

Simon Mundy was born in 1954. He trained as a theatre and opera director. From 1977 on he wrote for The Guardian, The Times, The Listener and The Independent (as well as many magazines) on classical music and was a frequent broadcaster on BBC Radio 3 & 4. His first book, a biography of Elgar, was published in 1980. In the 1990s he directed the National Campaign for the Arts, founded the European Forum for Arts and Heritage (now Culture Action Europe) and directed festivals in Scotland and the Netherlands. This century he has worked as an adviser to the Council of Europe and UNESCO, given many seminars on culture and conflict at King's College London and started Creative Guild, the Association of Creative Professionals. As a poet he has read all over the world. He lives in Mid Wales.

Also by Simon Mundy

Novels

Silent Movements

Seeking The Spoils (writing as James Eno)

Shadows On The Island (writing as James Eno)

Poetry

Letter To Carolina

By Fax To Alice Springs

After The Games

More For Helen Of Troy

Music

Elgar

Glazunov

Purcell

Tchaikovsky

Politics

Making It Home

Flagey
In Autumn

by

Simon Mundy

Illustrated by
Kate Milsom



First published in 2015 by Hay Press,
an imprint of Present Arts Ltd., Wales
www.haypress.co.uk

Copyright © Simon Mundy 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library.
ISBN: 978-0-9932202-0-3

Cover drawing and illustrations © Kate Milsom 2015
Set in Georgia and designed by C & C Design Ltd.
www.candc-design.com

Printed in the UK by Berforts Information Press, Stevenage and
King's Lynn

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Für Elise
another bagatelle

Progress

Starting Saturday

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| A Morning Of Encounters | 1 |
| Fidel Looks Up | 8 |
| Catrina Mulls | 12 |
| An Unparliamentary Morning | 17 |
| Uncalled-for Assistance | 20 |
| Change Of Habit | 26 |
| Saturday Afternoon And Evening | 31 |
| A Dithering | 31 |
| Oops | 35 |
| Above And Below | 39 |
| Slow Progress | 44 |
| Some Good Wine | 48 |
| Vespers | 52 |

Monday

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| The Realities Of Monday | 61 |
| Opening Shots | 66 |
| Elise Considers | 70 |
| Unparliamentary Business | 74 |
| Brain Power | 78 |
| Resolution | 83 |
| A Germ Grows | 87 |

Tuesday

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| After Dinner | 93 |
| Vultures Waiting | 98 |
| Stirring It | 102 |
| Dropping The Drawbridge | 107 |
| Significant Encounters | 111 |
| Together And Not Together | 115 |

In Autumn

Right Place, Wrong Move 120

Wednesday

A Busy Morning 127

An Offer Or Not 132

A Difference Of Viewpoint 137

Considerations 141

The Fates Dance 145

Return Coup 150

New Jobs 154

Cocktail Hour 159

Thursday

A Satisfactory Committee 165

A Simple Walk 170

Parliamentary Lunch 174

Gallery Impressions 179

Late Lecture 183

Ruptures In Paradise 188

Still Thursday

Surveillance Confirms 195

Irish Solutions 199

Complicated Dressing 204

Peace Is Harder Than War 209

Political Crisis 213

No Time For Contemplation 218

French Backing 220

Second Saturday

A Peaceful Weekend? 225

Clothes Lines 230

Train Plans 235

Flagey



I

Starting Saturday

A Morning Of Encounters

Saskia looked up moodily from her first machiato of the morning. The volume of the Spanish chatter from the table two along was insufferable. It was Saturday and barely ten. Surely Spanish could happen quietly sometimes?

At home in The Hague everybody knew that Saturday mornings were gentle domestic affairs, the cafés piping soft music, even classical, not the violent metal sounds of the Friday night *borrel*, the after office end of week drinking. But here in Brussels, despite the Flemish proximity, the sensible Dutch way held no sway. She sighed, sipped and glared.

Patrice, leaning back against the Italian coffee gismo in a brief interlude between customers, spotted her look and grinned. Keep out of a girl's way in the morning, any girl, blonde or not, he thought to himself. No point in prodding was nests. He wondered what she was. Northern, obviously,

Flagey

not fat enough to be English. But neither was she one of those huge Dutch fortresses. Too pretty to be German. He'd go Danish. It would explain the gloom.

Catrina shuffled up to the bar, eyes down as she rootled through the shapeless shaggy Afgan bag dangling from her left shoulder. Purse hunting, mobile hunting, keys hunting – the bloody sport occupied her for at least two hours a day. Her last and unlamented boyfriend, Bruno the Tory computer nerd, had told her this. It hadn't been hugely funny when she had been in love with him. Now the fact that he had bothered to calculate it and then produce the result with all the smugness of a well fed cat just demonstrated how unutterably sad he was.

Such a loser. He had lost her.

She saw Patrice's grin as she looked up, purse triumphantly in hand, and her day brightened. Now here was what she was looking for. Dishevelled, yes, off hand, often, but drop dead dishy all the way. She thought, I'd never find that in Derby.

Across at the Spanish table, it sounded as if the momentary hilarity had been replaced by furious argument. All four people, three men, one women, were talking at once, the woman most volubly. In fact, Mercedes would have told anyone in perfect French or florid (though not always easy to catch) English, they were only discussing whether it was going to rain. This is usually a near certainty in Brussels, which is what Mercedes was trying to tell the boys – Jordi, Jose and his younger brother Joaquin, the latter only up from Valencia for

In Autumn

a long weekend, hence the discussion. Should they risk going all the way out to Heysel and the park round the Atomium or should they just stick around Flagey, take in a film and then see which bar sounded good for the evening? But this – the shape and calibre of the clouds, the direction of the wind, what had happened last Saturday – all had to be examined with conviction or not at all.

