ISHMAEL

AND THE

RETURN

OF THE

DUGONGS

ISHMAEL AND THE RETURN OF THE DUGONGS

MICHAEL GERARD BAUER



A TEMPLAR BOOK

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Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY 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

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

Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs

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.

• 20 •

Who are you after?"

"I... ah... I." The list! I snatched it up. "Um... Kelly... Could I speak to Kelly, please?"

"Kelly? Just hold on a tick and I'll check. I think she might be in the shower."

In the shower? Kelly Faulkner? (Warning! Potential sensory overload!) Kelly Faulkner... in the shower. Kelly Faulkner... in the shower... with the soap suds. It was like an R-rated version of Cluedo. I had to get my mind back on the job. I desperately scanned my checklist. *Kelly – Ishmael – Party*. Forget the shower thing. *Kelly –* Ishmael - Party. Don't think about the shower thing. Kelly – Ishmael – Party. Don't think of Kelly Faulkner lathered up like she's in one of those shampoo commercials – closing her eyes and smiling as she rinses the suds from her hair while the water trickles and bubbles over her face and shoulders and the camera sloooowly pans down... (Danger! System overheating!) The list! Concentrate on the list! *Kelly – Ishmael – Party*. Okay. Kelly - Ishmael - Party. All right. Kelly - Ishmael - Party. That's better. Kelly - Ishmael...

Clunk. Rattle. "She won't be long. Who should I say is calling?"

"... Party."

"Paddy? Well hang on, Paddy, she'll be with you shortly."

"No... No, wait... It's Ishmael... Ishmael Leseur..."

But it was too late – a voice was now calling out in the background, "Kel, it's a *Paddy* someone... Yeah, I'm sure that's what he said."

Great. Now she'll think I'm an Irish stalker. I tried to calm myself down. Not an easy task with my heart giving an inspired beatbox performance in my chest.

Muffled sounds came down the line.

I tried to imagine the scene at the other end. What did their house look like? Where was the phone? In the kitchen? In the lounge room? Maybe they had a cordless phone. Maybe Kelly would take it into her room... after she got out of the shower... wrapped in a towel. Just think, the only thing between Kelly Faulkner's bare flesh and me would be a thin cotton towel... that and a mere six or seven kilometres of telephone cable. Anyone for Cluedo? Kelly Faulkner... in her *bedroom*... with a *towel*... With *just* a towel.

"Hello?"

"Kelly? Hi, ah... it's (checking the list) Ishmael...

Ishmael Leseur here." All right, I could do this. The trick was to remain focused. "Just ringing about the towel."

"Ishmael? Sorry, what... what was that about a towel?"

"No... I... ah... I... It must be a bad line... Nothing about a *towel*... No... I was just saying... that I was ringing... to... *tell*... you that I got your letter... and Razza and I can come to Sally's party." Brilliant!

"Oh... right... Well that's good, that's great."

Phew. Okay, I was in the clear.

"So... why did you tell my dad that your name was Paddy?"

Then again. "I... ah... I... It's ... It's just... It's a nickname."

"Your nickname is *Paddy*?"

"Well... not *exactly*. I'm... just sort of... trying it out, you know, to see if it works or not."

"Why Paddy?"

"Ah... It's a long story." (Yes, it starts way back when I was born with an overactive stupidity gland.)

"Is your family Irish?"

"Ah... well... Yeah, sort of."

"Leseur doesn't sound very Irish."

"No... It's... probably from Mum's side of the family."
"Right... so what was your mum's name?"

Hey, any time anyone wants to lend me a hand here that would be great – you know it can get pretty tiring digging your own grave.

"Umm... I'm not really sure."

"You don't know what your mum's name was before she was married?"

"Well... I do... I just can't think of it. I know it sounded pretty Irish, though... Something like... um... Bono... but I could be wrong."

"Bono? What, like Bono from U2?"

"Well something *like* that, but probably not *that* exactly. I'm not really sure. Anyway, I don't really think *Paddy* suits me. I'll probably forget about it."

"Good move," Kelly said with a bit of a laugh.

Then the line went silent. I had to say something to fill the gap – something clever, something witty, something sophisticated.

"Yeah," I said. Well, what did you expect from someone with a Play Dough brain?

"Right, well anyway, that's great that you can both

come to the party. I'll get Sally to send you an invitation with all the details on it. It's just going to be a barbecue at her house with her family, but it should be fun. There's about six or seven girls coming from school and about the same number of guys including you two. Oh, and Sally said not to worry about presents, but to bring your trunks because there's a pool."

"Great." Yes, I was thrilled – me in my trunks. At last the steroids and all the hours in the gym pumping iron were going to pay off. I just hoped that Kelly and the other girls wouldn't be too overwhelmed by the sight of my rippling muscles and forget that there was a sensitive, weedy stick figure of a guy under all that beefy bulk.

"Look, sorry to rush off, but I better go. I'm just out of the shower and I'm dripping all over the floor." (Error: This program has performed an illegal operation and will shut down.)

"Ishmael? Ishmael, are you still there?"

"What? Oh yeah... I'm here." I wasn't really, though. I was off on Fantasy Island playing R-rated Cluedo.

"Well I guess I'll see you at Sally's, then. Bye, Ishmael... or should that be Paddy?"

"No... No, you can call me Ishmael."

"To be sure, to be sure," Kelly Faulkner said with a giggle, before adding, "See ya."

"Bye..."

I hung up the phone and stared at my checklist. *Kelly* – *Ishmael* – *Party*. Yes, it had gone like clockwork. I hope those Mission Impossible guys were listening in. They'll probably want me to head up their Australian bureau. Well, maybe not, but what did I care? *Kelly* – *Ishmael* – *Party*. That said it all, really. In about three weeks' time I was going to a party and Kelly Faulkner would be there. Everything was going to work out just great, I told myself.

You know, looking back, I think that was the moment when I should have signed myself up for Optimists Anonymous. I could have attended meetings with people like that guy in *King Kong* who said, "Sure, let's take the gigantic killer ape to New York – what could possibly go wrong?"

THE AUTHOR

When quizzed about his own memories of school, author Michael Gerard Bauer recollects three things clearly:

- 1. His ambition was to become a Samurai warrior.
- 2. Standing in front of his fellow students was as daunting a prospect for him as it is for Ishmael.
- 3. He never thought about writing.

Fortunately for his readers, soon after graduating from the University of Queensland, Michael quickly traded in his dreams of martial arts expertise, became a teacher and began to write.

Michael has since discovered that he is, after all, rather good at writing and has received a raft of awards for his *Ishmael* series, including the 2008 South Australian Festival Award for Literature and the 2007 Children's Peace Prize. In 2007 he was also shortlisted for the CBCA Award for Older Readers and the White Ravens festival at the Bologna Book Fair.

Michael now lives in the beautiful Brisbane suburb of Ashgrove with his family.

Don't miss the first hilarious *Ishmael* book:



Don't Call Me Ishmael

Michael Gerard Bauer

There's no easy way to put this, so I'll say it straight out. It's time I faced up to the truth. I'm fourteen years old and I have Ishmael Leseur's Syndrome. There is no cure.

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'Comic genius and a great read.'

The Bookseller

'Sharp and witty... utterly engaging.'

Marilyn Brocklehurst, Norfolk Children's Book Centre

'An extremely funny book that doesn't shy away from the inevitable growing pains of adolescence.'

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