

Chaordia - A Novel Of Transformation Ch. 12

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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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We arrived at Glenn's farm a little after three in the afternoon. Instead of the VW bus, Glenn had borrowed a larger, newer, blue van from his friend, Edgar, someone he had met at Occupy Wall Street. He knew about Glenn's plan and was interested in being part of it if it got off the ground. Glenn wanted to make sure his mom would be comfortable, and this van had more seats and a lot more storage space, so the trip was a little easier. Alice and I were eager to meet Glenn's mom, and so was my dad. She was not at all what I expected. Eventually, I learned to try not to have expectations about people, but it took me awhile to learn that. My dad was eager to meet her because of her willingness to give her son his inheritance before she died, but when we met her, we understood why. It was all connected to the farm and Glenn's idea. It had to do with her father's dream and why he left the farm to him. She knew the place was special and that one day, Glenn would also realize how special it was. So when she heard his plans, she knew it was the right thing to do and was what her father would have wanted. I guess I thought a Professor of Classics would be stuffy and formal, and I'd have to be careful with my English, but Grace was more of a hippie than Glenn, even though she was seventy-two. She had really long, straight, white hair that she wore, pulled back and held with a wooden broach, but it flowed halfway down her back. Also, her skin was smooth with hardly any wrinkles, and her cheeks had a radiant glow, not rosy, but she looked healthy. I remembered Glenn said she had not been well, but you could have fooled me. She had really clear blue eyes behind her wire-rimmed glasses. She wore a long, colorful skirt filled with blue and yellow flowers, a bright green sweater and over that a heavy bright orange and yellow wool poncho that looked really warm. She carried a straw basket that had several bottles of pills, as well as apples, a jar of peanut butter and two books; one she picked up while we were riding and flipped to a page which she read for awhile. Several sentences were underlined, and had small pieces of paper tucked in at various spots, and then she closed it and looked like she was thinking about something. When Alice asked what she was reading, Grace showed her to cover, and I saw the title, *Antigone's Dilemma*. "I've been asked to review it for a journal, a scholarly journal I have written for. I've been thinking what to write. That's all," she said. "It's an interesting book and Sophocles,' *Antigone* is a disturbing play. I recommend you read it, one day." "Why?" Alice asked. "Because it's about moral conscience and the decisions one

must make on how to live with honor," she said. "In fact, it's not unlike the decision we may have to make regarding what's happening on my father's farm." "What do you mean?" Alice asked. "What does a Greek play have to do with what's happening with the farm and the Indians?" "Because the Greeks thought about Fate and the circumstances we face and the courage it takes to be moral and live with integrity." She looked at Alice and me. "I know what is happening at the farm and the conflict that has presented itself." "Are you saying it's Fate that this is happening?" I asked. "Yes. The Greeks wrote a lot about Fate. My son is being tested," she said. "We are often being presented with obstacles that test our determination and our will to do something. My son is facing a moral dilemma just as Antigone did when she had to defy the King's order not to bury her brother. She had to decide whether to honor a higher law or the law of the King." I wasn't quite sure what Grace was talking about, but I think I understood that his vision for his land was important to him, but so was respecting the feelings of the Indians, who believed he was on their land. It really was a moral dilemma. Finally, we were at the farm. When we got out of the van, we were surprised to see that there were several piles of firewood by the rocks where we would build a fire. One pile was kindling, and the other was a large stack of firewood that would last at least a day or two. Glenn stared at it, then looked up at woods and shook his head at how thoughtful it was that Sun Dancer had welcomed them back in such a generous way. "I wonder if that's a sign that White Elk's vision was passed by the council," Glenn said. "Never assume anything," Grace said, "but it's a wonderful gesture of friendship." Grace stood next to Glenn and gazed out in all directions as if her eyes were taking snapshots. She swallowed a deep breath and held it in, savoring the fresh air. "I love it here. I haven't been