

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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THE CRIME THERAPIST

The trouble with substitutional expression is that the subject knows he's substituting . . .

By
**MARION
ZIMMER
BRADLEY**

THE Rigellian named Rhoum murmured sibilantly, "You realize, Mr. Colby, that this operation is illegal?"

Colby furtively mopped his brow. "Yes. I thought we'd been all over that before."

It seemed incredible that this place actually existed, here on a modern Earth, where you could

illustrated by ORBAN



have shrimp in California and twenty minutes later, for a fifty-cent traffic-token, have coffee in

Boston; where two weeks passage on a dionite-drive spaceship would take you to Theta Centaurus, and two months to the fourth planet of Antares. Here, where children were carefully conditioned for social adjustment, and crime simply was not.

Yet, that this office was here. The sign on the door said simply:

Dr. Rhoum (Ex-T.), M.D.

Licensed Crime Therapist.

"I just wanted it to be understood, completely," the little Extra-terrestrial breathed hissily, and looked at the puny man in the relaxit. "Unfortunately, your psychotherapeutic authorities do not yet recognize the criminal impulses to be a form of insanity as normal, if I may make a minor paradox, as any other. They treat criminals as socially maladjusted individuals, not as psychoneurotics. And they fail to realize that, in the one type of individual, these impulses cannot be discharged by ordinary rehabilitation methods. Nor can they be sublimated; they need satisfaction."

Rhoum paused. Colby leaned forward, sweating a little with anticipation.

Rhoum continued smoothly, "I had a patient, several weeks ago, who was an arsonist. Or rather, he should have been an arsonist. Most unfortunately, your compulsory childhood social conditioning had sent him into a state of continual sublimation and frustration. Conditioning told him, and he believed it consciously, that arson was an

antisocial impulse, besides, most houses today are flameproof. He was on the verge of total breakdown; fortunately, he was referred to us for treatment — in time."

"I thought you said you weren't legal," growled Colby.

"We are not inside Terran law," Rhoum smiled. "The Terran Empire provisions permit us to carry on our business. It is illegal for citizens of Earth to patronize our therapies. But," he smiled, again, "it is to our client's best advantage not to talk. And — the word gets around. Oh, yes; it gets around."

A brief pause, then Rhoum continued, "But I was telling you about my client. At our therapy center, we erected a large building of highly-inflammable material. At his leisure, he burned it down. It made a beautiful blaze — beautiful. Very successful therapy."

". . . Where is he now?" Colby asked, his small, close-set eyes gleaming with excitement.

Rhoum drew his smooth brows together in a little frown. "Well, the case was a peculiar one, Mr. Colby. As a direct result, he contracted severe burns and died. But *he died sane* — and happy, Mr. Colby."

Colby rubbed his scrawny hands. "I see," he murmured, chuckling. "The operation was a success, but the patient died."

Rhoum concealed a look of violent dislike. "You might put it that way, sir."

COLBY suddenly sat bolt upright in the relaxit, pushing his feet to the pneumatic carpet. His tongue slid over thin lips. "That — there wouldn't be any — any danger of anything like that, happening to *me*, would there?" he whispered, looking around furtively.

"Oh, dear me, no, sir! The nature of your ailment is altogether different, if you will allow me to say so. I understand quite well. Arsonists are fanatics; murderers are really a relatively mild form of psychotic, you might say. The arsonist — or pyromaniac, you might say — committed suicide, in an elaborate way. He really wanted to die, you see; his antisocial neurosis built itself up to a self-destruction complex. In immolating the building, he really immolated himself."

"I see." Colby was bored now; he tapped his foot impatiently. "Er — do you handle murderers very *often*?"

"Oh, yes. Homicidal mania is very common — especially since it has been possible to construct such lifelike android robots within a period of three to four weeks. Until the previous decade, you know, it often took several months to make a single model, and the results were often uncertain. The new Centaurian process is most effective. Before, when we had to wait so long for the delivery of androids, the — well, the delay in therapy was often disastrous to the patient. In a case of murder, you see, immediate therapy

is often imperative. Why, just last week — but I am boring you now, Mr. Colby."

