calling?

SERGEI: Karl.

RUTH: Oh, great. We're in bed together and you're phoning my husband for therapy.

SERGEI: There's no answer.

F/X: PAUSE. AT A DISTANCE, SERGEI'S LAND LINE RINGS.

RUTH: Leave it. Stay here.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

F/X: SERGEI GETS OUT OF BED AND PADS ACROSS THE FLOOR.

SERGEI: It might be Karl.

RUTH: Sergei!

F/X: SERGEI PICKS UP THE PHONE.

SERGEI: Hello. Hello? I know there's somebody there. Who is it?

RUTH: Sergei?

SERGEI:

home phone … the mobile … it's always ringing. Blank pages coming through on the fax …

LIEBERMAN: I see.

SERGEI: This is exactly what happened to *Max*. I'm being haunted.

LIEBERMAN: Haunted?

SERGEI: You *know*.

LIEBERMAN: (LOW) Richard Wagner?

SERGEI: I'm more mad than when we started.

LIEBERMAN: You weren't mad. You were depressed.

SERGEI: And *now* I'm mad?

LIEBERMAN: More depressed.

SERGEI: Should it work like that? Or am I missing the point here?

LIEBERMAN: Think of it as a cycle.

SERGEI: Light at the end of the tunnel?

LIEBERMAN: Something like that.

LIEBERMAN: Told him what?

RUTH: That you know about us. (BEAT) Well, have you?

LIEBERMAN: No. Have you?

RUTH: No. I'm going to look after him.

LIEBERMAN: The sick, leading the sick?

RUTH: You bastard! You cured me.

LIEBERMAN: Cured you? You're a one-woman psychiatric ward. I could retire and spend the rest of my life treating you. You're a mess.

RUTH: That's not true.

LIEBERMAN: And it all stems from low self-esteem.

RUTH: (LOW) I don't have low self-esteem.

LIEBERMAN: You're pathetic. Neurotic. Self-loathing -

RUTH: I'll divorce you! That'll knock a hole through your marriage guidance work. Credibility nil.

LIEBERMAN: That's perverse.

RUTH: What is?

LIEBERMAN: A matrimonial lawyer divorcing a marriage guidance councillor?

RUTH: It makes perfect sense to me.

LIEBERMAN: Of course it makes perfect sense to you, you're delusional. You can arrange the divorce and I'll help us to get over it?

RUTH: For the first time in my life I start having some fun, and all you want to do is ruin it.

LIEBERMAN: Divorce me then. See if I care.

RUTH: Grow up, Karl.

LIEBERMAN: Me grow up? Have you stopped and thought about all of this? If Sergei found out that I know about you two? Who'd you think he'd drop first? The menopausal floozy, or the trusted psychotherapist?

RUTH: You're a prick.

LIEBERMAN: You knew that when you married me.

RUTH: You're a real piece of work. You know that?

LIEBERMAN: Of course I know that. I analyse. That's what I do.

RUTH: You've always got to have the last word.

LIEBERMAN: Yes.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

SERGEI: Thank God. For a minute-

LIEBERMAN: You're not listening to what I'm saying, Sergei. You could drop dead next week, at the first preview of *Tristan Und Isolde*. Who can say? We never know our time's up, until it's -

F/X: A BUZZER SOUNDS LOUDLY.

SERGEI: (ALARMED) Oh God!

LIEBERMAN: Thank you, Sergei. That's the end of our session.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN. NIGHT.

F/X: COFFEE PERCOLATOR IN ACTION.

LAURA: Karl, you're not being rational.

LIEBERMAN: Rational? I'm being completely rational. Icily rational.

LAURA: Because this is beginning to sound like a manic episode.

LIEBERMAN: Listen to me -

LAURA: You can't sleep … easily distracted … excitable -

LIEBERMAN: Laura.

LAURA: *Hyper*manic maybe. Coffee?