here in over fifteen years and even though it's falling apart and overgrown, this land is beautiful and brings back such memories." Alice stood on the other side of Grace and looked around. "I love it here, too." "I wish you could have known my father," Grace said. "He loved this land. He worked hard all of his life in order to be able to stay here and pass it on." She closed her eyes as if remembering something. "My mother was also special," she said. "The fact is she was the one who really kept it all together when things were tough and believe me, they were. She always found a way to save the place when the bank wanted to foreclose. Dairy farming had its ups and downs because we didn't have control of the price of milk. You either accepted the going price, or you were stuck." I remember the real estate man saying there weren't many farms left in the area. This one and the Kirkpatrick's were about the only ones though I remembered seeing one other farm with sheep and cows while we were driving here. "My father made sure it stayed organic, and he worked hard at it, even though the other farms were using artificial fertilizer and pesticides." Tammy unloaded everything from the back of the van while Glenn started a fire. My dad helped Tammy. Grace walked towards the barn and stood in front of the stone wall and looked up at the tall, dilapidated building. A moment later, she opened the gate and walked into the barn. We went to the van and got our backpacks and sleeping bags and headed to the cabin and again, we were surprised to see a pile of wood next to the stove. "Wow," Alice said. "I never expected they would do that for us." Just as I started to make a fire in the stove, Alice said, "Wait a minute." She smiled and surprised me by putting her arms around my shoulders, then leaned her head on my chest to rest. "I wish we could live here. Don't you?" We had

never hugged, and the feeling of her head on my chest and her arms pulling me to her stunned me at first, but then filled me with a warmth that thrilled me, and I put my arms around her. "Yes, I do," I managed to say as I held her, then added, "but." "But what," Alice asked. "Don't say but. I always hate what comes after but." "It's not that simple." "I know. I can wish, can't I?" "Of course. I like the idea too. So what if it's unrealistic." It felt so good holding her, and I could smell the fragrance of her hair. "I can't wait to find out what the council decided about White Elk's vision," Alice said. "We'll find out soon, I hope. But what if Grey Fox and the others vote against White Elk, what do you think Glenn will do? That's what Grace meant, it's a test." Just then, a knock on the door startled me, and Grace opened it and came in. "Sorry to intrude, but I had to see this cabin." She looked around, then walked over to the bunk, touched it and laughed. "I used to make out in here a lot when I was a teenager over fifty years ago. There was this one apprentice, George, that worked here one summer, and we'd get high in here. My father had no idea, but he was a great guy...my first love." She laughed. I was surprised that Grace said she got high and made out, but I could see her eyes twinkling as she remembered. "Was it hard growing up on the farm?" Alice asked. "I was just imagining living here before you came in." "In some ways," she said. "I was alone a lot, just me and my brother, Derrick. We home-schooled and worked on the farm, but we had great talks at dinner. My mom was a weaver, and we had sheep, so I learned to weave. My dad loved to read. He was a poet and told great stories. I still have a small book of poems he wrote, but the farm took all of his time and energy." "Did you know the people next door, the Kirkpatrick's?" I asked. "How do you know about the Kirkpatrick's?" Her eyes widened. "We found out at the realtor's office that they had the farm next door," I said. "Yes, I knew the Kirkpatrick's. I was friends with Molly Kirkpatrick, their daughter. She was a year older than me, but they were a little odd. My dad tried to be friends with Walter Kirkpatrick, but he had a drinking problem, and things weren't right with them. He was an angry man. Molly liked being with us, and so she came here a lot. I think mostly to get away from home. She never said much." "When we were on their land meeting with White Elk and the others, I didn't see a farm house," I said. "That's because it burnt to the ground, so did the barn," Grace said. "It happened about a year before my father died. No one knows what happened, but it was suspicious because all their sheep were in the pasture instead of being in the barn for the night. That's why people think the fire was set, but no one knows for sure. Anyway, they collected the insurance and then they all left. The insurance paid some of the mortgages off because they never rebuilt and just