ISHMAEL
AND THE
RETURN
OF THE
DUGONGS

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To my father-in-law
L.P.J. 'Ben' van Schyndel (1925–2006)
Master tradesman, artist, philosopher,
knight in shining white overalls
and tireless promoter of my books.
With love and thanks.

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Track 1:
Collision Course

I'm tracking you down
I'm hot on your trail
Girl, I got you square in my sights
I'm zeroing in
You're glowing on my radar
Flashing like a warning light

Chorus
Collision course
We're headed for a showdown
There's nothing that can keep us apart
Collision course
There's just no way around it
You're coming head to head with my heart

From The Dugongs: *Returned & Remastered*
Music & lyrics: W. Mangan and R. Leseur

1.
Welcome to My Nightmare

The phone growled in my ear like an angry bear. I crashed it back down. I picked it up. *Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!* I crashed it down.

Welcome to my nightmare.

For the hundredth time I ran through the three items on my checklist.

1. Kelly Faulkner.

This was to remind me who I was phoning just in case my brain suddenly turned into Play Dough. Don't laugh. This was a definite possibility. After all, I was phoning Kelly Faulkner – and not just *any* Kelly Faulkner,

but Kelly Faulkner of the ice-blue eyes and the cute white teeth, Kelly Faulkner of the 'only in my dreams' body and the heart-attack smile. Yes, that's right – *that* Kelly Faulkner. Breathtakingly, mind-meltingly, jaw-droppingly, brain-bubblingly, stomach-churningly, heart-poundingly perfect Kelly Faulkner.

No pressure.

I moved down the list.

2. Ishmael Leseur.

That's me. It's also the name of a frightening but as yet virtually unknown medical condition. And if you're thinking it's pretty stupid writing your own name down so that you can remember it, then you've obviously never suffered from Ishmael Leseur's Syndrome. (Which I guess is hardly surprising, since I'm the world's only known case.) But what you have to realise is that something like making a phone call to Kelly Faulkner is *just* the kind of situation where the main symptom of Ishmael Leseur's – rampant stupidity on a massive scale – is most likely to flare up. And I'm warning you, from my vast experience, you don't want to be around if it does.

Last year I had some truly awful attacks. I even wrote a scientific report documenting every humiliating second of it. The thing was, though, by the end of the year I really started to believe that I had the worst of Ishmael Leseur's Syndrome under control. After all, didn't I sort of rescue some primary kid from being picked on by the resident school bully Barry Bagsley? And didn't that kid turn out to be Kelly Faulkner's (yes, *that* Kelly Faulkner's) little brother? And because of that, didn't Kelly Faulkner, girl of my dreams, invite me and my mate Razza to her friend's birthday party so that now all I had to do was ring her up to accept and my life would be perfect? All true.

Which brings me to the last item on the list.

3. Party.

My planning and attention to detail were legendary. I was expecting a job offer from the Mission Impossible Force any minute now. Nothing had been left to chance. I knew the routine off by heart. All I had to do was plug in the number and when someone answered I'd say, "Hi, can I speak to (checking the list)… *Kelly* please?" If/when Kelly picked up I'd say, "Hi, Kelly,

it's (checking the list again)… *Ishmael Leseur* here, just ringing about the (checking the list one more time) … *party*."

Yes, the list was an absolute good. It was a thing of beauty, stunning in its simplicity. Not only that, it was totally foolproof. There was just one nagging question left unanswered. Was it Ishmael-Leseur-Syndrome-proof?

Now that was a tough one. To fully appreciate the awful burden that is Ishmael Leseur's Syndrome you'd have to read the detailed report I compiled last year, only I don't suppose you could, seeing as how there's only one copy and it's been buried under a pile of shoes at the bottom of my cupboard, or at least it was until I accidentally mentioned it to my English teacher Miss Tarango. Then, before I knew it, she was asking me if she could read it. Of course I wanted to say, "No way!", but hey, it was Miss Tarango, and she's the best teacher I've ever had and she's got this way of looking at you and these cute little cheeks and these dimples and… well… I handed it over.

Not all of it, of course – just a sample. (There was some detailed scientific analysis concerning Kelly

Faulkner and Miss Tarango herself that was classified 'Highly Confidential'.) The weird thing was, Miss really liked the bit she read. Who'd have thought an English teacher would be interested in scientific reports? She even talked about showing it to some people she knew – doctors, I guess. Who knows, maybe my report could be published in some big medical journal and Ishmael Leseur's Syndrome will finally get the recognition it so richly deserves.

The other thing Miss Tarango asked me to do was to write another report on this year. So that's what I'm doing. For reasons – see above re cheeks and dimples (by the way, the aforementioned 're' is an excellent word to include in a report, as is 'aforementioned').

To tell you the truth, I was kind of hoping that there wouldn't be much to write about this time around. Like I said, when Kelly Faulkner invited me to her friend's party, I really thought that maybe I was finally getting on top of Ishmael Leseur's Syndrome and that this year was going to be a much smoother ride.

Not even close.

That 'smooth ride' I was hoping for turned out to be a roller coaster on growth hormones. You know, one

of those wild gut-wrenchers that hurtle you towards total annihilation while your internal organs feel as if they're being rearranged by a madman with a shovel and which usually ends with your digestive system thrusting itself into full-throttle reverse.

But I'm getting way ahead of myself now. Miss Tarango's got this thing about the importance of organisation and planning. She says that everything you write should have a clear beginning, middle and end.

So here are mine.

Beginning: The very start of the year at St Daniel's Boys College.

Middle: The aforementioned roller coaster ride on growth hormones.

End: The night that The Dugongs returned.

There, that doesn't sound too terrible, does it? And it all starts off innocently enough. Geez, all I had to do was make a simple phone call.

2.
R-Rated Cluedo

It was ringing. I could hear myself breathing in the earpiece. Why couldn't she have given me her email address or her mobile number, so I could just text? Perhaps no one was home. One more ring and I'd hang up.

Suddenly the line clunked and rattled and a man's voice answered. "Hello. Faulkner's Fried Food and Funeral Parlour. *You die – we fry.* How may I help you?"

"What? I… ah… I thought… Sorry… I… ah… There must be… I wanted… I think I got the wrong number."

"That's not Macca, is it? Sorry about that. Just joking. I was expecting someone else. Dave Faulkner here.