

Izgubljeni svet

ROMAN

Včasih se pač dogodi, mladi prijatelj, da se mora človek postaviti v bran za postavne in človeške pravice, če le hoče ostati pošten. Baš iz tega vzroka sem tam prišel malo vojno. Sam sem jo napovedal, sam vodil in sam končal. Vsaka izmed teh zarez na kopitu pomeni enega trinoga za sužnje, pa lepa vrsta jih je, kaj ne? Ta, največja, pa velja Pedru Lopezu, njih kralju, ki sem ga ustrelil ob nekem pritoku reke Putomaya. Poglejte, tukaj pa imam neko stvarco, ki bo prav za vas." Vzel je iz omare prekrasno temno-kostanjevo, s srebrom okovano puško. "Kopito je lepo podloženo z gumijem, iskalo je prav ostro, zatvor šteje petero nabojev." Izročil mi jo je in zaklenil vrača hrastove omare. "Pare," je nadaljeval med tem, ko je zopet sedel, "kaj vam je znano o tem profesorju Challengerju?"

"Do danes ga nisem nikoli videl."

"No, jaz tudi ne. Ali ni smešno, da hočeva zdaj odjadrtati oba z zapечатimi povelji človeka ki ga sploh ne pozna. Kakor ošaben, star tič je. Tudi njegovi učeni bratci niso menda zanj kaj navdušeni. Kako ste se vi prav za prav pričeli zanimati za to zadevo?"

Povedal sem mu na kratko o dopoldanskih dogodivljajih in me je pazno poslušal. Dobil je potem zemljevid Južne Amerike in ga razgrnil na mizi.

"Prepričan sem, da je sleher na beseda, katero vam je povedal, sama živa resnica," je pripomnil resno, "in bodite prepričani, da imam svoje vzočke, vam tako govoriti. Južna Amerika je moja priljubljena dežela. Sploh sem menenja, da je to najbolj bogat, veličasten in čudežen del našega planeta, če ga le prepotujete v pravilni smeri od Darienskega zaliva do Ognjene dežele. Ljudje še premalo poznajo to pokrajino in si sploh ne morejo misliti, kaj vse se tam lahko naredi. Bil sem tam povsod, prepotoval deželo od enega konca do drugega in ostal zaporedoma dve suhi poletni dobi baš v okolici, kjer sem se vojskoval, kakor sem vam pravil, so prodajalci sužnjev."

Baš tam sem čul neke povsem slične stvari — indijanske prav-

iljice in druga izročila, ki morajo vsebovati, kakor se mi zdi, nekaj resnice. Čim bolj spoznavate to pokrajino, mladi prijatelj, tem bolj morate biti prepričani, da je tam vse, prav vse mogoče. Ozke vodne poti so tam edina prometna sredstva, razen, njih pa je vse zavito v temo. Poglejte tamkaj, na primer, Matto Grosso," naredil je s cigaro krog nad zemljevidom, "ali pa tu, gorenijski kot, kjer se stikajo meje treh držav: tu se ne bi ničemu začudil. Kakor je pravil naš prijatelj nocoj, imamo tukaj 50,000 milj dolgo vodno pot, ki peče skozi prazgod, in ta je velik kakor približno vsa Evropa. Delila naju bo lahko razdalja, ki odgovarja oni med Skotsko in Carigradom, pa vendar ostaneva oba še vedno v enem in istem orjaškem brazilijanskem prazgodu. Tu in tam je zabeležil kak potovalec svojo pot ali samo blodnjo skozi goščavo. Razen tega se dviga in zopet pada vodna gladina, pa znašajo razlike dobrih 40 čevljev. Radi tega pokriva polovico dežele nedostopno močvirje. Zakaj ne bi bilo v taki deželi kaj čudežnega in novega? In zakaj ne bi bili baš mi oni, katerim je sojeno te čudeže odkriti? Razen tega," je dodal, in njegov izraziti suhi obraz je začel od veselja, "bo to nevarno potovanje tudi za sportnika pomembno. Jaz sem namreč kakor stara žoga pri igri v golf: davno se mi je že olupila vsa bela barva. Življenje me lahko premetava sem pa tja, ne da bi zapustilo kake vidne sledove. Toda sportne nevarnosti, mladi prijatelj, pomenijo zmisel našega življenja. Samo radi njih se izplača bivati na svetu. Vsi smo se preveč omehkužili, postal razvajeni in preleni. Dajte mi samo veliko, razsežno deželo, puško v pest in kako nalogo, za rešitev katere bi se bili vredno potruditi. Poskušal sem se v vojni, pri konjski dirkah in letalcih. A lov na pošasti, ki so slične prividom umobolnega, bo povsem nov, napet doživljanje." Ves srecen se je nasmehnil tem izgledom.

