

Breach

Ahmed pressed his face to the translucent glass window on the metal door, looking and trying to listen intently as the scientists—at least, that's what he thought they looked like judging by their lab coats, goggles, and overall educated appearance—discussed unintelligible things inside the lab cum room he was forbidden from entering.

Of course, he was unable to decipher what they were saying. Forgetting the fact that the giant lab was always locked and sound-proof, the scientists always spoke in Urdu or English with one another—both languages the uneducated, Baloch boy, Ahmed, was unable to understand. Moreover, none of what they discussed was any of his business. He had simply been hired into this small, secluded facility on the outskirts of Baluchistan's Karan Desert as one of its cleaners. At an imposing six feet, Ahmad was a precocious teenager. Hardened by poverty and the need to survive in a cruel, harsh world, he had learnt to take care of himself. He was quick on his feet, always on the lookout for opportunities, knowing he had to make the most of whatever scraps life held out to him. To his young, curious mind, his workplace was a mystery and he was intrigued by the secrecy surrounding it. He wanted to know what happened behind those closed doors.

It was this inquisitiveness that compelled him to try and peek inside the room which was strictly off limits to everyone. No one was allowed to enter the room, not even to clean it—the sweepers were only supposed to clean the outside halls and nothing else. They were instructed to arrive at 11 A.M sharp (the scientists would be locked in the lab room by then, working away) and leave at 7 P.M sharp (the scientists would still be inside, hidden from view). Sometimes Ahmed wondered if they actually lived inside the facility. From the looks of it, most of the ten scientists were discussing something in a huddle, while two of them were checking some materials on a nearby table. There were lots of other items scattered around the room, but Ahmed couldn't see clearly as the window on the door was not only small but also extremely blurred and frosted. However, he was taking in whatever he could as the window was always closed from the inside on all other occasions, and this was the only opportunity he was getting to see even the slightest of movements inside the lab room.

Something was moving in the large glass container that stood several feet away from the door. It was too blurry for Ahmed to see clearly, but he could tell that what was in there was not human—most certainly an animal, with a darkened, moving shadow thrown against the glass container. The scientists were carefully inspecting it from the safety of the outside. Ahmed felt something threatening in the air. He may have been ignorant, but something told him that this curiosity over what was happening inside that locked lab room should keep him wary at all times.

Suddenly, Ahmed snapped out of his thoughts when he noticed one of the scientists—engaged in conversation with his colleague on the right—backing toward the door. Breathing heavily, Ahmed hopped to the side and concealed himself behind the concrete wall, pretending to be in the not so suspicious act of staring at the narrow, dimly lit hallway's low ceiling. A minute or two passed. Slowly, Ahmed crept back to the door and tried to peek inside the window. Nothing—the metal slide had been locked back in place. They had noticed their mistake. Ahmed sighed—he grabbed his mop and bucket, and went back to work.

Hassan came walking by. He was a close friend of Ahmed's; of course, many years his senior, but with a keen eye for things and a wisdom that comes with age and experience. Hassan worked as one of the two security guards at the facility's main entrance, which Ahmed never used—the cleaners always used the side entrance, as they were forbidden to go near the main one. Hassan usually joined Ahmed for a quick cup of tea during his break, updating him with all the latest information.

"Ahmed! How's it going, son? Have I got some news for you!" Hassan exclaimed in Balochi.

Ahmed leaned his mop and bucket against the wall. *"Salaam, Hassan Chacha! What happened? Did the foreigners come back again?"*

"You're right they did; in that giant of a helicopter, no less! I'm telling you, something strange is happening here...they were holding these briefcase boxes or something, and meeting one of our scientists, Javed, again. He took them inside one of the large conference rooms, but that's all I was able to see. I'm not even permitted to go near that room....the Head said he'd fire me if I did!"

"Hassan Chacha.....I wish I understood everything happening around here...."

"Believe me, I wish I did too, son. I've been here two years, and only two years ago did I see these people entering the facility...now it's happening all over again. You've been here only....three months, right? We're both bound to learn a lot more. Lots more, indeed..."

Time passed on. The wall clock in the darkened hall had struck six. Ahmed was tired after a long day's work throughout the facility. To make matters worse, it was the middle of July; and the Karan Desert is not particularly pleasant during the summer. He decided to return to the hall for a brief rest after cleaning out the washroom stalls. He sat down on one of the steel seats in the hallway, moving aside some of his unkempt black hair that dangled annoyingly in front of his unwashed face. As for the sweat on his forehead, he wiped it off on his dirty shalwar kameez. Ahmed continued staring at the walls of the narrow hallway, its white painted smell filling his nostrils.

