

The Final Word

By Carmine Giordano

**Contact:
Carmine Giordano
9592 San Vittore Street
Lake Worth, FL 33467
561- 762-8064
cgiordano9592@gmail.com**

THE FINAL WORD

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JACK DE LORENZO.

Physical: 55. 5'10. Medium build, brown hair, brown eyes. Italianate features, Roman nose, muscular.

Social: Practicing psychoanalyst, Ph.D. Clinical Psychology, graduate of a Freudian psychoanalytic institute, non-practicing nominal Catholic, married ten years to a Jewish woman, Jill.

Emotional: Intensely analytical, chronically searching for the motivation behind speech and action, good sense of humor, loving, stoic in most responses

JILL DE LORENZO

Physical: 47. 5'6. Well-proportioned, slightly overweight, brown hair, brown eyes, beautiful features, traditional secular Jewish background

Social: MS in Educational Administration, runs work-study program for New York City, studied psychoanalysis for a period, had brief practice

Emotional: Practical, rational, compassionate, melancholy at times

THE TIME

Present. Late November, the day before Thanksgiving, mid-afternoon

THE PLACE

Interior of a Brooklyn coop apartment

SCENE

The living room of their apartment where Jill is working to unscramble words for the Daily Jumble puzzle while Jack is reading another section of the newspaper.

JILL
I got it!

JACK
Figured out the Jumble?

JILL
The cartoon has people dressed in feather-costumes and grimacing.

JACK
Grimacing? Is that the word?

JILL
No, they're grimacing in the Jumble.

JACK
Why?

JILL
They're saying something.

JACK
But why are they grimacing?

JILL
How would I know? But it's got to do with the Jumble solution.

JACK
Okay, so tell me why are they grimacing?

JILL
They're "talking turkey"!

JACK
And why would they be grimacing if they're talking turkey?

JILL
It's not a psychoanalytic diagnosis, sweetheart. It's the puzzle solution. "Talking turkey." You get it? Tomorrow's Thanksgiving, so they're "talking turkey"!

JACK

Groaner! Speaking of which — are we having *that* for dinner tomorrow?

JILL

Having *what*?

JACK

Turkey, you know the family bird. The ones the Indians and the colonists ate together before they stole their lands and marched them across the amber waves of grain to various slum reservations.

JILL

Wow! So cynical. No, we're going to get a nice Costco fryer. Don't need the big bird. We're only by ourselves. Enough for you and me. They're cheap and juicy. And besides, you carve them so nicely.

JACK

If you're going to do that, you have to get their organic chicken. Those juicy ones have been abused you know. Read that somewhere. Poor things are housed on factory farms in buildings without windows. Tens of thousands of them on top of one another. One of their spoke-person's actually refused to sign the "Better Chicken Commitment."

JILL

My god, the "Better Chicken Commitment"?

JACK

Jesus, yeah! There's such a thing. Seems BJ's, Burger King and even Subway have signed on, but not Costco.

JILL

Leave it to you to delve so deeply into things.

JACK

That's what I do. Probe deeply. Shrink heads. Signed the "Make People Better Commitment"!

JILL

Then conscience tells me there shall be a mid-size juicy Costco organic bird primed and stuffed on the table tomorrow. Susan's cooking a thirty-pound turkey. Can you imagine how much meat on it, the breasts the big drumsticks, all the stuffing that it will need, but then she's got four kids and three grandchildren visiting. She'll need it. And tons of sweet potatoes cranberry and all that stuff.

(Sings)

"Over the river and through the woods..."

JACK

What's that?

JILL

You don't remember that from grammar school?

(Jill resumes singing)

"Over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house we go, the horse knows the way to ..."

JACK

(Interrupts her singing)

Grandfather's.

JILL

(Continues to sing)

"Carry the sleigh through the ..." What did you say?

JACK

Grandfather's house. Not grandmother's house. That's how it goes if I remember correctly.

