

Chaordia - A Novel of Transformation Ch. 14

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Because of climate change a man wants to transform an old farm into a new colony in Vermont

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It took quite a while to find the small gravestones. They lay twenty or thirty feet in the woods, surrounded and hidden by dozens of birch trees and green bushes. Grace wasn't certain exactly where they were, but knew they were near two huge pine trees that towered over the other trees, "I know they're near these trees," she said. "Now I feel bad that I haven't been here in fifteen years. I should have realized the woods would take over like this." "This is the first I have been here," Glenn said, when we found them. "I think I was in Mexico at the time and didn't have the money to make it back." "I didn't know where you were," Grace said. "I hadn't heard from you for two or three years." Glenn nodded, but didn't say anything and just stared at the two gravestones. Standing there with everyone, I saw we were in the woods opposite where the Indians were living. The farm was in a valley and the Indians lived on the other side of the hill beyond the barn and the old pasture. Looking at her parent's gravestones, I wondered where the Abeneki burial grounds were. Grace and Glenn were quiet. She held her wide brimmed hat at her side. Glenn continued staring at the two gravestones. I wondered what he was thinking, especially with just finding out he was part Mohegan Indian. Standing there, looking at the gravestones, reading their names was strange. Glenn just talked about his grandparents without saying a name, so when I saw the crooked gravestones and read Eugene Burke 1922- 1993 and Hilda Burke 1924-1992, it felt a little weird. "My dad died seven months after my mom," Grace said. "I'm not surprised after fifty two years of living and working together day after day, he wanted to be with her. I was with him at the end and I'll never forget that time." "I remember people called him Gene," Glenn said. "He was a loner," Grace said. "He loved to read and though he never went to college, he was well educated and a real philosopher and a poet. He was a lot more than a farmer. I remember him talking about economics and how land should be owned by the community and not individuals. It was like air or water, it belonged to everyone. No one should own land. It should be held in common. That's what the word commonwealth means. I think people around here thought he was odd. They liked him, but I think he was a thorn in their side with some of the things he said. Even when I was a little girl he would talk to me about his ideas on this and that. I didn't always understand what he was saying, but he never treated me or Derrick like we were kids. I think that gave me a lot of self-confidence and helped me be independent. He was a

great dad and my mom was really a talented weaver. She also loved to knit and I still have sweaters and a wool cap she made me when I was in my teens." I liked listening to Grace talking about her parents and remembered her saying she was home schooled and the farm was all she knew until she went off to college. Just before we left to walk back to the fire, she said she wanted to clear some of the brush aside and get some tulip and daffodil bulbs in town and plant them so that they would bloom each spring. I thought that was a really cool idea, and the more I was getting to know Grace, the more I admired how she thought and lived. While we were walking back towards the smoldering fire, Morning Star was walking towards us through the high grass in the pasture. She carried a huge bunch of wild flowers which she gave to Grace. "This is for your generous offer," "Thank you, Morning Star," Grace said, sniffing them. "You didn't have to do that." "I wanted to," Morning Star said, then turned to Glenn. "You have an amazing mother. She's very wise." "I know," Glenn said, "and full of surprises," he added. "I can't believe I never knew I was part Native American. I know nothing about the Mohegan Indians, nothing." "I know what that feels like," Morning Star said. "For most of my life I knew I was Native American but knew nothing about my heritage. I hardly remember my mother and never knew my father. All I remember was St. Albans. My grandfather and grandmother came once when I was five or six, and until I saw them again, I didn't know them." "I didn't know I was part Mohegan until a week before my father died and he didn't know until he was old," Grace said. "It was startling to find out." She turned to Glenn, "I'll tell you soon why I never told you." While Alice and I listened to the conversation, I tried to imagine what it must feel like to discover something about yourself that you didn't know before, and it made me think how mysterious life is. It made me think about what was happening in my own life, not just with Alice, but after reading the Atlantis books, and meeting Elizabeth, and discovering that the Bendula not only existed but were watching Glenn and that we were all in danger. I was barraged with thoughts and feelings. It was overwhelming. My dad was listening to Morning Star and Grace, but I noticed how he was looking at her and how she glanced at him, a slight smile on her lips, then she'd look back at Grace and Glenn. I don't miss much and again could sense an attraction there. After my dad and mom divorced, he concentrated on his work and never had a date, at least that I know of. I think he's a pretty good looking guy, but like me, not that smooth around women. Alice made it easy for me because she was so direct and said and did what she thought. "I came to bring you the flowers and to tell you that my grandmother was very touched by your offer and your explanation. My grandfather didn't say anything, but I could tell he was deeply moved by your words and generosity. I don't know what will happen later at the council meeting." "I don't either," Grace said. "Grey Fox is an obstacle, but maybe, when he learns what is happening with the land, he will understand and change his mind." "I don't know," Morning Star said. "He is angry and bitter at what happened to him and thinks my grandfather is crazy. I've heard him say mean things about him to others. It's painful for me to hear him when he doesn't know I'm listening." "What happened to him?" Tammy asked. "Do you know?" "I only know what my brother has told me. I don't know the whole story, but he was wounded in Vietnam. He joined the Marines when he was twenty. Many Indians joined the Marines and the Army because it was a way not to be poor and to get an education." "I know about that," my dad said. "More Indians joined the military