LIEBERMAN: I've been thinking, you know…a therapist takes on a client … and the therapist, most times, really wants to help the client. To cure the client. Cause that's the whole reason a therapist becomes a therapist, right? To cure people, to make people better -

LAURA: You're babbling, Karl.

LIEBERMAN: I'm quite aware of the fact. Thank you. Where was I?

LAURA: Making people better?

LIEBERMAN: Yes. No.

LAURA: No?

LIEBERMAN: Sometimes, and I only say *sometimes* … not *all times* … a therapist, for whatever reason, gets to the point where it's not in his best interests for the client to get any better. Actually, quite the reverse.

LAURA: Karl?

LIEBERMAN: Say … and I'm clutching at examples here … say the client runs off with the therapist's wife. Awkward situation … I mean, what would you do?

LAURA: I'd sit down, very calmly. Breathe. Keep breathing.

LIEBERMAN: Or say … just for another example … your client hada … I don't know … a morbid fixation with Richard Wagner. Would it be so wrong to phone that client -

LAURA: Karl … I'm not hearing this.

LIEBERMAN: …. and phone that client. And phone, and phone and phone …

LAURA: (PAUSE) Karl. Karl, are you okay?

F/X: LIEBERMAN BEGINS TO SNORE.

Shit.

INT. SERGEI'S APARTMENT. DAY.

F/X: A SERIES OF ANSWERPHONE 'BLEEPS'.

RUTH: Sergei, if you're there, please answer the phone. Come on, pick up. It's me, Ruth. I've been trying you all day. I just wanted to wish you luck for tonight … (FADE)

INT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE. NIGHT.

F/X: THE ORCHESTRA WARMS UP IN THE PIT. THE HUM OF AUDIENCE CONVERSATION. LIEBERMAN TAKES HIS SEAT.

RUTH: I didn't think you were going to come.

LIEBERMAN: And miss Sergei's big night? I think not.

RUTH: (LOW) Have you been drinking?

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

RUTH: Don’t, for God’s sake, pretend you’ve got a professional conscience now. That’s too hypocritical, even for you.

LIEBERMAN: Do you think he’ll survive to the end of the performance?

RUTH: Stop it.

LIEBERMAN: Two acts down, one to go.

INT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE. NIGHT.

RUTH: What is it? What's wrong?

LIEBERMAN: I don't know. I can't see.

RUTH: Oh my God. Look, Karl. It's Sergei! Oh my God, no.

LIEBERMAN: He's collapsed. (FADE)

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT.

F/X: A CONSTANT 'PING' FROM AN ECG MACHINE.

RUTH: Well?

SERGEI: (PAUSE) I feel absolutely wonderful.

LIEBERMAN: You do?

SERGEI: Apparently *in articulo mortis,* I find all is well.

LIEBERMAN: But the doctor. What did the doctor say?

SERGEI: Well, I've got to stay hooked up to this thing over night, just to be on the safe side.

LIEBERMAN: But -

SERGEI: Panic attack. Nothing more, nothing less. The doctor said I was a perfectly preserved specimen. I think it was intended as a compliment.

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

Converted to PDF by www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom

INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY.

F/X: THE PHONE RINGS.

LAURA: (D) You've reached the voice mail of Laura Van Helden. Please leave your name, number and message after the tone.

F/X: A LONG TONE.

SERGEI: (D) Doctor Van Helden. This is Sergei Bodanov, we met at Doctor Lieberman's funeral. I was one of the Doctor's patients … mild depression and hypochondria …er …I feel so much better now, but … I wake up in the middle of the night, absolutely panic stricken that I'm … I don't know, the spectre of hypochondria … does that make sense? A gnawing, all-consuming terror. What if I become a hypochondriac *again*? I was wondering if I could make an appointment to see you -

ANSWERPHONE: End of messages. To delete all messages press delete.

F/X: ANSWERPHONE 'BLEEP'.

ANSWERPHONE: All messages deleted.

GRAMS: THE MUSIC FADES.

END