JILL

I don't think so, Jack. It was *grandmother's house* they were going to, *not grandfather's!* But what difference does it make?

JACK

Nothing really, but why did you say grandmother's?

JILL

Here you go again, Sigmund, probing deeply. I'm not one of your patients, Sweetheart, and this isn't my therapy hour.

JACK

But why did you say grandmother's ?

JILL

Because that's the way the song goes! We sang it in school every Thanksgiving. It's just a song. What's going on with you? Why are you doing this to me?

JACK

Doing what?

JILL

Making an issue out of a song, something out of nothing.

JACK

But it's not nothing. You don't just say things because they don't mean anything.

JILL

You're twisting something all up here. Creating a false case to psychoanalyze me!

JACK

I'm not!

JILL

Yes, you are. You can't help it. What you said before, it's what you do for a living. And what you're doing— to me right now. And I don't like it!

JACK

And that's what you do whenever I bring something up that's problematic —accuse me of being cruel and then running away screaming and pulling a tantrum.

JILL

Goddamn you! Can't you leave this alone. Are you accusing me again for not having a family? Not having children?

JACK

I didn't say that. You did!

JILL

I don't want to have this discussion, if you don't mind.

JACK

But you brought it up, I didn't.

JILL

No, God damn it, you did! You are bringing it up right now, *you are!* And we're going to leave at that.

JACK

We've got to look at this sometime, don't we, Sweetheart? You may not want to but, you're right it's something I always— *we always* — feel particularly during the great American family holiday, isn't it?

JILL

What is it we feel?

JACK

I don't know. The absence. The great absence.

(Jill gets up and hugs him.)

JILL

Oh, sweetie, I'm so sorry. I didn't realize...
I didn't think of how you would feel...
You're always so down to the ground cheerful
Such a stoic about things...
You keep things in so much it's hard to read you.
You're so used to your psychoanalytic reserve.
you don't let on what's inside.

JACK

Hey, who's psychoanalyzing who right now?

JILL

So since I have my shingle out, aren't you doing a little projecting about "grandmother's house" when those are exactly the words written in the song. You're the one taking something out on me, no? *You* tell me, why did *you* think it's "grandfather's house."

JACK

Taking it out on you? Like it's only *my* issue. I see how wistful you are when the ladies brag about their Someday Nobel Prize winning *mispuchke*. The dentists, the lawyers. Harvard. Yale. And the cute and always precocious grandkids. Jannette says her granddaughter's child is her life. Says when Joel died, she wouldn't know how she could have coped if she were like us, she had the nerve to say, and didn't have her children.

JILL

Well maybe, in her case, yes, she always wears her kids like a life jacket or a coat of medals, but then again what about Jeremy's daughter who is always driving them nuts. She keeps demanding that they apologize for sending her to special ed classes years ago when she was a semi-autistic brat who no one could handle. He told me once that if I wanted a kid, I could have her, that he'd even provide the dowry for her. Monthly installments. Even your sister says kids are overrated!

JACK

Yes, but some bad apples don't remedy those feelings.

JILL

So what's this feeling of absence about? Since you want us to talk. Why don't you talk about it. Do you want to use the couch?

JACK

So snide!

JILL

You're the one who brought this up, so talk about it — standing up, on the couch — or on your head if you want to, idiot. I don't care.

JACK

Are you Virginia Woolfing me? Can't we talk about this for once as they say as calm cool and collected, without affect and drama? What do you think?

JILL

Do you really want to do this?

JACK

Do what?

JILL

Get out what's bothering you?

JACK

Me?

JILL

Yes, you! You're the one talking about my accusing you for not having a family.

JACK

Never said that.

JILL

Yes you did. I am telling you again, it's you, not me, who is making the issue out of a stupid song the lines of which *you* have misinterpreted! Do I detect displacement? Denial? What's that Anna Freud book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*? It's you got the problem here, kiddo!

