

## THE CHARACTER COUCH

**Regan Malloy** is a Marriage, Family, and Child Therapist voiced by Tracy Tappan, a romance author who holds a Master's degree in MFCC herself. Regan is inputted into different story realms, becoming the Regan Malloy of that time and place, to help fiction's favorite characters with life's challenges.

This session: focuses on Claudia Davis, who has traveled back in time into the body of Ruby Kerrigan, and Antoine Richard from "Dancing with Paris" by Juliette Sobanet.

Staging: Paris, France, February, 1960. The scene takes place two months into the story of "Dancing with Paris."

\* \* \*

I finished my *café au lait* and tossed the requisite number of francs on the table, sweeping my white gloves up as I stood. No sense donning them. I lived just upstairs in an apartment above this café, *Le Select*, on the Boulevard du Montparnasse in the 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris. Bohemian artists used to flock to this part of the city in the decadent days of the Belle Époque, then later, in the 1920's, this very café became the meeting place for such creative minds as Hemingway, Picasso, and Henry Miller. My afternoon *café au lait* at *Le Select*, hobnobbing with literature's greatest ghosts, was a daily luxury. To the outside world, I might present a practical front, but on the inside, I was *la révolutionnaire*.

I checked my watch. *Merde*. My next appointment was in five minutes. I headed inside and entered the elevator. I'd converted the front room of my flat into an office, and—

"Oh!" The couple was already waiting for me in the vestibule outside my front door. "*Ponctuel*," I commented, although they were more than just punctual. They were early. "Come, come—" I unlocked the door to my flat. "*Suivez-moi, s'il vous plaît*."

They followed me inside. We all paused at the hatstand to remove the trappings necessary to withstand Paris' cold February weather. Underneath his long gray coat, the husband was garbed in a dapper black suit, white shirt, charcoal tie, and a gray top hat—perfectly matched to his coat—which he settled on the topmost point of the hatstand.

As discreetly as I could, I gave him a thorough inspection. According to my secretary, *he* was the one who'd called for the appointment. Unusual enough that a man should seek out

therapy, but he'd specifically asked for an English-speaking therapist. Yet, he was clearly a Frenchman.

I, myself, was American by birth. I'd come to the City of Love in my twenties, and ended up staying to cavort with exactly the kind of man who stood before me now. With sensuality oozing from the husband's deep, bedroom eyes, the smoky gray color like the atmosphere of an underground jazz club, forbidden, mysterious, and erotic, he exuded everything that gave the Frenchman his reputation for being *un amant fantastique*. His features had a masculine strength to them—only enhanced by the late-day stubble darkening his jaw—but his face was also warm and inviting, and his hair was the kind of rich chocolate brown that just called for a woman's fingers to explore.

Giving myself a firm mental shake, I chased those thoughts from my mind. This was one of those moments I was grateful my clients couldn't see inside my mind.

"*Bonjour.*" I shook each of their hands in turn. "I'm Regan Malloy."

Even if the man had been single, I clearly wasn't his type. His *amour* was my opposite in every way: blonde, wavy hair, full, luscious lips, and fair, flawless skin. My own attractiveness was vastly understated compared to hers. I drew my fingers down the large round buttons of my short jacket. I'd never been so happy that my attributes—or lack thereof—were being concealed beneath the thick, wool material.

The wife was wearing a navy dress that fell to mid-calf, full in the skirt, pointed at the bust, and caught at the waist with a shiny black belt that accentuated her slim figure. The altitude of her high-heeled pumps looked treacherous. She was a real dolly, no doubt about it, the kind of voluptuous—and fast—woman that used to be painted on WWII bombers.

Of course, I, myself, could hardly criticize her for being fast, if indeed she was. Maybe we weren't so different, after all.

I motioned them to sit on the rose brocade couch while I settled into the armchair across from them, propping my feet, in their practical—shall we say, boring—shoes, on an ottoman. To my left on a side table were my regular provisions for session: notebook, pen, water glass, ashtray, and cigarettes. I opened my leather bound notebook, glancing at my secretary's intake notes as I uncapped my fountain pen. *Monsieur* Antoine Richard and *Mademoiselle* Ruby Kerrigan: he was a surgeon, she was a performer. They both looked their roles. I glanced up. "You'd prefer to conduct this session in English?" I confirmed.

“*Oui*.” Antoine smiled in recognition that he’d just spoken French. “My fiancée is fluent in French, but her native tongue is English. I thought it’d be easiest.”