Colby leaned forward, the small eyes glowing expectantly. "Oh, no, really I'm not bored, Doctor Rhoum. Really. Please go on," he murmured emphatically. Rhoum's cool, nonhuman eyes surveyed him quizzically.

"Very well. You — we had a patient, last week, a confirmed sadist, and psychiatric examination showed that beneath his conditioning he was a seriously-frustrated potential murderer. Fortunately, another client had just cancelled his appointment for mayhem therapy — oh, yes, we sometimes have spontaneous cures where therapy becomes unnecessary — and we had six young-girl androids on hand, quite perfect models — a few of them had been made for assault therapy. Only one was a standard murder model. They were quite expensive, too — not these assembly-line robot affairs which are just one notch better than the old steel-oid frame jobs. They were genuine female androids, with all the details complete — you follow me?"

Colby smirked. "Nice work!"

Rhoum's professionally lifted eyebrow cut him off. "Within a week of therapy, Mr. Colby, he had murdered them all. His methods — but I fear I must spare you the details." The Rigellian ignored Colby's disappointed frown. "Professional ethics, you will understand."

"What — what happened to *him*?"

"He was discharged yesterday morning, completely sane, my dear sir. *Completely* sane."

COLBY could not keep back a sigh of relieved satisfaction. "Of course," he said, smirking again, "I'm not really insane, Dr. Rhoum, you understand. But I feel it would be better to get it out of my system. These minor frustrations, you know; they take it out of my nerves."

"Ah, yes," Rhoum was professional and serene. "Now, in your case, sir. A serious hate complex —"

"Oh, hardly serious —" protested Colby deprecatingly.

Rhoum only smiled. "I understand, Mr. Colby, that you want to kill your wife."

"Well, er, yes. She — you see, she's such a sloppy dresser. And she wears those old fashioned neonylon housecoats. Then, she *will* wear an earring-alarm to bed, and five times in the past month, it's gone off and waked me before ten o'clock. Then when I slapped her — just a little knock — she threatened to leave me. We have only a five-year marriage, you see. But it isn't fair. And, er, well, I understand that after — after this, you make arrangements so I don't have to meet her again. And, er, there's this girl at the Sky Harbor Hotel —"

"I quite understand," Rhoum murmured in his hissing voice. "But why murder, Mr. Colby? Surely that is drastic treatment. A little

mayhem therapy — slapping around one of our substitutes for a few hours every day for a week or so — or you could simply apply for a divorce —"

"Well, er, you see," Colby smirked again, "well, I'm not really insane, but I feel frustrated over it. Besides, I've tried to choke her once or twice, and — well, *she* made me promise to come here. So I decided, if I was going to do the thing at all, I'd do it up right, and kill her properly!" He glared at Rhoum, then suddenly shouted, "Blast it, what do you care? I've got the money! If I want to kill my wife, what business is it of yours? You don't have to try to reform me, do you?"

Rhoum said calmly, "Of course not. But we dislike employing drastic therapy, if a cure can be carried out with milder treatment. It is my professional duty to try to persuade you to employ the simplest therapy. But if you feel you *must* kill your wife, well —"

"It's the only thing that will make me a sane man again!" Colby said dramatically.

Rhoum's sharp eyes glanced at him, blinking back. "I fear you are right," he murmured, "I can see you are in a serious condition. Of course. We can arrange it at once." He paused to consult a calendar, and asked "Will the third of Einstein suit you? This is only the fifth of Freud, but Einstein third is only five weeks from now. You can wait five weeks, can't you?"

"Oh, I think so," Colby murmured.

"Well, we might be able to squeeze you in toward the end of this month, but these hurry-up jobs never effect a complete cure. Of course, if you decide to change your mind, and take it out in a simple mayhem therapy, it would only be three or four days —"

Modestly, Colby waved the suggestion away.

Rhoum nodded gravely. "Do you have a recent three-dim photograph of your wife?"

Colby tugged it out of his pocket. "As a matter of fact —"

"Hmmm, yes, she's very pretty. Well, Mr. Colby, you understand that until your appointment you must be a guest at our therapy center. That is to prevent a — well, a normal and a pleasant anticipation from getting uncontrollable."