JACK

But when I asked you about grandmother's house it was you who....

JILL

Again? Stop it! Stop it! My god, Jack, is this what you do to your patients? No wonder your practice is so small.

JACK

Oh, shit. Right to the balls. I'm starting to fear you, Virginia!

JILL

All right then let's have at it without histrionics or affect —calm cool collected. You first! What's this great absence you're feeling?

JACK

But you're the one...

JILL

No! you first! That's the second word for today:
T R U T H, Talking Turkey —without the grimaces.

JACK

You know what? I think I will lie down here on the couch like a real session, let *you* play Anna Freud.

JILL

Well, I almost did have my own shingle out, didn't I? I also studied at that analytic institute you went to for a few years, but with a name like De Lorenzo, the clinic patients didn't guess I was Jewish and unwittingly and trustingly spewed their anti-Semitic biases out to me once too often. One beauty actually said, "You know how they are!" Imagine the nerve. I wanted to say, "It's a Jewish guy that made it possible for you to be here — get this kind of help. That's how we are!" Pushed my analytic neutrality to the breaking point. Not for me.

JACK

(Laughing)

Yeah, they thought you were Mrs. Soprano, Edie Falco trying to figure things out while Tony was smashing heads or sweating tits at the Bada Bing club.

(with mocking mobster enunciation)

'You shoulda given those Jew-haters the kiss of death on their way out. Told them you were going to put a hit out on them, told them they better look out for Uncle Carmine!'

JACK

Ready? Let's see what you learned.

(Jack moves to couch, lies down, then a long, long silence)

JILL

Well?

JACK

If you're going to play the role right, you better get used to the silences. It's when so much stuff is coming up there's a log jam —nerve ends trying to translate themselves into words.

JILL

Okay. So, I'll wait here till you untangle and get your shit together!

JACK

Virginia!!! What was your question?

JILL

Your question, as I recall, not mine. The absence? The absence *you* feel.

JACK

Trader Joe's yesterday.

JILL

What's that got to do with this?

JACK

Free association, Anna. You got to let me associate. Like the puzzle. I give you the pieces as they pop up and you help me figure them out. As you said, that's what analysts do.

JILL

Well, pop them up then!

JACK

A kid's grandfather had bought him a cookie and while he's eating it on one of the lines, I hear him tell his grandfather, "I love you so much, Poppy." It was so beautiful. He called him Poppy. And suddenly I find myself choking up, can you believe it, actually tearing up. Had to wipe my eyes.

JILL

And what did you make of all that?

JACK

Thought I'll never have that in my life.

JILL

Have what?

JACK

Some little guy of my own to love me so fully and freely!

JILL

Probably because he loved that cookie so much!

JACK

Too early in the session to interrupt right now. You need to keep listening.... Found myself suddenly feeling sorry for myself. Never going to have that experience I thought.

JILL

(Scoffing)

To be loved “fully and freely?” Pardon me then, as they say, so what have I been serving you all these years, hard biscuits? Let me ask you: who do you have, who will you ever have to love you more “freely or fully” than your one and only Mrs. Cookie over here? Pardon me, Woe-Is-Me on the couch, but I don’t think that’s what’s really bothering you!

JACK

You’re supposed to be an analyst over there —not a mind reader!

JILL

And this is what they call in the practice: a confrontation! Isn’t it? Calling the patient out on his bullshit. So, what’s really going on with you today, Sweetie!

JACK

And if you’re really going to play the analyst, don’t you think your own counter-transferring hostility should be a little less apparent?

JILL

Fuck you!

JACK

There, there. So unprofessional. I thought you wanted to look at this without theatrics, without affect. No?

JILL

You bastard! You are really cruel. You’re the one who started this turkey fest, not me. Now you’re the one hiding under the feathers!

JACK

Okay, okay! So, you want to know why I feel like shit at turkey time? What the “missing stuff” is all about?