*Fiancée?* I glanced down at my notes. My secretary had written “couple” for today’s appointment. A mark against me for assuming that meant married. “American?”

Ruby nodded. “From New York.”

“Lovely city.” The men couldn’t compare to Paris, though. “So what brings you in to see me today?”

Silence ensued while each member of the couple waited for the other to answer.

I prompted, “I believe you were the one who called, Monsieur Richard?”

“Yes. That’s true.” Antoine hesitated, then swept his hand through the air. “Ruby and I are experiencing certain...stressors that don’t make sense to me. She...how do you say?...picks a fight with me over the silliest matters.”

Ruby exhaled a measured breath. “They’re not silly to me, Antoine,” she countered, her long, slender legs crossed and her hands folded on top of her knees. “He wants me to cook and clean and—”

“Ruby, please. I said we could get a maid for—”

“—doesn’t want me to work.”

“No, no.” Antoine held up a finger. “I said you didn’t *have* to work.”

Ruby looked at him. “I’d like to continue dancing, Antoine, maybe teach someday.”

“I know this.” He spread his hands at her. “How could you think I don’t know this? I plan to buy—” He cut off whatever he was going to say. “*Ça ne fait rien.*” *Never mind.* “We both agree that you shouldn’t dance for Jean-Pierre at ‘*Chez Gisèle*’ anymore. *Oui?*” He looked at me. “We agree on this. She must find another expression for this love of dance rather than with that *bâtard*. And as for the cooking...is it really so perverse for a husband to desire a meal cooked for him by his loving wife?”

“See?” Ruby huffed at me.

I maintained a noncommittal silence. No, I didn’t see. That did sound a bit silly, but in here on the couch, one tried to preserve judgment. Experience had also taught me that larger matters often lurked below surface absurdities.

Ruby blew a lock of hair off her brow. “I’m a modern woman,” she explained. “Um...in spirit. And I want Antoine to appreciate that these are tasks we should *share*.”

Moaning, Antoine propped his elbows on his knees and pushed both hands through the hair at his temples. “Modern woman! This is yet another way you are so different to me, Ruby—to complain about cooking a meal! *Mon Dieu.*”

I opened my mouth to ask, *different in what way?* but Antoine wasn’t done.

“It is ridiculous, no, all of this, not worth a fight?” He looked from me to his fiancée. “I swear to you, Ruby, I don’t understand your displeasure.” Heaving a sigh, Antoine sat back. “*S’il vous plaît*, may we just have some peace and calm in our lives? That’s all I desire, truly. There’s been too much drama around us, of late.”

“Oh?” I asked, my interest peaking in another direction. “What’s been happening?”

The high-pitched *wa-woo, wa-woo* siren of an ambulance rushed by on the street below.

“Well...” Ruby shot a sideways glance at her fiancé. “Antoine’s insane ex-wife murdered his sister and then tried to kill me. So... I killed her. In self-defense,” she added hastily.

I froze with my fountain pen poised over my notebook. A clogged toilet, a favorite *pâtisserie* closing, a melon found rotten in the fruit bowl: *those* were the kinds of dramas I was expecting to hear. Very well, maybe something more alarming than those, but still... I cleared my throat to dislodge my voice. “How awful about your sister,” I told Antoine.

He acknowledged that with a solemn inclination of his head.

Ruby’s blue eyes softened. “Actually, we connected over that tragedy. Besides how difficult Gisèle’s death was for me, too—Antoine’s sister was one of my best friends—I can relate to what it’s like to lose a family member.” Her throat moved. “My father was murdered in front of my eyes when I was ten-years-old.”

“*Merde,*” I breathed. The dramas were plentiful here. “I’m sorry. Such an experience is terrible for anyone to endure, but especially a child.” I looked back and forth between them. “That *is* quite a connection.”

Ruby’s lips curled into a smile that didn’t reach her eyes. “As is our guilt.”

I raised my brows.

Ruby’s gaze dropped. “I had a chance to save my father, you see, but...” She gave a little half-shrug, the gesture somehow making her look small and vulnerable. “I was holding a gun on the intruder who was threatening my father, but I just couldn’t pull the trigger and kill the man. My reluctance cost my father his life.”

I exhaled a long breath. “No, that’s not your fault. You were a child. No one could expect you to perform such an act.”

“My mother did.” Ruby looked up, her lips trembling. “She never forgave me for my father’s death. Ever since the day he died, she has shut me out.”