during the Vietnam war than any other minority group." "Is that true?" Grace asked. "I didn't know that." "Is that why he has a limp and that scar on his face?" Glenn asked. "Yes, he was badly wounded by a landmine and is lucky he didn't lose his leg," Morning Star said. "My brother told me Grey Fox's best friend was killed in the explosion and he was behind him and got hit with shrapnel and was burned, but that is not the only reason he's so angry and bitter." "What do you mean?" Glenn asked. "I'd think losing your best friend and almost losing your leg would be enough to make him bitter." "He was given a medal and a something called a Purple Heart," Morning Star said, "but he told my brother he threw the medal in a dumpster in Montreal after three years of being homeless and broke. He couldn't find a job. They didn't send him to school like they promised. He was a pawn like in a chess game and realized he didn't matter to the Marines or the government. That is what he told my brother. He was told 'shoot anything that moves' and that's what he did. He almost lost his life fighting for his country, but then when he got out, he couldn't get a job and had no place to live." "No wonder he's bitter," Grace said. "A similar thing happened to my grandfather," Morning Star said. "What happened to him?" Glenn asked. "He also joined the Army when he was twenty, but he was in Korea. He's twenty three years older than Grey Fox and was wounded and almost died. That's all I know, but the same thing happened to him when the war was over. He drove a truck for a concrete company in Canada, but kept getting laid off when business was bad. He was married and had my mom and a son, but he could not support his family. I don't know very much, because I was put in that orphanage and so I know very little. He only came to visit once." "How did he become White Elk and the Chief," Grace asked. "My grandmother told me that his name was Earl before he became White Elk. He had to recover from being an alcoholic which was very hard. He was told he would die unless he stopped drinking. Then one day he was told he was full blooded Abeneki by an Elder he met in the church where the AA meetings were held. The Elder knew my great grandfather, who had died and told my grandfather he had an important mission and that the sacred pipe would be given to him to keep, but he must recover and never drink again. And that is what happened over thirty years ago." "Wow, that's an amazing story," Alice said. Morning Star turned to Alice, "Yes, it's an amazing story. My grandmother told me how my grandfather changed when he was told he would become keeper of the sacred pipe. It inspired him to learn the ways of his people. It made him know he must find his roots and live honoring his heritage and to help his people who were lost and suffering. He had a purpose." "So how did he get people to come back to Vermont and to this land," I asked. "He had gatherings for many years on a friend's farm in Canada. They started meeting and talking about the old ways and how they must change in order to survive and pass onto their children the ways of their ancestors. When he received the sacred pipe, the one you smoked with him, he became dedicated and revered by the other Indians. Not all of them were Abeneki people, but many were." "How did he find this land, how did he know his ancestors were here?" my dad asked. "That's an amazing story," Morning Star said. "White Elk never told me this, but my grandmother told me that an old treaty was found in a trunk. The treaty was from 1790 and it had a map that showed what land was Abeneki and what was American. Vermont was still part of New York territory, but the map showed the Merrimack River and Lake Champlain and it showed that almost all of this part of

