

The Final Chapter to *Confederacy of Dunces* By: Meredith Weir

Myrna walks tearfully with a Monkee's lunchbox in one hand, filled with every received letter that Ignatius had ever sent. In her other hand, her and Ignatius' 15-year old son, Socrates. Socrates was named by Myrna mostly, but with Ignatius' approval.

On the morning of Socrates' birth as the couple sat in a hospital room with no nurses and no doctors, Ignatius turned to his partner and said, "I think I coulda done it with less screamin, but you did well enough that I will grant you the privilege of naming our son." Full of medicine and sore as a piece of chopped wood Myrna whispered the name Socrates and drifted asleep. Ignatius bulled around the room touching and poking everything he could, unimpressed at every turn. He was happy to know their room had a window over the parking lot. As Myrna slept and rested he peered out the window watching countless pregnant women arrive with their husbands and wives. Ignatius never got use to the idea of women having babies with other women, but he wished them the best, confident Socrates would grow up to defeat any competitor raised by two women that crossed his path.

Socrates doesn't know the story of his birth or many stories about his father at all. All he knows is that every May, on the anniversary of his father's death, his mother holds his hand as they walk through the cemetery in Wilks-Bear, Pennsylvania. Socrates watches as his mother falls to her knees and reads letter after letter. "I don't want to be here, Mom. I don't understand why we come here every year, when every other day you curse his name and wish you never knew him." "Your father was a genius and an asshole and though he doesn't deserve respect 364 days a year, I will always give him this day," Myrna responds. Socrates kicks sticks and dirt from around the cemetery. He sulks and carries his body identical to his father. There is no mistaking who he came from and who he will become. Myrna knows this too, it's been 15 years in and she is beginning to distance herself from her son. She fears she will become Mrs. Reilly and love her child blindly, stifling whatever creative genius is inside. She already regrets having the child; the only thing she imagines could be worse would be to raise someone as despicable and manipulative as her son's father.

"Please, Ma – lets just go, already," Socrates yells over and over causing the blood in Myrna's veins to begin to boil. This has started to happen more and more frequently. The sensation of hot water running inside her whenever her son screeched demands her way. It felt like the worst kind of orgasm. Most of the time Myrna obeyed, and this time was no different. Myrna finished her readings, licked her lips seductively to her late partner and walked quickly after her son.

As they drive off, Socrates struggles with his seatbelt, already too hefty to seamlessly buckle up, and Myrna tries to remember a positive story about his father. Myrna doesn't remember a lot, not even the night her son's father left, but she knows it was in the winter, and she assumes he headed south. Ignatius didn't care much for the winters in New York. Christmas was supposed to be a happy and merry time around the city but somehow he always managed to bring the whole spirit to a halt. Their first Christmas together, the same month Socrates was conceived was one that would taint Christmas indefinitely for Myrna. It was Christmas morning and Ignatius came barreling down the stairs. "I never spent Christmas with any woman except my filthy, Ma, did you happen to get me anything worth writing home about?" Ignatius did send letters home from time to time, but never once did he find a response. Even though this was the case, Ignatius assumed Myrna was hiding his mother's letters from him; the United States Postal Service was screwing up again, or Ma didn't actually know how to write. All possibilities seemed plausible and each one saddened Ignatius so much he never dared confront anyone about them.

That first Christmas was a tragedy for Ignatius. "What do you mean we are too poor for presents, Myrna?" With a lump in her throat she replied, "There is one thing I got you, but only if you have something to exchange with me can you have the present I know you so desire." Ignatius had nothing. He scrambled around the house, yelling from the second floor, "I didn't know yours would be so wrapped. I have mine for you upstairs and it just needs a bow or a paper to cover it." Hoping this lie would hold up as Ignatius scavenged around the room he became exhausted. Finally, he threw himself onto the floor and under the bed he saw a silver pelican with a gold chain. Quickly he put it in a sock and tied it off.

"For you my dear," as the couple shared a giggle at the poor wrap job. "And this is for you," Myrna replied. They ripped into their gifts. Ignatius opened a refurbished watch, extra banded, so it had enough links to fit around his wrist. He immediately threw it to the side proclaiming, "WHAT DO I NEED A WATCH FOR WHEN I CAN TELL TIME BY THE SUN PERFECTLY FINE?" Myrna looks up with tears in her eyes, "you found it, I thought this had been lost forever." The two consummated their love and 9 months later they were in the hospital room with Socrates.

They never made it to a second Christmas. Ignatius couldn't stand the sound of a crying baby. Sadly, Socrates was rather colicky. This screeching and clambering for attention was the beginning of the end for Socrates, he was on the path to wind up just like his father. As winter approached Ignatius took off, and 3 months later, on Christmas Eve, a knock at the door with a letter from Mancuso read "I want to be buried in NYC amongst the great men of whom our horrid country was found." Falling to her knees with a baby crying in her arms, Myrna knew what this meant. She was not going to give Ignatius the thing he wanted most. Days later, she headed to a sleepy town in Pennsylvania that she now visits each year. The man deserved nothing of what he had and got nothing of what he wanted by the end of his life.

Looking to her son, Myrna tells Socrates, "Your father, one time..." moments pass and Socrates speaks up, "what did he do one time?" Pausing for what seemed like an eternity Myrna decided to tell her son the truth. "Your father didn't do anything one time, he was an all the time type of person. I always looked for and expected him to change, but do you know what – at the end of the day, he was consistent. Your father knew who he was, even if he didn't know he was an asshole, he was extremely predictable. He would eat nonstop for days. He would manipulate you into escape plans and babies and then once he had what he wanted – he would go back to his same old self. I wanted change, I expected change and I never got it." Looking blankly at this Mother, Socrates responds, "is that why you come here every year? Do you think he is going to be undead? I hate to break it to you Ma, but that's not how it works. Once you're dead – it's the same forever and for always you're just dead – it amazes me how often people think they can just change life events. That seems naïve to me. What is life but a series of events that are merely repeated by everyone? There are ups, downs, mornings, nights, births and deaths. Additionally, everything in between those moments is just as repeatable. Once you identify your behavior you repeat it. Sadly, Mother, you looked for hope, it appears, in a man that was hopeless. I'm sorry Dad let you down so often and so consistently. I can't help but to blame you, for not recognizing your own pattern.