One Dance in Paris

Julia Holden

Published by Piatkus Books

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

1

Sometimes, the less you're wearing, the more you're hiding.

That's one of the lessons I've recently learned. Here are a couple of the others:

Showgirls are not strippers. And, *A headliner is not a showgirl.*

The nakedness, showgirls and headliners are all coming. But before I could comprehend any of those things, I had to get out of Somerville, Massachusetts.

You already know Somerville; it's the run-down, beat-up town where Matt Damon and Ben Affleck lived in *Good Will Hunting.* Slumerville, as many of us natives call it. Scumerville.

Some may resent my perpetuating the unfortunate low-class reputation under which Somerville labors. The mayor's office will remind you that Somerville is a City on the Move, and that they've made great strides in Urban Revitalization. In fairness, they have. Just not on my block.

Maybe it's personal. Admittedly, I've done a few things over the years that might have alienated the powers that be in Somerville. But it would be awfully small-minded of them to withhold all that progress from an entire street on my account—so perhaps the blight that persists in my immediate vicinity is just a coincidence.

I've tried to give Somerville the benefit of the doubt. For instance, not long ago, the city opened a new dog park with considerable fanfare. Jack and I jogged over to the park, which was a very fine-looking place, and which made a very fine first impression on both of us.

Unfortunately, the second impression it made came in the form of an unleashed shar-pei with eczema who attempted to hump the living daylights out of poor Jack. Thanks a lot, Somerville.

Jack is our dog. He's a Jack Russell terrier, which my dad bought because he liked the dog on *Frazier*. My dad named him. Lest you think naming a Jack Russell terrier "Jack" was a clever postmodernist statement, it wasn't. It was purely lack of imagination.

My dad's name is Jack, too.

The shar-pei incident is fairly representative of what it's like to be one of us, as opposed to one of them. *Us* being people who grew up here, whose parents grew up here, whose children will probably grow up here, too. *Them* being the snooty big-money pseudo-intellectual brats who descend on us annually to take advantage of Somerville's cheap rents and proximity to the snooty big-money pseudo-intellectual institutions of higher learning that have us surrounded. Southeast is Boston University. Southwest is Boston College. Farther west is Brandeis. East is MIT, and North is Tufts.

And then there's Harvard.

Harvard hugs Somerville the way an Adams House freshman clings to his floozy rent-a-date on his big night out at the Hasty Pudding. In Somerville, we're constantly confronted by Harvard and its minions. They infest our rental properties, our Laundromats, our bars. They would infest our bedrooms, too, if we let them.

Living under constant siege from Harvard, Somerville girls have an unenviable choice: never date, become a collaborator, or subvert from within. Over the years, several of my classmates have attempted the latter, planning to play Mata Hari with the affections and grade point averages of the Ivy League boys. But Harvard is a powerful foe, and inevitably, sleeping with the enemy leads these girls to cross over to the dark side. Consequently, I've followed a hard and fast rule: I don't date Harvard guys. Ever.

Nonetheless, although I hate to admit it, we need Harvard—at least, we need Harvard Square, which wouldn't exist without Harvard. We depend upon it for our pizza and our ice cream. For our

black-and-white movies at the beloved Brattle Theatre. And, maybe most of all, we rely on Harvard Square for our jobs.

Harvard Square is like a giant outdoor red-brick shopping mall. It has Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, Urban Outfitters, Talbots, Ann Taylor, Express, EMS, HMV, CVS, Starbucks, Au Bon Pain and Baskin Robbins, not to mention countless wireless stores, banks, stationers, bookstores, restaurants, cafés, bars, and everything else you can think of. In other words, it offers a never-ending supply of sub-minimum wage jobs requiring no skills whatsoever, making it the perfect environment for someone with no college degree, poor interpersonal skills, and a bad attitude in general. Namely, me.

Harvard Square also has the advantage of being within walking distance of Somerville. For me, that's not just an advantage, it's a necessity, as I don't possess a valid Massachusetts driver's license. I used to have one. Sure, I've been caught speeding on the Mass Pike a few times, and yes, I was clocked going 98 on the last occasion. Possibly my blood alcohol was a little high the night I drove home from the Plough & Stars and was pulled over by Officer Heggarty, who cut me no slack whatsoever despite the fact that I was coming from a good Irish bar. Still, I managed to keep my license until last fall, when I had that unfortunate misunderstanding about the man's car.

I was going to give it back. Really, I was.