Vermont was Abeneki land, even though there were now miles and miles of towns and cities and highways and shopping centers and everything that is now here." "What happened with the treaty and the map?" Alice asked. "Did the Indians try to claim their land according to the treaty?" "Yes, they tried, but nothing ever happened. They hired lawyers, but it kept getting shoved aside," Morning Star said. "So eight years ago White Elk knew nothing would change, so he studied an old map and found this land that was once Abeneki and brought people to this land and your grandfather's abandoned farm and said we will take back our land and we will live here just as our ancestors did." Morning Star paused and turned around, pointing to a place on the other side of the pasture. "We found the old burial ground near the river covered by trees and brush and knew we were home. We cleared the land and made paths. We could tell no one had been on this land for many years, or on your grandfather's land, but White Elk knew it was our sacred ground and we reclaimed it as ours. It is the land of our ancestors and had been long before your grandfather came here." "It's all beginning to make sense," Glenn said. "That's some story." "Thank you for telling us what happened," Grace said, "but it is not a new story. In many places around the world--Greece, Italy, Turkey, Africa, South America, Mexico and most of Europe, people migrated when conditions were bad, or to get away from war or oppression, and they settled on other people's land. They had no choice and it caused fighting and struggle. The same thing is happening now in the Middle East in what was Palestine and now it's happening here with all of us showing up." "It's going to get worse," my dad said. "Climate change is going to cause mass migration and there will be fighting over water and land. Severe drought is devastating many people, and people are being forced to move to places where they are not wanted. It's going to be a mess. Many people are migrating to Europe from Africa and the Middle East." "That's why I'm here," Glenn said, looking at Morning Star. "And that's why your people are here--that's exactly why we are both here." "I understand," Morning Star said. "And Sun Dancer does too. My grandfather's vision is difficult for many of our people. He sees what others don't. Still, your presence here awakens bitterness and distrust, and I don't know whether they will accept what he is saying." "I understand," Glenn said. "Perhaps when Grey Fox and the others know about the back taxes and my plan to buy the land and give it to your people that will change their minds," Grace said. "I don't know," Morning Star said. "The bitterness and distrust is deep and forgiveness might never come." No one spoke when Morning Star said that. I understood how our suddenly showing up on this land was an un-welcomed surprise, and how similar it was to the Indians seeing ships from Europe sailing off the coast for the first time. How strange it must have been to see strange people come ashore, dressed in clothing they had never seen, people with white skin, their appearance so different, seeing women in long dresses, men with beards, speaking words they could not understand. I wished I knew more about what happened, what they thought, and was determined to learn more. I know from what my dad said about Manifest Destiny how horrible it must have been to see their lives invaded and changed by people from across the ocean, and here we were over four hundred years later, showing up. I remember reading somewhere, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Morning Star looked at Alice and smiled, their eyes meeting. "I hope you will say something at the council," she said. "You do?" Alice responded, "Why? What should I say?"