abandoned the place. Now I heard from my son it might come up for auction and the Indians could lose the land." "What would that do for Glenn's vision? They still think this farm is theirs," I said. "I don't know what's going to happen. It could get messy," she said. "I know how Glenn thinks, and I also care about what happens here. I want his idea to work. I have my reasons." She paused a minute and looked at Alice and me before speaking. "Did he mention the word, 'chaordic?'" "Yes, he did. He said it was a word you told him," I said. "It's a combination of chaos and order, isn't it?" "Exactly," she said, nodding. "It's something I'm interested in and have been for years." "It's an interesting concept," Alice said. "Yes, it's the Phoenix rising out of the ashes idea," she said, looking at us, narrowing her eyes as if thinking. "It's a Greek legend. It seems that throughout history as cultures disintegrate and fall apart, something new rises. It's like a

creative force that fascinates me." She then said something that floored me. I couldn't believe my ears when out of the blue she asked. "Have you ever heard of Atlantis, the Lost Continent?" Alice stiffened as if jolted by her question. She looked at me then turned back to Grace. "We just read these novels about Atlantis, and it's all we've been thinking about. Why did you ask that question? This is amazing. I don't believe you just asked us that question." "Interesting," she said. "I had no idea you had just read about Atlantis. Most people have never heard of it. Not much is known about it." "But why did you mention it?" I asked. "Sometimes things happen and you don't have an explanation. It seems random at the time, and then later, you get a different perspective, and you see what you weren't able to see before. Do you know what I mean?" "I'm not sure," I said. "Maybe I'm too young to have that kind of perspective, but something strange has happened that I don't understand." "What's that?" Grace asked. "I'm curious about that phenomenon of what appears as randomness but isn't." "Well, we read this Atlantis Trilogy called Children of the Dream by Arnold Greenberg and we know the books are fiction, even though they seemed so real, and we wondered how he could have written them and make them so believable." "Fascinating, I'm not familiar with those books," Grace said. "Then we met an old woman named Elizabeth at the library a few weeks ago when we heard a talk about climate change, and suddenly she said the word, 'Bendula,' and we couldn't believe it because the Bendula are in the novels, and she never read those books." Alice interrupted. "It turns out she has memories of Atlantis, and she just told us the Bendula are watching Glenn. It's actually part of the FBI and CIA, and they were watching lots of people at the Occupy Wall Street." "Bendula? Watching Glenn, really? And you said this woman has memories of Atlantis? Who are the Bendula and what do they have to do with Atlantis?" "They're who took over and created a huge weapon called The Great Crystal. They were going to use it against the Athenians, but that's when the end came. They wouldn't listen to the warnings of Amelius," Alice said. "They're like the military and big corporations today, but on Atlantis, they changed the way people used to live. They tried to get rid of the old ways." "Glenn doesn't know anything about Atlantis, but he wants to make a new way of life on this farm," I said. "But it seems he wants to live more like the Indians did a long time ago. He thinks it's new, but it's really like the old ways on Atlantis. And White Elk remembers stories about the old ways. He said he remembered stories he was told about people coming to this land from a land in the ocean a real long time ago." "Is that so?" Grace then walked over to the window and looked out. I could tell she was thinking, but after a moment, she turned then looked at us. "Several years ago, I did research about Atlantis. It's often considered something that Plato made up, but that's not true. Several other Greeks like Aristotle, Plutarch, Herodotus, Homer and others have all mentioned Atlantis. Plato learned it from a man named Solon, a Greek scholar who learned about it when he lived in Egypt, but many cultures, not just the Greeks, have legends, ancient legends that refer to Atlantis." "Really," Alice said. "Like what?" "Well, the Mayan and Aztecs have mentioned Atlantis in Chilam Balam and the Troano Manuscript, two documents found several hundred years ago. They also talk about Lemuria, another continent thought to have sunk even before Atlantis." "I never heard of that," I said. "Where was Lemuria?" "In the Pacific, possibly near where Hawaii is now or the Easter Island," Grace said. "It's a guess." "Why were you researching this?" Alice asked. "I thought you taught about Rome