He paused, "I trust you won't find it unpleasant. I think our facilities for the entertainment of patients are fairly complete. And now — to get down to business —"

The talk became definite. A very large check changed hands.

"Sign here, Mr. Colby."

Colby signed the form which said that he was committing himself voluntarily for treatment. Rhoum pushed a buzzit; an exquisite Centaurian girl in a wisp of neonylon appeared.

"Nurse, take Mr. Colby to his apartments. I hope you will be quite content here, Mr. Colby, just

ask Demella for anything you want."

When the smirking little man had gone, quite willingly, Dr. Rhoum selected a stylus and made a careful entry in his casebook.

Then he reached for the telephone.

THE therapist said, "Hello. Mrs. Helen Colby? Dr. Rhoum speaking."

The light feminine voice at the end of the telephone sounded disturbed. "Oh! Frank told me he was going there." A pause. "Tell me, doctor. Is it serious?"

Dr. Rhoum made his voice professionally serene, but grave. "I'm afraid so, Mrs. Colby, quite serious. You must try to be brave. You see, he decided on the murder therapy. I suppose you have no objection to being murdered?"

"None whatever, but — oh, that's so drastic!"

"Drastic diseases, you know, Mrs. Colby. Let me see, when can you come down for an appointment? Are you free tomorrow afternoon? We will need samples of blood, hair, and so forth, to make the android — as soon as possible. It's serious."

The appointment was made.

The fifth of Einstein dawned bright and clear. Colby woke up, switching off the all-night hypnotic learner, and ate with a hearty appetite the breakfast that the blue-haired girl from Aldebaran VI brought him. Last week, at his re-

quest, Dr. Rhoum had removed him from Demella's charge; she had been insufferably insubordinate. Besides, he had never cared for those Centaurians — too skinny. Hamilda, now, she was something.

Dr. Rhoum came for him punctually at nine. His face looked stern and terribly grave. "You are certain that you want to go through with this?" he asked quietly. "There is still time to change your mind, you know. We can convert you to a simpler therapy — mayhem, or simply abusive treatment — or you can go home this morning, get a divorce and forget the whole matter. We're quite prepared to give you a refund on the murder fee."

Colby stared at him between tight-squeezed small eyes. "I'm going through with it," he snarled furiously. "Didn't you say you weren't going to try to rehabilitate or reform me?"

Dr. Rhoum shrugged. "Very well," he remarked quietly. "First, remember this: When you murder your wife, you will murder her; we are very thorough. When you leave here this morning," he smiled faintly, "she will, to you, be dead. You will never see her again, or she you. We are very thorough about that — since it would, of course, invalidate the entire therapy, and perhaps drive you into severe psychosis for you to meet the woman you had murdered. That is one reason why the murder therapy is so expensive."

Colby smiled quietly. "It's worth it," he remarked.

Rhoum only shrugged again. "Go down the hall, and into that room," he told him. "And — I'll see you in the office afterward."

Colby stood still for a moment, and Rhoum, watching closely, saw his hands tremble a little, saw his lips thin and set tightly. Then Colby turned and walked down the hall. The door closed behind him, and Rhoum walked into his own office.

The television cameras had been carefully placed, so that Rhoum and the woman could see, on the wide screen, every corner of the room which Colby had just entered, even the young and lovely woman who sat, dressed in a loose neonylon robe, on the divan. Mrs. Colby shuddered as she looked at the woman-image.

"It's — it's terrible —" she breathed in low horror, "she's — why, she's *me*, Doctor —"

"You don't have to watch if it's too painful, Mrs. Colby, but there is a catharsis-therapy in this for you, too. After all, you will never see him again. If you watch him murder you in cold blood, you won't grieve for him," said Rhoum gently. "Remember, he is insane. A man who could murder in cold blood — even when he knows it is a robot — a man who could come here, knowing it to be illusory, and who, after five weeks of waiting, clings to the need to release by killing — he is a very sick man, Mrs. Colby."