JILL

Yes, clue me in on it. Honey, please stop this thing you’re doing today. It’s making me sad and crazy!

JACK

Sad is the key word there. Sad that I missed my share of the relay.

JILL

The relay? Another word?

JACK

The great momentum from the first moment of being. The eternal e equals mc squared. The shaping of energy to mass to energy to mass in time, thirteen billion years in the making. The creation from the stars, the stuff that ultimately shaped me and was supposed to pass on also through me, reshape itself and seed into the infinite future. Missed out in all that. Those tears for the little boy and his Poppy? Vergil said it the best: *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*. The untranslatable, tears of things, tears of the living being: the tears that spring from the creature become aware of his mortality. The way everything ultimately ends. The sadness felt by the girl in the autumn park at the falling of the leaves in Hopkins poem: "It's Margaret you mourn for," he tells her. It's me I'm sad about, Sweetheart, it's me I mourn for!

JILL

Oh, my poor darling.

JACK

Didn't mean to do a Hamlet on you, Sweetheart, but it's that kind of stuff I'm feeling lately. Didn't know it would bother me so.

JILL

Can I offer you some matching high-minded consolation?

JACK

Sure, the stage is yours, Miss Bernhardt!

JILL

Think of all that you've helped people do in your work, reconnect them to their own *elan vital* — if I might be poetic, too — what Dylan Thomas called "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower." The stymied inherited forces of the real selves that you've helped unfurl into that infinite future you speak of. Without you many an oak tree would never have burst from the acorn, never have grown to seed the forests of the world exponentially. If you ask me, you've done more than your share of relaying.

JACK

Wow! Now that is a splendid matching aria for our duet today, isn't it? My god, you astound me!

JILL

"And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose / My youth is bent by the same wintry fever."

JACK

Another wow! That's in that poem, too! I didn't know you knew it.

JILL

Yes, and that same sadness, the same wintry fever, that same sense of loss is in me, too, my darling, the painful regret a woman has that she has not born children to continue the universal relay, as you put it, have the infinitely expanding universe enter her and reshape itself and continue its journey, reseed itself in the eternal momentum.

JACK

Oh, Jill, I knew there was something! You never told me any of this!

JILL

And I am dumb to tell you as well how really bent out of shape I am by all that. Much too painful. The faults, accusation, self—recreminations.

JACK

Faults, accusations.... recreminations? What are you talking about? Are those the words now?

JILL

Yes, not as philosophical as the others, not those grand existential grievances, but way down the ladder of abstraction: blame, worthlessness, feeling like shit! I know you blame me for all this, the loneliness, not passing “the quantum torch,” the absence of little boys with cookies from their “Poppies.”

JACK

(Gets up; embraces her)

I’m not blaming you for any of this, Sweetheart. Really. It is what it is. But I can’t help feeling what I feel.

JILL

(Pushes his arm away)

“It is what it is?” There’s accusation in that, Jack!

JACK

Projection, you mean, not accusation! You’re the one accusing yourself of all this.

JILL

There it is again. “All this.” Accusation. I can hear it in your voice. I’m not imagining it. It’s there. Be honest with me, Jack. Admit that it’s there. What you really feel about “all this” somewhere deep down. Tell me what’s really bothering you!

JACK

I told you what it was. What are *you* doing now? It’s clear to me that this is a classic case of projection. One for the books!

JILL

Then it's a new diagnostic category: mutual projection!

JACK

Look I'm getting tired of this, Sweetheart. You started it. But I'm willing to end it. Enough!

JILL

Me? I started it? O my god! Look how you've twisted it. Denial! Denial! *I* started this?

JACK

(Enraged)

I SAID no more!

JILL

(Screams)

God damn it, Jack. What is it? What is it you want to say to me. For the love of God, tell me! You're making me fucking crazy here.

JACK

All right, Miss, if you insist. If you really want to know. Yes, it's me. *I'M* the one with the problem.

