

Bāh Bēhl

a story by

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(English translation by Wendy Piemonte)

God was getting terribly bored. His ever-present eternity, which was one of his exclusive attributes, had become a weakness. He was unable to feel a strong yearning for the future or a tormenting nostalgia of the past. Yet more than anything else time stood still. His mind went back to the exhilarating experience he had, he couldn't remember when, in creating the universe. It had been a busy and exhausting six-day job, followed by a well-deserved 24-hour rest. He decided to relax by taking a look at the crystal clear demonstration of his incommensurable omnipotence. Actually, on that occasion he had even managed to generate his opposite. As a motionless being, he had produced movement. He, who was always present, had invented the past and future. Ultra pure light had been set against the deepest darkness. As the absolute infinite, he had built limited space.

He imperceptibly pulled aside the veil that separated him from his creation. The cosmos! What a marvel his hands had created! Galaxies, nebulae, supernovas, dwarf stars, black holes, planets, comets, asteroids. An infinity of shapes, all of them different, had been generated by the truly brilliant

idea that had struck him at the start, the curved line, the shape of the celestial bodies and of their relentless, almost enthusiastic movement.

Then, he adjusted his eyesight a moment, to focus on some other very interesting details. Zooming further away, he finally framed an extraordinarily marvellous object, the jewel of all jewels produced by his fervid mind, the Earth. The colours, especially the blue of the sky and sea, the green of the fields and forests, the red of certain sunsets, left him breathless. He almost felt a sense of pride. And what about the animals? The variegated myriad of graceful butterflies, the immeasurable number of tones and modulations coming from the voices and tunes of the animated world. He was struck by a painful sense of envy. His perpetual immobility would have never let him experience the graceful flight of birds, the elegant and soaring jump of antelopes, the swift-moving run of cheetahs, the measured stride of elephants, the lightning darting of fish in the depths of the waters, the inebriating bounces of monkeys from branch to branch.

Suddenly, he recollected that he had modelled a thinking biped from the mud, with a soul that he had taken from nothing. At the beginning, he thought he had created it in his likeness. He soon changed his mind. Almost immediately, this being that he had called *man* had tried to depose him. He had been forced to drive him out of the place of delights created especially for him, packing him off to the Earth for some penitence by the sweat of his brow. Although he had taken action on other occasions, he always ended up admitting defeat. Neither a Universal Deluge nor the destruction of the Tower of Babel had been sufficient to make that stubborn worm come to his senses. Since a tougher approach had given no results, he had asked his

beloved Son to go personally among the people to kindly convince them. Instead of listening to him, all the earthlings managed to do was to crucify him.

He was overtaken by the desire to find out how far humanity had come. Everything flashed before his eyes. The situation wasn't certainly a rosy one. The world was plagued with wars, murders, suicides, tortures, kidnappings, slavery, lies, abuse of power, all kinds of injustice and so on. Of course, some foolish person was endeavouring to bring peace, ease the pain, assist the needy, eradicate poverty. It always ended up with that person being made a saint, just to get rid of a bothersome nuisance, and that was it. The heroes were the others. There was nothing to be happy about.

He suddenly saw something that he would have rather not seen. Man had once again decided to take possession of the Universal Word. It was just another attempted coup. The animal with a brain was erecting an enormous pyramid with very high steps, using the diabolic straight-line geometry. The height of the building was already stratospheric. Its highest point was about to touch the invisible frontier separating the finite from the infinite. It wouldn't be long before it crossed it.

The first very high step was the work of the Romans. In their sprawling dominion, Latin was used to communicate. Everybody spoke and wrote following the example set by Horace, Cicerone, Catullus, Virgil and other famous writers. This had been a serious attack, which God had fended off by calling towards the Roman Empire entire populations of bipeds from the north and east with slightly more hair but far lower intellectual capabilities. The consequences could be seen. On the rubble produced by the barbaric invasions, cancerous offshoots of Latin were being

spoken: Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin. By this time, people were finding it difficult to understand each other. Along the sides, furthermore, some were already hard at work building new steps: English, German, Slavic, Arabic, Chinese. Incommunicability was at the doorstep.

The second important step had been built by the Spaniards. They had generalised the use of Castilian, eliminating, without too much fuss, the ancient cultures from across the ocean. The ruins of the corresponding pyramids were clearly visible.

The third step was an imaginative invention by the French. They had tried to disseminate their language through diplomatic channels. Their attempt, despite the noteworthy literary production, fell through without any devastating consequences.

Then a guy with black hair and moustache appeared. He wanted them all to be beardless, tall, blond, have blue eyes, Pan-Germanic, at all costs. On the eastern side, a guy with a bigger moustache and his successors had given him a helping hand. They, in turn, supported the compulsory use of a system that used Cyrillic, as the vehicle for the political ideology they wished to impose on the entire world. This fourth *double face* step was dominated by red and black, the tragic consequences of a catastrophic world war, genocide, political cleansing, *lagers* and *gulags* could be seen everywhere.

At every attempt, God had intervened in a variety of ways to stop the escalade, inflicting relentless, widespread natural catastrophes and recurrent plagues. Despite this, some people had started building the fifth step. Initially, as a result of a widespread colonisation process, later through economic and commercial globalisation, English evolved

into Anglo-American, thus becoming a means of communication for almost all the inhabitants of the Earth. It seemed that the people who had planned to get to the top, had already made it. The Islamic populations were the last to give in, bitterly renouncing their identity. At that stage, nobody had been thinking about the Jews for some time. The others had given up much earlier, in the wake of, and following the example of the Japanese who had chosen the idiom of the wicked Albion to export their products. In many states whose rulers had proclaimed themselves the upholders of freedom, English had been imposed in a rather incoherent manner. The Verb was about to be taken away from its legitimate holder, and was set to become dumb. Yet, the genes of human history had memorised the ancient punishment that quickly came to life again. Afro-American, Chinese-American, Hispano-American, Italo-American had emerged, as many slangs as there were age brackets, social classes, ethnic groups, religious sects, trade unions, political parties, immigrants, recreational and sports centres, voluntary associations and criminal organizations. Some spoke East Coast American and, of course, on the other side, others spoke West Coast American. The English spoken by Italians was understood only by Italians. The populations of the third, fourth, fifth world and the minority ethnic groups had raised their heads again. Also as a result of new technologies, they had returned to their mother tongues. Italy, to outdo the others, had even decided to reinstate the dialects that were as many as there were bell towers, that is, a great many, perhaps too many.

Bāh Bēhl appeared at this point. His ancestors were the famous architects of the Tower and, subsequently, of the first five steps of the pyramid. The project for the last floor

that he submitted to the authorities had been unanimously approved. The project was dedicated to the computer technology divinity WWW.E-MAIL, whose followers expressed themselves through ideograms. God, who had always been shown as a frowning old man in folk iconography, could now consider himself done for. He had just enough time left to leave a will, say his last prayers and recommend his soul ... to himself, of course. Yet some problems cropped up almost immediately. How should the stylised heads be shown, smiling or sad? With western or almond-shaped eyes? With a snub, Parisian, Greek or Maya nose? And what about the ideogram showing a closed hand with the index and small finger sticking out, meaning “that’s cool”, in young people’s language, or “you bastard”, in the colourful gestures used by the people of southern Italy?

“I’m not enjoying myself anymore”, said the Universal Word softly, with a faint sigh. The infinitesimal breath was more than enough. The pyramid crumbled down disastrously, bringing down all that multitude of arrogant beings. Once again, God had banished man for good to the place where he got him. Into nowhere.