"You will know what to say," she said. "Just speak your heart and they will listen." "I'll try," Alice said, looking at me, then at Grace, then back at Morning Star. "I must go now," Morning Star said, turning to Grace. "They will listen to you also." Just before she turned to go, she glanced at my dad, and then walked off, turning quickly to wave back at us. My dad watched her walk away towards the old pasture, and then surprised me by walking past Alice and me and jogged after her. Morning Star must have heard him and turned. She smiled at him and then they started talking. I have no idea what they said, but I saw her laugh at something and he did too. Alice was also watching and then looked at me, "I think your dad has a crush on Morning Star." I didn't say anything, but noticed Grace was watching also, then Glenn started talking to her and she turned away. Tammy noticed also and smiled to herself, then walked towards the van to get something. My dad and Morning Star continued walking through the tall grass towards the hill and the woods. They stopped again and said something before Morning Star walked into the woods, turning once to wave goodbye to my dad. Alice then took my hand, "Let's go to the cabin," she said. "I feel there's a little romance in the air, don't you?" While we walked towards the cabin, I waved at my dad as he came back towards the camp fire. He waved back then continued to where Glenn and Grace were talking. Alice squeezed my hand and smiled at me, "Let's race to the cabin," she said and before I could respond she started running through the high grass, dashing past the apple orchard. I'm pretty fast, but after a slow start, caught up with her. We were running side by side, pumping our arms. She looked at me, then put her head down and started running faster. I was determined to pass her, but was surprised how fast she could run. It was fun running through the tall grass and could see we were getting closer to the cabin. She was ahead of me, but not for long because I put on a big spurt of speed and caught up with her and just before we got to the front door, passed her and won by a few steps. When we stopped, both of us gasping, taking in deep gulps of air, unable to speak, but then she laughed, "That was fun, but I let you win." "No you didn't. You would never let me win on purpose." "You're right," she said between breaths, "but I almost won." When we opened the door, it was a little chilly in the cabin. We were still breathing heavily. I stoked the fire and threw in a log. That's when Alice came over to me, took my hand then wrapped her arms around me. At first, I wondered what she was doing but suddenly, we were kissing each other, standing in the middle of the room, embracing each other, then we stumbled over to the bunk bed. She fell on her back, pulling me on top of her, wrapping her legs around me as we kissed and moved together. She lifted her mouth from mine. "I'm on the pill." What is she telling me? I wondered, but realized she wanted me to make love to her. I was uncertain what to do and nervous, but we were kissing harder, our tongues moving madly, our breathing growing ragged. When I felt her reaching to unbutton my jeans, I got up on my knees between her legs, while she unbuttoned her jeans and started to squirm out of them. I pushed my jeans down, feeling clumsy, then helped her squirm out of her jeans, pulling off her sneakers, then her tangled jeans while she took off her panties and tossed them onto the floor. I continued pulling my jeans and underwear down over my ass, her blue eyes looking up at me, her reddish hair splayed on the mattress, her lips slightly parted. Still trembling and self conscious, I knew I had to be gentle as I leaned over her, kissed her and feeling her wetness, entered her slowly, carefully, feeling the barrier, feeling her lifting, feeling me pushing.

She stiffened at the pain, but then, penetrating deeper, felt her moving faster, then loud screams telling me she she was close. Thrusting harder and faster, it didn't take long before both of us exploded, sharing our first huge, thrilling orgasms, the warm wetness on our bodies, the aroma of our sex in the air. I collapsed on her and felt her strong arms and legs holding me as if she would never let go. We lay there in each others arm, breathing softly, feeling the warmth of each other. "That was wonderful," she said softly, breathlessly, looking into my eyes. I kissed her, but didn't say anything, then rolled onto my back and gathered her in my arms, placing her head on my shoulder, kissing her hair, loving the sweet fragrance of her shampoo, and knowing we would never be the same, or forget that moment. Later, while walking through the high grass towards the circle of wigwams, two eagles were gliding in circles high above us. We stopped and looked up. "I hope that's a good sign," Glenn said. "I do too," my dad said. Grace looked straight up and took off her hat, so that it wouldn't fall. Tammy shielded her eyes with her hands. "They're so beautiful," Grace said. "I'll never forget the first time I saw eagles when I was a little girl." As we got closer, Sun Dancer and Morning Star came to greet us at the edge of the garden and saw the smoke coming from the wigwam where the council was meeting. "How is White Elk?" Grace asked. "He is weak and tired, but I know he is happy that you are here," Sun Dancer said. "My grandmother gave him warm squash and bean soup which is his favorite, And he has his comfrey and mint tea," Morning Star said. When we entered the warm wigwam and saw everyone seated in a circle around the fire, White Elk nodded a greeting and moved his hand, showing us the place where we should sit. I looked at Grey Fox, Blue Lightning and the others and could see they were waiting for Tall Tree to lift the smudge pot, so that we could begin. After he did that, he took the pipe from its brightly beaded leather pouch and held it above his head, the two eagle feathers dangling from the long stem. He then placed several pieces of sacred tobacco in the bowl, tapping it with his thumb. Once it was lit, he passed it to White Elk who closed his eyes while inhaling, holding in the smoke before releasing it, then passed it to Glenn to inhale. Glenn passed it to Grace, who looked at the pipe, examining it before placing it in her mouth. While she inhaled, holding in the smoke, she and White Elk looked at each other as if their eyes were speaking, then she released the smoke and passed the pipe to Tammy. It was tense and, as we all smoked, everyone knew our presence at the council was unusual, but important. White Elk sat silently for a moment before speaking. He closed his eyes as if searching for words. At first, his voice was low and gravely, and it was clear he was weary. "Our friends are here to see how we listen and speak to each other until we know what is to be done," he said, pausing, "but they bring us knowledge we do not have." Grey Fox kept his eyes on White Elk, listening. He then looked at Glenn and Grace, before turning back to look at White Elk. "We know the rivers are rising," White Elk said. "More floods will come like the hurricane several years ago. We know the winds are changing. We know that in many places sacred burial grounds will be underwater. We know that Mother Earth is angry. We know the time is coming when one place will be too dry, one place too wet, one place too hot, one place too cold. The rivers will change course and take land back." White Elk closed his eyes and swallowed a deep gulp of air. It was difficult for him to speak. He opened his eyes and with great effort spoke. "I have said my vision that we are all in danger, and the time is here that we must share what we know