Predolgo sem se morebiti zadržal pri novem znanju, a moral mi je postati tovariš za dolgo časa, in zato sem ga poizkusil popisati, kakor ga vidim

videl, nas kati njegovo značilno osebnost ter gotove male posebnosti njegovega jezika in mišljenja. Slednjič sem ga vendar moral zapustiti, ker treba mi je bilo še spisati poročilo o predavanju. Zapustil sem ga med tem, ko je sedel v rdečkasti električni luči, mazal z oljem zatvor svoje priljubljene puške in se tiho smehljaj, zatopljen v sanje o bodočih potolovčinah. Bil sem globoko prepričan, da ne bi našel izhaska v vsej Angliji preudarnejše glave in pogumnejšega duha, da bi z menoj delil nevarnosti, če bi nam bilo sojeno, srečati jih

Bil sem dokaj utrujen po po vseh čudežnih današnjih dogodkih, a vendar sem obsedel do pozne noči pri McArdleu, našem glavnem uredniku, in mu tolmačil, kako daleč je dospela vsa stvar. Zdelo se mu je toliko važna, da je o njej zjutraj poročal siru Georgeru Beaumontu, ranatelju. Sklenili smo, da bom jaz spotoma redno poročal o vseh svojih doživljajih v izčrpnih pismih na McArdleu naslov, in da se bodo ta poročila takoj po prejemu objavljala v "Gazeti" ali bodo izšla pozneje, kakor bo pač hotel profesor Challenger, kajti nismo vedeli, pod katerim pogojem nam izroči svoje podatke, ki so nas morali voditi v nepoznano deželo. Na naše brzojavno vprašanje nismo prejeli nobenega točnega odgovora, temveč samo besen napad na tisk v plošnem. Samo na koncu je bilo pristavljeno, da nam profesor sporoči, ko mu bomo namanili, s katero ladjo odrinemo, pri odhodu one podatke, ki se mu zdijo za to primerni. Na ponovno vprašanje sploh nismo prejeli nobenega odgovora, samo njegove žena nam je s moledujočim glasom naznaila, da je njen soorog že vesiljvi, pa izrazila upanje, da ne bomo še poslalsali njegovega stanja. Tretji poizkus, ki smo ga tvegali dokaj pozneje, se je zaključil z grozovitim ropotom, in potem nam je sporočil telefonsko ravnateljstvo, da mora biti telefon pri profesorju Challengerju pokvarjen. Opuštiti smo na to nadaljnje poizkušnje, doseči z njim zvezo.

Zdaj pa, o, moji potrpežljivi prijatelji, sem primoran z vami prekiniti vse neposredne stike. Od sedaj (če je sploh sojeno, la vam pride nadaljevanje moje povesti kdaj pred oči), se to ahko zgodi samo po "Dnevnem Listu", katerega poročevalec sem jaz izročam uredništvu poročilo o dogodkih, ki tvorijo uvod k enemu izmed najpomembnejših znanstvenih potovanj v svetovni zgodovini. Na ta način se ohrani — če mi ne bo sojeno povrniti se na Angliško — vsaj spomin na okoliščine, pod katerimi je nastal ta načrt. Pišem te zadnje vrstice v salonu parnika "Franciska", da jih bo izročil pilot (Pilot je vodnik, ki ladjo peče v pristanišče ali ven, v odprto morje.) Mr. McArdleu. Dovolite, da vam predočim, preden zaprem svojo beležnico, še zadnjo sliko, zadnje vtise, ki jih odnašam iz stare domovine. Imamo vlažno, megleno jutro, kakor je po navadi vedno pozne pomladi; droben, mrzel dežek prši. Tri, v nepremočljive, od vlage lesketajoče plašče zavite postave korakajo po nabrežju in stopijo po mostiču na velik oceanski parnik, s katerega vihra plava zastava, odhodno znamenje. Pred njimi poriva nosač enokolnico, ki je do vrha natovorjena s kovčgi, culami in v prevleke zaviti puškami. Profesor Summerlee, suh, poltrt, star gospod, dviga počasi noge in koraka s povešeno glavo, kot da bi se sam sebi globoko smilil. Lord John Roxton se bliža s trdnimi koraki, njegov suhi, živahni obraz se kar sveti med lovskim klobukom in okoli vratu ovito ruto. Jaz sem prav vesel, da sem že prestal razburiljive potne priprave in te-

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In addition to his outstanding record as a State Representative, Mr. Woodling is a scientist and mathematician in his own right with over 60 inventions to his credit, a lecturer and trustee at Fenn College, the author of several books and articles, an active worker in young people's organizations and on frequent Sundays a guest minister in Cleveland Churches. A home owner, Mr. Woodling is married and has two sons attending public schools.

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