"I — I know — *oh!*" Mrs. Colby gave a low scream as the two images on the screen coalesced in terrible conflict, "Oh! Oh!" and covered her eyes with her hands.

Rhoum's voice was low and soothing. "Please try and watch this, Mrs. Colby —"

"Will it — will it cure him?" she faltered.

"Perfectly, madam. He will be discharged, completely cured, sane, this evening."

Helen Colby squeezed her eyes tight shut. "Oh no —" she moaned, "Frank — Frank — don't — did I drive you to this —"

Rhoum's smooth cold eyes watched the screen in professional detachment. "A bad case, Mrs. Colby, a bad case. Sadistic and wild — you were very wise to send him to me when you did. He might have broken down, and —" his voice grew suddenly hard, "it *would* be you lying there now!"

He touched a button on his desk. To the two heavy male nurses who came in, he said curtly, gesturing toward the screen, "Take the patient out of there — the murder cubicle — and clean up the android. And send Demella with a sedative for Mrs. Colby," he added, glancing at the sobbing girl.

He rose from his desk and walked around the divan to Helen Colby, placing a light hand on her shoulder. "Try to be brave," he said. "I'm ordering you a sedative. The nurse will take you upstairs. Lie down

there until you feel better, and then any of the staff will call you a cab and take you home."

He nodded at the Centaurian girl who came in carrying a drinking-glass and a couple of capsules; then left the office and walked down the hall toward the murder cubicle.

COLBY hung, limp and loose, between the male nurses. There was blood on his hands; he was sweating, slack-limbed and slack-mouthed, breathing in little panting sobs. But his eyes were shrewd and alight.

He understood the technique. Complete catharsis of the impulses. He felt cool and clean and released, ready for anything . . . sane again. He glanced up at Rhoum, who stood, tall in his white garments, before him. And he marvelled that his voice was so steady. "Well, Doctor?"

Rhoum's voice was hard. "Excellent, Mr. Colby. You will very soon be discharged as cured."

Colby glanced down at his stained garments. "Can I — get cleaned up a little?"

"After a bit, Mr. Colby," Rhoum's voice was smooth and soothing. "Just come with me, now. Just come with me."

Colby hung back; was dragged, suddenly resisting, between the male nurses. "What's this — where are you taking me? The treatment's over, isn't it? I'm a sane man again —"

Rhoum shoved open a door; the male nurses hauled Colby bodily

through it. Colby knew at once where he had been brought. Hard, real and anachronistic in the streamlined, crime-less world — an electric chair is unmistakable anywhere.

"Not quite," said Rhoum softly, to the slumped and helpless Colby, "Murder, sir, carries the death penalty." He paused. "You see, your therapy isn't quite finished yet. You can't commit a crime without punishment; and the punishment fits the crime."

Colby suddenly began to struggle wildly. "But I didn't — I didn't — it was only an android robot, a duplicate —"

Rhoum came and knelt beside the chair, fastening the final electrodes in place. "A test, sir; a test of your aberration. You might say, a final test. The intention, the means and the method of committing a fatal murder. Were we to leave you without —" he smiled, "without this final therapy, you could not be cured. Either your temperament would demand that you commit more murders, or else you would develop an intense guilt complex, and would, in the end, be more

seriously insane than you are now." He stood up, moving to the great switch. "There is only one cure for a murderer, Mr. Colby."

"But you can't do this . . ." Colby yelled, his voice hoarse, harsh, unrecognizable. "It was a robot — I signed — it's murder — murder — murder —"

Rhoum threw the switch.

He glanced only briefly at the body as they carried it past his office door.

"Yes," he said to Mrs. Colby, as he finished signing his name, "he died sane." He handed her the check with a ceremonious little bow. "Here you are, madam, minus the cost of the robot, and a few other expenses."

Her voice almost failed, and she left the office with a choked, quiet farewell. Rhoum gazed after her for a moment, smiling faintly; then chose a stylus, and wrote in his log-book, "*Colby, Frank. Discharged cured —*" he glanced at his watch, "*11:52, 5th of Einstein, 2467.*"

Then he picked up the telephone to make his report to the police psychologists.