and Greece." "Because of my interest in the Chaordic principle and the bad habit that civilizations have of destroying themselves. I've been fascinated by all of the flood myths. So many cultures have stories about a great flood, including the North American Indians. Also, the Mexicans and Mayans believe that the present order was preceded by other worlds that have been destroyed. The fact is our present civilization is fairly recent." "Wow, so Atlantis wasn't the first time. In the books we read, it said Atlantis sunk in one day and one night about twelve thousand years ago. Mt. Atlas erupted and caused great fires all over, then a huge tsunami that came when a huge asteroid crashed into the ocean." Grace nodded, "Yes, that's right," she said. "But another ancient book I have studied is called, Popul Vuh talks about the first home of the Guatemalan race and says that many races lived together in this happy land in great peace and spoke one language. There was even a race of people with bronze skin like the Indians and another with black skin like Africans. It goes on to tell how they were forced to migrate from their ancestral home and how some went to the East to what is now Portugal while others traveled to the West to what is now Central America and possibly to this continent." "So are you saying the Mayans might have once lived on Atlantis?" I asked. "Yes, also, a similar story appears in Mesopotamia. A flood legend that says Enlil, the most powerful of the gods decided to send a flood that no living being could survive, but he told his favorite mortal, Utnapishtim to build a boat for himself and his family and take the seed of all living creatures." "That sounds like the story about Noah," Alice said. "Yes, exactly and scientists agree that a huge flood occurred twelve to fifteen thousand years ago. My conclusion is that these old civilizations mention Atlantis in one form or another, and it is important to see if there is a pattern. So I am not surprised that White Elk knows stories of that land." While Grace spoke, I went over to the window to see what was happening at the campfire. It was getting late, and I wondered if Sun Dancer would come and let us know what is happening, or when there was going to be another council meeting. "Time and time again," Grace continued, "the pattern of civilization has been one of wearing out its welcome in nature by over exploiting, over expanding, overpopulating and often at the height of its magnificence. It happened with the Romans, the Mayans and with the Sumerians and is happening now." "And Atlantis," Alice said. "Yes, and you say this woman, Elizabeth has ancient memories of Atlantis and believes the Bendula are watching Glenn?" "Yes, she warned us that they're watching Glenn. They might even know that he's here," I said. Grace narrowed her eyes, thinking and looked at us. "I wonder if there are others besides your friend, Elizabeth with memories of Atlantis." "I don't know, but it's weird because the writer of the books said he made up those stories for his kids. He didn't really know much about Atlantis. He said it was fiction, but in the books, he says there are people alive today with memories." "Strange," Grace said. "There must be an explanation. How could he know that?" "I don't know, but first we read those books. Then we meet Elizabeth, and then you suddenly ask if we ever heard of Atlantis," Alice said, "and here we are with Glenn wanting to live a new way when actually it seems like it's a really like the old ways on Atlantis." "That's why I have been studying the Chaordic principle," Grace said. "That's what's happening here." "Glenn said the FBI has been watching people since Occupy Wall Street," I said. "And Elizabeth says the Bendula are watching him. It sounds like they're the same." "I don't know what to say. I never heard of the Bendula before," Grace said. When

she said that, I glanced out the window and saw Sun Dancer and Morning Star walking through the high grass in the pasture. Tammy was by the fire, stirring something in a pot. "Oh, look, it's Sun Dancer and Morning Star," I said. Alice came over to look. "Great! Let's go and see if any decision was made about White Elk's vision. I can't wait to find out," Alice said, opening the door and started running towards Sun Dancer and Morning Star, then suddenly stopped, turned around and waited for Grace and me. "Sorry, I can't run like you can," Grace said. We continued walking with Alice on one side of Grace and me on the other. Just as we arrived at the fire, Glenn came over to Sun Dancer, and they shook hands. My father also came over and greeted them. Tammy stood up from stirring and waved with a long wooden spoon. Morning Star smiled at Alice and me, then introduced herself to Grace. "I'm Morning Star." "Oh, it's good to meet you. I'm Grace," she said, reaching for her hand. "This is my mother," Glenn