In his turn Patrice caught the beam of Catrina's smile as he turned and half inclined his head to take her order. At least there was one happy customer this morning. This girl looked OK too, if in that disorganised way that all English girls had (he assumed she was English, even if she wasn't fat). It was as if they had got out of bed and failed to put the bits of their body together in the right order. Her hair, for example, an interesting sandy colour, but pulled tight at the back with wisps escaping instead of being allowed to flow full and free. And that baggy mauve T-shirt, a size too big, stuffed into a much too formal jacket for the weekend and completely hiding her figure, the rest of which (he noted appreciatively as he glanced at her jeans while she worked out the French for fresh mint tea) was surprisingly neat and trim without being skinny. And the bag, one of those Afghan woolly creations that reduced any woman to looking homeless.

Across by the window Saskia was aware that her sharpened glare was having absolutely no effect whatever on the Spanish contingent. She had neither seen, nor would have cared if she had, Patrice's amused interception. She sipped the machiato

Flagey

and returned to her laptop screen where she was attempting to log into her Ziggie account – that world artery of intimate friendship that made lives so much more public than previous generations would have thought bearable. Even this, though, was beginning to torment her. The wireless system in the café was so slow that it had already taken her fifteen minutes – almost the whole machiato – just to get her to the password stage but then Ziggie wouldn't let her in because by the time the signal had been sent, the system had given up waiting and just demanded the password again.



Behind the bar Patrice pulled a handful of mint leaves from a plastic box, shoved them in a glass, poured on the hot water and added a long spoon, sugar and tiny slab of chocolate to a saucer. Catrina watched him dreamily, massaging the Euro coins between her fingers as if they were his hair. He wound a paper napkin round the glass and tucked it in place with a practised twist. Catrina could barely bring herself to pay but then thought that if she gave him the coins instead of putting them on the bar her fingers might meet his. They did, for an instant and she tingled. If Patrice tingled, though, he didn't show it; merely chucked out a 'merci' and moved briskly to the till.

In Autumn

Catrina adjusted the bag on her shoulder, picked up her tea, turned and looked around for a table. There was a small one free, two in from the window, between a woman working at a computer and a jolly group chatting away in what she could tell even from the bar was Spanish. She began a slow walk over, her eyes firmly on the lip of the glass so as not to spill.

Jose was adamant, and determined that Mercedes would not pen them all inside all day just because it might rain. They would go to Heysel. Mercedes was not so easily defeated, however, and wailed to Jordi for support.

For Saskia, just as Ziggy blocked her entrance once again, the wail from Mercedes was too much. She grabbed her coffee cup, pushed back the chair with determination and stepped forward. There was a word to be had and it should be comprehensible in any language.

Shut up.

It was unfortunate that Saskia and Catrina should arrive at the same side of the spare table at the same time, one intent on making her point, the other equally intent on making it to the table. As Saskia strode forward she nudged Catrina's bag hard. The bag lurched from the shoulder and slipped heavily down the elbow. Mint tea was catapulted upwards and when it came down – glass and extras first, the leaves, then boiling water – it fell into the moving bag and over the black silk shirt on Mercedes' back.

The wail became a shriek. Catrina howled. The boys jumped up. Patrice spun round.

Flagey

Typical, thought Saskia. She was not going to take the blame for their foolishness. Taking the blame was not her way. If that stupid girl had been looking where she was going and if those Spanish idiots had not been shouting like children, nothing would have happened. Without a word she went back to her table and began to shut down her computer.

Jordi was livid. It was clear Mercedes was in a deal of pain from her scalded back and that great oaf of a woman had not said a word of apology. While Patrice emerged from the bar with a cloth soaked in cold water, Jordi pushed past the lamenting Catrina to confront the Dutchwoman.

‘You pain her,’ he accused in halting English, ‘you will make sorry.’

Saskia shrugged. ‘Why?’

Jordi was staggered. ‘Why?’ he repeated.

‘You make too much noise. She gets hurt. It’s right.’

Jordi Santal was a Catalan gentleman and hitting girls was against every code in his twenty-six year old book but this was provocation beyond his belief. How could someone cause another to have shocking burns and not show even a scintilla of regret? Patrice began to pad down Mercedes’ shirt with the cool cloth as Catrina stood by miserable and helpless. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Jordi straighten threateningly. Saskia hadn’t noticed. She was calmly packing away her computer.

Patrice gestured to Joaquin to take over the care of Mercedes, handed over the cloth, and moved swiftly to Jordi’s

In Autumn

side. He laid a hand on the Catalan's arm.

'Non Monsieur.'

Jordi glared at him, then relaxed.

'Madame,' Patrice began in French to Saskia, then switched to English, 'you were at fault I believe. Now you will apologise, if you please.'

It was not a notion in Saskia's constitution. She looked up at both men and regarded them with contempt.

'I will not,' she said simply.

'Then you will leave,' stated Patrice.

'I am leaving.'

'And you will not come back. Again. Jamais.'

Saskia looked up in astonishment. 'You ban me?'

'Oui, Madame. You are banned.'

The Dutch girl looked around the Café Franck. She was bemused. Nobody had ever banned her from anything, nor thrown her out. She stood still waiting for things to change, to return to normal, for a usual Saturday routine of two machiatos and Ziggy to reassert itself.

'Maintenant, Madame' insisted Patrice, 'out. Please.' And he moved to open the door to her right. In silence Saskia obeyed.

Outside, the first drops of rain began to fall.

~~~