of the world and become more, become whole. It is a new time." Again he paused and looked at us, then faced the council. He moved his hand to include us. "It is now a time when we must all become warriors." His words jolted me. Warriors? I was startled and looked at Grey Fox listening and wondered what he was thinking. "I see small bands of people living very close to the earth. Others will come to join them and they would be embraced and welcomed. We will live together in a sacred manner knowing we are guardians of Mother Earth. All men and women will be warriors, and our children will grow, and they, too, will become warriors for a new way. It is how we will survive. That is my vision." I wasn't really sure what he meant by warriors, but it didn't sound like a bad thing, though I wondered how all people would become warriors. What does he mean we will be warriors for a new way? It was hard imagining most people changing. I looked at Grace, nodding and could tell she understood, and knew I would ask her later what was meant by being warriors. White Elk turned to her, their eyes meeting. "Please tell us what you know. Share with all of us that you said earlier." Grace held her hat on her lap, straightened her glasses and closed her eyes, gathering her thoughts. She turned to Grey Fox, and then looked at those sitting next to him. "You are in danger," she said. "You may believe this is your sacred ground, but there are others who will think you're crazy. This land is about to go on sale because of back taxes. As far as the county is concerned this is their land, and you are about to be discovered and evicted." Grace was so blunt, but it had the reaction she wanted. Grey Fox and the others turned from Grace and looked at each other then at White Elk. "Now listen to me," she said. "This is why we were meeting with White Elk earlier. I told you I would tell you later, and now I am. I will pay the back taxes and buy the land and give it to your people. No one will need to know you are here. Please understand, White Elk is right, we need each other more than ever if we are going to survive." "How can you give us land that is already ours?" Grey Fox asked. "I know you believe this is your land, but the world of commerce and the world of nature are colliding here. I know about the treaty that was discovered and proves that this is your land, but believe me, if you are discovered here when the property goes up for auction, all of you will either be evicted or arrested and everything you have made here will be removed by force, if necessary." Grey Fox nodded and stared at Grace. "Why would you do what you are saying? Why would you buy the land and give it to us?" "Because I believe you belong here, and I believe Glenn also belongs here on his grandfather's land. White Elk and I share a vision about a new way of living where we share our knowledge, learn from each other, both becoming more than we are separately." Suddenly, Alice surprised me. She took out her cell phone and held it up. I remembered Morning Star saying she should say something and it would come from her heart. "See this cell phone. I can talk to anyone in the world from this phone and share information, thoughts and ideas." "What do you mean?" Grey Fox said, looking at Alice's red cell phone. "Right now I cannot get a signal, but if I could, I would know what is happening in the world and be better prepared to know what to do." White Elk's eyes widened when he saw the cell phone and heard what Alice was saying. She continued. "We have knowledge that can benefit you and you have knowledge that can benefit us." When she said "us," I wondered if she was saying she wanted to live on the land and become part of Glenn's idea for a new colony. I knew she felt something about the farm and even said she could live here, but I didn't think