JILL

Which is what?

JACK

Aretha Franklin!

JILL

My god! You've got a treasury of associations. Songs, poets, singers. Now what's she got to do with it?

JACK

That song of hers. You make me feel ...

JILL

"Like a natural woman"? What about it?

JACK

Do I make you feel that way?

JILL

Whatever in the world are you talking about right now? Of course you do.

(Jill starts to talk/sing)

“When my soul was in the lost and found
You came along to claim it
I didn't know just what was wrong with me
Till your kiss helped me name it.”

JACK

That I don't believe.

JILL

What are you saying? What's this all about, Honey? What do mean you don't believe me? I love you.

JACK

How can you feel like a natural woman when I haven't given you a family, let you feel what it's like to have a child grow in you, give birth, nurse, baby talk, baby toys, changing diapers...

JILL *(Interrupts him)*

Oh, my god, Jack. Oh, my god! You think that only that would make me feel like a natural woman? Woman as calf mothers, as lactating cows? Woman defined by some biological imperative to reproduce the species. That would be your example of the typical male gaze. But I don't think that's really it. You're looking at me from your own disappointment, aren't you? Is it that you yourself haven't spawned? You're a salmon leaping upstream who hasn't managed to drop his sperm on the brood of dames eagerly waiting for him. And you project that on me! It's what I've been saying all along here. You've got the problem with this. You! You! You!

JACK

Me? I the one who hasn't spawned, Virginia! Me? Oh, that's a nice try with “the male gaze” bit. The usual feminist cliché to deflect any of the unpleasant truisms about women's feelings. “Oh, you men don't really know anything what it's like to be a woman!” Tell me the truth: you really have never felt any of what I just said? You really think this whole issue is only a grand projection my part? You don't think I've ever noticed your eyes welling, the tightness of your whole body when mothers bring their children around to you. That self-accusing sudden sadness that comes over your face. And then, o my god, then that tight lipped angry accusing look you throw at me that somehow, some way—little passion, little sperm, little dick—I've robbed you of all that. I've seen you react that way a million times and I've felt the stab of those stares a million times.

JILL

O my god! You cruel and heartless son of a bitch going after me like this when you should listen to yourself Mr. Psychoanalyst. Don't you see it? Or won't you see it? It's so blatant it's you that feels that way about yourself. Classic denial and projection. Casebook, my dear. Casebook!

JACK

(A long silence, then realization)

So, brilliant work, Anna Freud! You've made the unconscious conscious, successfully pinned the trip to grandmother's/grandfather's house on me. God knows, we've abreacted plenty here today. So what do we do now with this illumination. The scabs have been picked. There's blood all over the place. What's the cure here?

JILL

We don't always have the option to get what we want, do we, Jack. I guess we have to live with that. I imagine that grace is how we have to finally deal with this. Wait for it to arrive. Let it come in. It's the only way.

JACK

Grace? What do you mean grace?

JILL

Don't take my word for it. Here's a dictionary. Look it up.

JACK

(Opens dictionary to the word grace and reads)

“grace noun 'grās

1. a: unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification
b: a virtue coming from God
c: a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine assistance.
2. a: approval, favor
b: archaic : mercy, pardon
c: a special favor : privilege
d: disposition to or an act or instance of kindness, courtesy, or clemency
e: a temporary exemption : reprieve
3. a: a charming or attractive trait or characteristic
b: a pleasing appearance or effect : charm
c: ease and suppleness of movement or bearing
4. -used as a title of address or reference for a duke, a duchess, or an archbishop
5. -a short prayer at a meal asking a blessing or giving thanks
6. -a musical trill, turn, or appoggiatura”

JILL

Yes! It's all there! It's all that, isn't it? *Amazing grace! How sweet thou art!*

JACK

O my god, Jill! You have a song, too?