My hand tightened around my pen. How do I keep letting myself get surprised by the insensitivity of people? I’d certainly seen and heard enough of it by this point in my career. “You lost both of your parents, then, for all intents and purposes.”

Ruby laughed wetly. “Yes, I suppose so.” She glanced down, brushing a nonexistent speck of dust from her skirt. “I try not to condemn my mother too harshly for it, though. Losing my father was such a devastating blow. He was handsome, loving, larger than life—God, such a hero to us both.” She smiled wistfully. “He never let anything bad happen to me or my mother. We both lost a huge safety net when he was gone.” Her eyes became stormy, dark clouds washing out the blue, her smile twisting into an expression of pain. “After that, I had to grow up very fast.

“I imagine you did.” *Floating around lost, no one to look after you.*

Ruby gestured to Antoine. “It’s the same for Antoine and Gisèle’s death. It wasn’t his fault that she died, but he thinks it is.”

“Please,” Antoine all but snapped. “The *one* night I wasn’t at the club, watching over my sister, she was murdered.” He rested his palms on his knees, lines of strain appearing around his mouth. “Gisèle was my responsibility to protect from a young age, only but a little girl when we lost our parents. I raised her as a father would.”

I mulled that over as I grabbed my packet of French *Gitanes*. “That’s interesting.”

Antoine frowned. “How so?”

I withdrew a cigarette from the packet. “Well, let me see if I’ve got this straight.” Holding the unlit cigarette between the vee of my fingers, I pointed it at Ruby. “You lost the big, powerful father who used to protect you, and”—I shifted my cigarette over to Antoine—“you lost the sister who you used to protect with utmost fatherly devotion.” I grabbed my silver lighter. “Which means that one member of this couple wants protection and the other wants to protect.” Flipping open my lighter, I lit my cigarette, gazing at them through the thread of rising smoke. “Do you think it would be a fair to say that you two are perfect for each other?” I snapped my lighter shut.

Ruby and Antoine exchanged a glance, but then her eyes darted away. “That sounds like a dysfunctional reason for being together,” she said.

*Dysfunctional?* A rather big word for a non-professional. I shrugged. “Why judge the roles if they’re working for you? Or fight against them? What works for you two, *works for you two*.” I tossed the lighter back on the side table. “I’m not saying there aren’t any issues here. You’ve both suffered a horrible tragedy. You’ve both been severely wounded by it, as evidenced by your refusal to forgive yourselves.” I dragged on my cigarette.

Ruby blanched.

A muscle in Antoine’s jaw twitched.

“It just doesn’t seem *relational*,” I added. “Or it doesn’t have to be.”

“As I said,” Antoine agreed quietly. “The problems between us don’t make sense.”

Ruby folded her lips in and out. “I just...don’t want to feel like I’m overly dependent on anyone. I want to be able to stand on my own two feet.”

“Oh, Ruby, nobody does that, not really. We’re humans, social creatures; everyone needs help and connection, a sense of safety.” I took a deep inhalation on my cigarette and tipped my head back, exhaling a stream of smoke toward the ceiling. “Do you feel safe with Antoine?”

“Yes.” She swallowed. “Very much.”

“Why must that weaken your character?” I waved my hand, trailing smoke. “Perhaps I’m not entirely sure what you mean by *overly* dependent, but I’m going to guess your view has been skewed by your mother’s desertion. When she ‘shut you out,’ you were forced to grow up on your own—*fast*, as you said. Now you have a close relationship with someone who wants to support you, and I’m guessing that feels very different from what you’re used to—from the independence that was *forced* upon you—perhaps making this intimacy feel overwhelming.”

Ruby’s blonde lashes fluttered as she blinked rapidly at me.

I waited, knocking ash into the ashtray on my side table.

Ruby squeezed her eyes shut, moisture leaking to the edge of her lashes.

“Ruby—” Antoine whispered.

“I-I’m sorry,” Ruby stammered hoarsely, tears rolling down her cheeks. “Maybe I am fabricating problems with Antoine to push him away. Because, God, I *am* overwhelmed by how much I love him.” Ruby let out a soft, hiccupping cry. “I’m so afraid of losing him.”

Antoine reached over and took Ruby’s hand. “*Ma chère*.”

I nodded. “In a world of abandoning mothers and murderers, I think that’s understandable.”

“I’ll never leave you, Ruby.” Antoine smiled gently as he placed a noble hand across his chest. “I’m sound of heart and can beat off any villain.”

Ruby turned her eyes up to Antoine, her pupils wide and dark. “You don’t understand. *I’m* the one who could be taken from you at any minute.”