she was serious. I knew she was planning on going to college next year. My dad lifted his hand, indicating he wanted to say something. "I'm an architect and must tell you how much I admire your shelters." He looked around. "They are warm, dry, simple and beautiful, but I also know ways they can be made stronger to survive huge storms when they come and how they can be cooler when it is hotter and even warmer in the winter. I also know how to get electricity from the sun." Grace nodded, listening to my dad. "I am giving your people the land not out of generosity, but out of what I know my father wanted his land to become, and that is why I am giving the money I have saved so that my son would do what my father hoped he would do, one day." "What do you mean, what he hoped I would do?" Glenn turned to his mother. "That is why I didn't tell you what I knew about our heritage," Grace said. "He told me it must rise in you, the idea, the vision of why you want to be on this land must come from inside, from your heart. It must come from love." Grey Fox and the others listened to Grace and Glenn, and I could see by their widening eyes, they were fascinated by what they were hearing. Grace turned to White Elk and then to others. "I have studied ancient legends and want to tell you a Greek legend that I believe actually originated in Egypt, but I know the Greek version. It is very relevant to what White Elk and I are saying and why Glenn is here." "Tell us," White Elk said. "It is the Phoenix Rising from the Ashes legend," Grace said. "The Phoenix is a mythical bird that consumes itself to be reborn from its ashes. It's the symbol of transformation of human consciousness and is what we must go through to create what we desire. It is also the process of rejuvenation. The phoenix is similar to the eagle and also similar to the pheasant." She paused, "both live here on this land," she added. "That is true," Grey Fox said, listening intently to Grace, nodding. I was also listening intently. I had never heard the story. "The pheasant is a bird of the earth and is the symbol for family and fertility. It seldom strays far from its nest. The eagle, however, is able to soar and hunt. It is able to grasp and hold what it needs in its strong talons and yet soar to unimaginable heights. It is important to remember that the phoenix is not just a transformation of our consciousness, but of our nest, our environment and how we live on the earth. The eagle soars, but it must also return to its home." Grey Fox and the others nodded, listening attentively to Grace. "Thank you for telling us the legend," White Elk said. "We share a vision." He turned to Tall Tree sitting next to him, then closed his eyes and took a deep breath. I wondered if he was tiring. He looked at Grey Fox sitting across from him, then turned to face Grace. "I am happy to have this opportunity to share what I know," she said. "I think I have said enough. I know you're tired and your council must decide what to do." "My grandfather is very tired," Morning Star said. "Thank you, Grace for all that you have said." She turned to Alice and glanced at the cell phone she was holding. "Your thoughts are also interesting. Thank you for showing us your cell phone." "It can take pictures too, and they can be sent to anyone no matter where they are," Alice said, looking down at it. "We should go," Grace said, reaching for Glenn's hand to help her up. She also picked up the branch next to her leg. When she stood up, she put on her hat. "Thank you for listening." When we left the wigwam and stood outside, Sun Dancer followed us. "I don't know if the council will listen to what you have said, but you spoke wisely." He turned to Alice. "So did you." "I hope I didn't scare everybody when I showed them my cell phone," she said. "I hate to admit it, but I don't know what I would do without it." Sun Dancer looked at

Alice, "I have never used a cell phone, but what you said interests me." He then looked up at the sky and saw the sun was getting lower in the West. "I don't know what the council will say about your generous offer and the vision you shared." He looked at Glenn. "I will come and tell you when I know." We were quiet when we walked back to our campsite. Alice and I walked behind Grace and Tammy. My dad and Glenn were walking together, not talking, deep in thought. Just before we turned the bend, Grace stopped and looked back at the circle of wigwams. We could see the smoke from the big fire in the center and the thin spirals of smoke rising from each of the wigwams in the chilly air. "I think everything is going to work out," Alice said. "I think Glenn's idea of making something new is going to work." "I hope you're right," Grace said, "but it won't be easy. Transitions can be hard, like childbirth, it can be painful." When Alice and Grace continued walking, I stood still and looked back again at the wigwam and thought about the word, "Chaordia," and the story Grace told about the Phoenix rising from the ashes. Standing there, a wave of fear swept over me causing me to shiver and close my eyes. Are the Bendula really watching?