Then he heard it. **BANG**. Ahmed froze, dead in his tracks. He immediately looked in the direction of where the sound originated. The door. The lab room door. A blood-curdling scream rang through the hall, followed by an inhuman roar that only sounded of pure rage. Terrified, Ahmed jumped off the chair and ran in the opposite direction. He didn't care about the scientists, or Hassan, or the foreigners in the conference room. The only instinct in him was to get himself to safety. He rushed to the swinging doors as fast as he could, burst through, and quickly took the immediate left turn to the washroom facilities. Throwing himself inside, he shut the door and looked around wildly for an object to barricade it with, deciding that a nearby cleaning trolley would have to make do.

Ahmed's heart was beating out of his chest. What was happening? What was that loud noise, that screaming.....that roar? It took less than a minute for Ahmed to deduce that what caused the roar was the animal that was inside the lab room's glass container. He was scared to his core—what was that animal? He had never before heard such a monstrous sound in his life. The only deadly animals that he had ever encountered were angry bees or rabid dogs, but the shadow he had seen in that container....it had to be at least a few feet taller than him, and it seemed like a giant lizard.

His frantic thoughts were cut off by the sound of scraping feet and the unmistakable sound of a growl in the hallway. Ahmed stood glued to his spot, before slowly crawling over to the door—it was dangerous, it was stupid, but....he just HAD to see what was out there. He had to. Very carefully, Ahmed looked out of the glass pane on the door.

And there it was. Outside stood a large, scaly creature of about 12 feet with hard, darkened skin, sharp canine teeth, and quills running down its back. It stood on two hind legs, with each foot finishing in three sharp claws, one of which was larger than the others. The long and scaly arms (with three claws on each hand) were hanging downwards, and the creature's reptilian eyes and bloodied snout seemed to be darting in perfect coordination with the scaly neck. Its long tail, pointed at the end, helped keep it upright. The creature was moving toward the closed door, its low growls becoming much clearer.

In shock, Ahmed slid back to one of the open washroom stalls and locked himself inside. Faint snarling came from the outside, and Ahmed began to pray to God that the trolley was strong enough to keep the creature from breaking inside. There was a long pause, with the faint snarls only there to hold the suspense. Gradually, Ahmed heard the footsteps recede away, and the low snarls stopped. He cautiously opened the stall door, and tiptoed over to see from the entrance door's window. The creature was continuing on its path. Ahmed was safe.

Now all he had to do was escape this facility. He did not want to stay stuck inside with that thing on the loose, but his escape route was blocked due to the creature being on the left side of the facility, where all the emergency exits and entrances were. Therefore, he had no option but to go back to the lab room from where it all started. Ahmed removed the trolley away from the door; he looked out to see that the creature had already disappeared down towards the kitchen. Without thinking twice, Ahmed opened the door and dashed to the familiar hallway--immediately turning a left corner to discover the now opened—and broken—lab room door. There lay a grisly sight for him.

One of the scientists lay sprawled on the ground in front of him. Stone cold dead. His back had been ripped apart, showing all red and nothing else, with a glazed expression on his face that would give Ahmed nightmares for the rest of his life. Ahmed covered his face to stop himself from vomiting. He deduced that the scientist had tried to escape and nearly succeeded by opening the door, which caused the loud bang that Ahmed heard earlier, but by then the creature had attacked. He turned his eyes away and entered the room; but the sight inside wasn't any prettier. Across the once dark blue walls of the room only lay streaks of red. Dead bodies lay strewn on the ground. Items were thrown everywhere like a child's bedroom. The glass container had been smashed, with bits of glass spread all over the floor. It was absolute carnage.

Ahmed looked at some of the items lying around. There were small glass tubes with colored liquids in them. Documents and drawings of the creature were laying on the desk and the floor. Buckets of what appeared to be raw meat lay in the corner. Something secret was happening here; and whatever it was, it had gotten out of control.

In an instant flashback, Ahmed recalled a scene from a movie he had caught a glimpse of while working at a cinema in Quetta. It was about some scientists who had created a big monster which had broken loose and was wreaking havoc upon the world.... Ahmad was terrified. Could it be that that was actually happening in real life?