“I won’t let anything happen to you,” Antoine assured her staunchly.

“No!” Ruby wrenched her hand from Antoine’s as she bolted to her feet. “Please, listen to me! I...I-I...” She stopped talking abruptly and just stood there, her ample breasts heaving.

Antoine’s brows dipped. “Ruby, *qu’est-ce qu’il y a?*” *What is it?* “What troubles you, my sweet one?” His eyebrows crashed lower. “Are you being stalked again?”

Ruby shook her head, sending her curls bouncing. “No.” The one word was a barely audible breath. She turned her head to look at me, her cheeks glistening with tears. The need to confess rolled like a seawave across her expression, and in that moment, I thought I could trace the shadows of another woman in her face.

*This is yet another way you are so different to me, Ruby.*

*I’m a modern woman.*

*I’m the one who could be taken from you at any minute.*

I set my fingers to my chin. Ruby harbored a secret.

I could tell the moment she knew that I knew; I didn’t understand the exact nature of the secret she held, just that she had one. Some invisible weight seemed to lift off her and her lips parted. She didn’t speak of it, though. Now was not the time, I sensed that. She would later. I mashed out my cigarette in the ashtray. “We never know for certain how much time we have on this earth. We must live each moment to the fullest, don’t you think?”

Ruby slowly sank back down on the couch. “Yes.” She swiveled her body toward Antoine. “She’s right. I’m sorry, *mon amour*, I’ve been acting crazy.”

“No, no, no.” Antoine scooted forward and pulled her into an embrace.

Ruby tucked her face into his shoulder. “You *are* perfect for me,” she said, her words muffled by his suit.

Antoine hugged her tighter and murmured something French into her ear that I couldn’t hear. Probably sweet nothings. “I just want you to be happy, Ruby.”

She eased back far enough in his arms to smile up at him. “I am.”

He smiled back. “Then we go home now.” Antoine helped Ruby rise, aiming his smile at me as he said, “*Merci.*”

I closed my notebook. “You’re welcome.”

“Yes, thank you,” Ruby added, then something mischievous sparkled in her eyes. “I couldn’t have done a better job myself.”

I hauled my eyebrows up. More cryptic comments? I’d never conducted a more puzzling session.

Ruby and Antoine headed for the hatstand.

I rose, moved into the doorway, and leaned a shoulder against the jamb, watching them don their coats.

“*Au revoir,*” Ruby tossed back at me as she looped her arm through Antoine’s and steered him into the hallway.

As the door eased closed behind them, I caught Ruby turning a coquettish smile up to her fiancé. “How about I cook you some Bouillabaisse tonight?”

The door shut.

\* \* \*

I hope you enjoyed this session between Juliette Sobanet’s characters, Antoine and Ruby. You may rest assured that there’s a Happily Ever After in store for these characters. If you want to know how it ends, I recommend you read this fabulous book!

**We love to discuss the session.**

Here are some thought-provoking questions from Juliette. Please comment!

\* If you could travel back to Paris in any year, which time period would you choose? Why?

\* If you were the therapist, would you advise Ruby to confess the truth to Antoine about her past life journey?

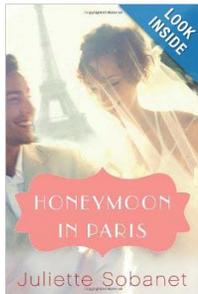
\* If you could travel back in time to your own past life, is there anyone in history you would like to be? Or a certain career or life situation you'd like to explore that is vastly different from the one you're living now?

\* \* \*



About the author: Juliette Sobanet is the best-selling author of five Paris-based sassy romance novels. Juliette's real-life experiences in France shine through her delightful voice, consistently earning her a beloved place in the hearts of her many fans.

Visit her website at [www.juliettesobanet.com](http://www.juliettesobanet.com) to find out more about her most recent release from Montlake—



HONEYMOON IN PARIS

Available now on Amazon: <http://amzn.to/1cdPcBb>

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Tracy Tappan, founder and creator of The Character Couch, is a multi-genre author of gritty romance. Her latest release in her dark paranormal series, THE BLOODLINE WAR, about an endangered breed of human who are kidnapping genetically enhanced women to save their race, is available now.



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Visit her website at [www.tracytappan.com](http://www.tracytappan.com) and sign up for *Author Updates* to keep abreast of other releases in her paranormal series, her upcoming medieval historical trilogy, and her new pulse-pounding military suspense series.

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