

short story
CHIARA BARZINI

OVERLAPPING VOLCANOES

I STOOD ATOP VOLCANOES. THEY WERE PERFECT—VOLCANO ONE AND VOLCANO TWO—TWO RUPTURES IN EARTH'S CRUST. DRY, FIRM, AND INACTIVE. NO LAVA, JUST CRATERS, AND NO POSSIBILITY TO MOVE BEYOND THEM. THEY WERE OLD CRATERS, FROM PREHISTORIC TIMES, A TIME WHEN THEY LAST ROARED. SOME SAID THEY FORMED WHEN A GIANT METEORITE CRASHED TO EARTH 300,000 YEARS AGO, BUT I KNOW BETTER.

WALKING TO THE BORDER OF THE FIRST CRATER I THOUGHT I MIGHT REACH GREEN SPACES, VAST LANDS AND PASTURES. BUT EACH TIME I REACHED THE EDGE, I REBOUNDED RIGHTBACK INTO CRATER TWO. THE VOLCANOES OVERLAPPED ALMOST PERFECTLY WITH ONE ANOTHER. ONLY A SMALL STRIP OF LAND REVEALED THEY WERE IN FACT TWO CRATERS SITTING ALMOST PRECISELY ON TOP OF ONE ANOTHER. THERE WERE MEADOWS, PINE TREES, NESTS, THORNS AND WILD RABBITS RUNNING THROUGH THE SHRUBS. EVERYTHING BEYOND THE CRATER, AS FAR AS I COULD SEE, IN VIVID COLOR, OCCURRED ON JUST ONE, MAGNIFICENT PLANE. NO OVERLAPS. THINGS WERE ONE OF A KIND OUT THERE. EACH TREE DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER, EACH RABBIT SCATTERING IN THE FIELD. THAT'S WHERE I WAS TRYING TO GO WHERE THINGS WERE NOT LIKE A TRACED PENCIL DRAWING. I DASHED TOWARDS THE VIVID GREEN, BUT WHEN I REACHED THE PASTURES, I BOUNCED BACK INSIDE. I PACED ABOVE THE CRATER.

A MAN ON THE CRATER'S EDGE HAD COME TO FILL A BUCKET OF DRINKING WATER FOR A BULL. I REACHED OUT TO HIM .

HE GRASPED MY FINGERS; WE RAN HAND IN HAND AROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE CRATER. SIDE BY SIDE, HE WAS ON THE OUTSIDE, I WAS ON THE INSIDE, BUT WHEN IT CAME TIME TO LEAP TOWARDS HIM, I FELL BACK INSIDE.

THE MAN SMILED BACK AT ME AND SAID "I'LL COME BACK FOR YOU." HE SAID HE WOULD BRING BACK A PLANK I COULD USE TO ESCAPE.

I SAT WAITING ON THE STRIP OF LAND WHERE THE CRATERS OVERLAPPED. THERE WERE SEAGULLS IN THE DISTANCE. THE SUN WAS SUMMERY. THE BULL WAS CALM. MY THROAT WAS PARCHED BUT I DIDN'T BOTHER TO FIND WATER BECAUSE I KNEW HE WOULD BE BACK WITH BUCKETS OF WATER AND JUICES. I SLEPT. I ATE WEEDS, THEN CARVED MY NAME ON THE HIGHEST STONE OF THE VOLCANO. I MADE A BALL FROM MANURE AND PLAYED WITH IT, IMAGINING THE CRATER AS A LARGE SOCCER FIELD. I WALKED TO THE TIP OF THE BASIN, SLIPPED OVER INTO CRATER NUMBER TWO, AND LAUGHED. I RAN FROM ONE BORDER TO THE NEXT, LAUGHING AND PANTING. I DIDN'T MIND SWEATING AND FEELING THE PAIN IN MY WAIST. I DIDN'T MIND THAT ONE LEG FELT SHORTER THAN THE OTHER, OR THAT A BARKING DOG SUDDENLY APPEARED ON THE MOUNTAINTOP AND CHASED ME AROUND. I WASN'T SCARED OF THE MAGMA CHAMBER. IT COULD ERUPT AND I WOULD BE HAPPY. I WAITED A NIGHT AND A DAY FOR THE MAN. HE CALLED ME FROM THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN.

"HERE I AM. HERE I AM. I AM WORKING ON IT!"

HIS VOICE WAS LIKE A PARTY. HE NEVER CAME.