JILL

Yes, you accept it without feeling guilt or regret even if there's every reason to feel all those. And you should or want to feel bad, but somehow you don't, because it's a gift from somewhere, unmerited, unexplainable, a virtue, an acceptance that makes you strong, somehow. There's mercy in it, a reprieve from self-pity. You give yourself compassion; you stay in your own favor; your own approval; you don't feel less than; your old charm returns; you step back into the day, move with normal ease and suppleness; you know it's the right way to be, an appogiatura, an illuminating clarity. Thankfully—and isn't it appropriate for the holiday—it's what I've been feeling for a long while. It's what's made all this bearable.

Look, at one point, after trying and trying, after the frenzied early morning sperm runs—you remember them, don't you, darling: the clinics, the swabbings, the watching and waiting, the disappointing bleeds. I had to deal with the futility of it, but instead of being sad and despondent, I determined not to be morose, to live life as fully and as well as I can. Not like Brenda who when her sister could not conceive wondered aloud to me, "What will my sister do now?" As though that was all there was to being a woman. Maybe it's sour grapes; maybe it's because deep down, I never really wanted children. Whatever it was, that season's over! I've accepted it. I accept it now, as they say—with grace. And I think at some point, it's got to be that way for you, Jack. (Pause) No, sweetheart?

JACK

I suppose so, your Grace. I suppose so. I hope I can accept this as gracefully as you say you do, ask god for the grace to do so, grace you with understanding, stay in your good graces, be thankful like grace before meals "Bless us, O Lord, for these thy gifts."

JILL

I think it's exactly that, Jack, my love. If you don't feel it yet, it's because you can't feel it at will just because you want to. It's not something you can reason yourself into. You read it yourself there on the page! It's unearned, unmerited, unexplainable, but when it comes, it's there like mercy, a pardon, a reprieve from all the accusation and hurt.

JACK

So how do we leave the jumble of this then? Solve this puzzle? Get cookies for Poppy here; a claim ticket for Aretha over there in the lost and found. Are you saying that grace is the final word?

JILL

Yes, it comes, it comes. Unearned, miraculous, forgiving! You have to wait for it; wait for reprieve! Then you get on with it, feel good or feel shitty as it happens: the old cliches, good days bad days, sunshine or rain. As the song says, “T’was grace my fears relieved!” And then you go on with it. You go on.

JACK

I guess so, Jill. I guess so.

(A long pause —and then realizations, shouted in staccato)

JILL

You would have been a great dad! You’d take him to the theater, read him great poetry!

JACK

You would have been a great mom! You’d teach her how to love, how to stand up to a man, how to make your mother’s stuffed cabbage, sweet and sour!

(A pause)

JILL

But the poor kid would have been hairy! She’d need a depilatory!

JACK

And the poor guy would have had a schnoz! ADD! Arthritis! Relentless inquiry!

JILL

O my god! You’re so right. Yes, Jack! Yes! Years of analysis. Money out the window, up the kazoo.

JACK

We’d have racked tuition bills instead of cruising fees, no walking the Great Wall of China, hearing the muezzin call from the minaret in Istanbul, stuff prayers into the Wailing wall.

JILL

No tulip fields in Holland, no tossing coins in the Trevi Fountain, no Tre Scalini tartuffos!

(Another long pause)

JILL

But they would have been darlings! We would have found a way!

JACK

Yes, we would have gasped and sighed in all the gorgeous places of world! We would have held each other breathlessly and tightly! It would have been so wonderful!

(They both start laughing, pensively, awkwardly at first, and then increasingly loudly, embracing a kind of happy recognition, peaceful acceptance, resignation —a moment of grace.)

(The manner of the laughing and the embracing are pivotal and crucial here to demonstrate the dawning awareness and its arrival.)

JACK

O my god, Jill! This is it, isn't it? This is the way it feels. The good, the bad and the beautiful.

JILL

Yes, my darling, yes! As you said. It is what it is! *Grace!*

(Music fade out: "Over the river and through the woods")

###

END