said. "She grew up on this farm but hasn't been here for over fifteen years." Morning Star nodded and smiled. "Welcome, it's special land," she said. "Yes, I know. Very special." Grace smiled and looked around. "My father loved this land." Everyone was quiet when Grace said that, then Glenn turned to Sun Dancer, "I'm anxious to know if the council has made a decision about your grandfather's vision." "No, not yet, many days have been spent in council discussing what White Elk believes must happen, but Grey Fox and a few others are opposed, so they will keep speaking." "Will they vote," I asked. "How will they decide?" "We do not vote the way your government does," Sun Dancer said. "We keep discussing until we all agree and it sometimes takes days." "That's consensus," my dad said. "The Quakers make decisions that way. They believe democracy is violent and creates winners and losers and usually struggle and bitterness." "I know about the Quakers," Sun Dancer said. "They're people of peace like my people. They made treaties with our brothers, the Lenni Lenape and were trusted." "So what is going to happen here?" Glenn asked. "I don't know, but more have come to the council to help decide," Sun Dancer said. "There are some who do not agree with White Elk that we must help each other. They know the climate is changing, that the river will rise, that the days are getting warmer, and more storms will make our life harder, but do not trust you. There is bitterness. Much damage has been done because of how your civilization lives. They want to be left alone and live the way our ancestors did. They believe your civilization is insane and does not understand the ways of Nature." "I agree with that," Glenn said. "That's why I'm here. That's why I want to live on this land in a new way. I want to change. It's the only way to survive. We need each other." Grace interrupted. "And this is why I want to help my son. I have saved money for many years, and I want to help him. Our world is facing chaos and destruction because of climate change. It has happened before, but if we can create a new order, a new way of living on this land, survival is possible. I want to call this place 'Chaordia,'" she said. "It combines the words chaos and order and that is what I hope we can create here—a new way." "Chaordia?" Sun Dancer repeated. "I've never heard that word." He looked at Glenn and Grace, obviously thinking about the word, "White Elk understands what you are saying," Sun Dancer said. "But many of our people are angry and will never trust your people again." "We reap what we sow," my dad said. "Believe me, I understand and have always known our way of living was unsustainable and doomed. I saw a documentary about the contagious disease our culture has called, 'Affluenza.' It's the desire to

be affluent, and it creates greed and envy. Our way of life is unsustainable because it's dependent on unlimited growth, but we live on a planet of limited resources." "Affluenza?" Sun Dancer repeated and chuckled. "I'm learning new words today, and yes, I know the illness. I almost caught it and wanted to become a professor in a university and worked hard. I wanted money and to be successful and affluent, then suddenly woke up and realized I was not happy, and drinking was not going to help." "I also was unhappy," Morning Star said. "My lucky day was when my brother found me in that diner and brought me to my grandparents." Tammy lifted up the lid from the pot on the fire and stirred. "You should have seen the way I was living before I woke up and said to my ex, 'I'm out of here.' I was miserable. I knew something was wrong, but it took awhile to unravel myself." Grace looked at Tammy. "At least, you woke up. Do you know how many people are asleep at the wheel and do not realize they're driving over a cliff." I listened to the conversation and thought about how dramatically they changed the directions of their lives. While they were talking, I noticed Morning Star looking at Alice then motion to her. Alice followed Morning Star several feet away from the fire. Morning Star opened the leather pouch she had been carrying, took out a necklace of colorful beads and handed it to Alice. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but Alice looked up at Morning Star, then at the beaded necklace in her hand. Her mouth was wide open in surprise. After a minute, Alice pulled it over her head and around her neck. She glanced over at me, then looked back at Morning Star. Her fingers touched the beaded necklace and looked like she was going to cry, but she choked back the tears, and a beaming smile came to her lips and eyes. It was a special moment, and I knew Alice would never be the same. Then Tammy banged the side of the pot with the spoon. "Come and get it." Glenn asked Sun Dancer if they wanted to stay for dinner. "There's plenty, please join us." "No, thank you, we must go. I just wanted to greet you," Sun Dancer said, "and let you know the council has not made a decision about White Elk's vision." "Thank you for the firewood you left for us. That was kind of you," Glenn said. While they talked, my dad bit his lower lip and looked at Sun Dancer. I knew he was thinking and wanted to say something. After a moment, he went over to Sun Dancer. Morning Star now stood next to her brother. "Excuse me, but there is something you should know," my dad said, glancing at Glenn. "Did you know that the land you're on is going to be auctioned off in a week or so because of back taxes?" "No I didn't," Sun Dancer responded, his eyes widening. "That's horrible news." "Yes, we found out about it last week when we went to the real estate office in town. The family who owns that land, the Kirkpatricks, haven't paid taxes for many years, so the town will put it up for auction." "The Kirkpatricks?" Sun Dancer repeated, "Who are they? There's no sign anyone lived on that land. There's no house." "They were our neighbors," Grace said. "Their house and barn burnt down over fifteen years ago and they left." Sun Dancer listened and looked at his sister, whose eyes were closed as if wanting to shut out the news, and then she looked at Grace, then at my dad, puzzled and breathless. "If you searched you might find the foundation of the buildings, but the woods have probably grown over everything," my dad said, pointing to the trees on the hillside and in the pasture, "just like what's happening here." "So they will find out we're here," Sun Dancer said. "If the land gets sold for back taxes we will be discovered." "Yes, you will be discovered and forced to leave, and if you don't, you could be arrested for trespassing." "But this is

not right," Sun Dancer said, glancing at Morning Star's stunned face. "It's our land. It has always been and always will be. It has been returned to us. This cannot happen." "I know what you believe," my dad said. "But we're now experiencing the clashing of cultures. We live in a world of commerce, and you now live in a world of nature." "Believe me, I know. I have tried leaving that world behind," Sun Dancer said, "and now I'm finding it's a world that is hard to escape." "Your grandfather may not know about the auction and the taxes, but he knows what is happening to the world and that there is no escape. That is why he had that vision," my dad said. Sun Dancer nodded he understood White Elk's vision and agreed. He didn't speak but sighed deeply. "Thank you for telling us," Morning Star said. "It was hard for me to tell you what is happening, but you had to know," he said. We were all silent, realizing there wasn't anything else to say. Finally, Grace stepped towards Sun Dancer and Morning Star. "I can see you love the land you're living on, just as I love this land where I grew up." "Thank you for saying that. I understand," Morning Star said. "I must tell White Elk," Sun Dancer said. "I hope this doesn't upset him, but I know it will." After a few moments, Morning Star turned to Alice. There was now a bond between them, one that I sensed began when they first met. Morning Star also looked at my dad, their eyes lingering. I wasn't sure what my dad was thinking or feeling, but I sensed an attraction that surprised me. When they left, I could tell they were upset by how quickly they walked through the pasture and then disappeared into the woods on the hill. It was sunset, and the shadows moved slowly across the farm. Tammy's vegetable stew was delicious, spicy, the way I like it. We ate quietly. Alice's arm touched mine, and I liked how close we felt while we ate. Grace sat next to Glenn with Tammy sat next to her. "What do you think their reaction will be to the auction?" Tammy asked, breaking the silence. "I don't know," my dad said, "but again their existence is being threatened. They have lived on that land for eight years or so. They believe it's their home from long ago." "I know," Glenn said, "Just like I believe this is my land." I ate quietly, staring into the fire and wondered what White Elk and the others would think of the coming auction and the danger their existence was in. I looked over at Grace and thought about what she had said about wanting to name this land Chaordia and how aware she was of the many civilizations that have come and gone. I looked at Alice and the colorful beaded necklace she was wearing and could tell by the way she stared out into space, she was thinking about the situation. Despite her telling Glenn not to worry, I knew she was worried. My dad ate slowly and stared into the fire. A sadness rose in me and tears ached in my throat as I fought to hold them back. Something beautiful was in reach but was fading away like the sparks from the fire floating into the dark sky.