Ahmed shook his head and tried to focus. He frantically looked around the room for any type of weapon, among the broken machinery and bodies of the scientists, but he only found a small pistol that just so happened to be empty. Ahmed swore in anger; when all of a sudden, as luck would have it, he noticed a long, grey, narrow vent on the ceiling. And there was an opening situated right on it too! Ahmed took no time at all in finding a large metal ladder that had been knocked to the floor, and placed it right below the opening in the vent. Climbing up, he no longer had any sense of fear or horror; now there was only hope, hope that he would get away from the monster. But in his hurry, Ahmed forgot to remain cautious; as soon as he entered the narrow vent, squeezing his body into it, his left foot accidentally hit the ladder. It crashed to the floor with a loud **CLANG**.

There was no turning back now. Ahmed knew that the creature would have heard the sound, and he had to escape. The instinct of survival kicked in again. He squeezed through and decided to take a left turn, to where the main portion of the facility was. He knew that by continuing left and then, at some point or another, taking a right would lead him to the main entrance from which he could escape. Ahmed crawled through the vent as fast as he could, but this caused a tremendous amount of clanging on the metal surfaces. His heartbeat stopped when he heard a roar from underneath, vibrating the vent. It was there. It was following him. Terrified, Ahmed

quicken his pace; as he passed over a metal net that covered the underneath of the vent, a pair of cold eyes looked back at him, and another blood-curdling roar escaped its mouth. Adrenaline was rushing through Ahmed's veins. He took the immediate right turn in the vent, hoping it would take him to the outside of the facility.

As sheer luck would have it, he broke loose the metal opening in front of him to discover that it was right above the main entrance. A gust of hot wind blew in Ahmed's face. He had never been here before, but in front of him was a long view of flat, rocky sand, a few shrubs, and nothing else. The blackened night sky was littered with twinkling stars. Uttering a prayer, Ahmed squeezed out and fell about seven feet onto the ground below. Hassan was nowhere to be seen, but the roars were getting closer and closer.

In his haste to pick himself off the ground, Ahmed failed to notice the distant yet distinct sound of a propeller above him whipping the air, its looming shadow being cast onto the ground. Ahmed grabbed his arm, injured from the impact of the fall, when suddenly an ear-popping CRASH came from the entrance. The creature had broken through the glass doors. It let out one final roar and ran towards Ahmed at top speed, fangs bearing and claws showing. Ahmed screamed—then the firing began.

The lizard let out a wailing shriek and fell to the ground, sprawling in the dust. Terrified and bewildered, Ahmed did not stand by to see what had happened, instead bolting off into the night. He managed to look up during his run, and he saw a black helicopter raining large bullets upon the animal, which now lay motionless on the ground. Unable to run any longer, Ahmed took one last gasp before dropping down. As he fell, he saw the helicopter land on the ground near the site of the beast. It was the last thing he saw before dehydration, exhaustion, and horror overtook him; and he saw no more.

"So let's have a quick recap over what you witnessed." The officer told Ahmed. He was sitting tensely in the darkened interrogation room. He was worn out and traumatized, yet still managed to have a wary look on his face. Behind the officer stood a foreign official, dressed in a black suit. *"You saw the....well....lizard escape from its containment and roam the facility. You saw documents, items and the bodies of the scientists in the lab room. You saw the helicopter land near the ground after shooting down the lizard, before you passed out from shock...this same lizard chased you in the vents of the facility before you escaped, correct?"*

"Yes."

"Did you read any of the documents?"

Ahmad shook his head. "I don't know how to read", he said looking down.

The officer looked at the foreigner and they both smiled faintly. They then exchanged a few words in English and the officer turned back to Ahmed. *"Alright then, son, thank you for your time in telling us this information. I can promise you that our personnel will get you back to your house in Quetta safely. I can also assure you that the situation of the security guards and the officials in the facility is taken care--..."*

"Sir.....I have a question."

"Yes?"

"What was that thing?"

The officer smiled. *"I don't know son. Perhaps it was just a wild animal from the desert. Maybe it was just some monster that your mind made up, just a figment of your imagination. To be quite fair, I doubt anyone would, well, believe you if you did tell them. It would sound like insanity if you spewed out a story like this, don't you agree? Especially since you are young. At the end of the day.....you survived. You survived, and that's all that matters. Ehsan, take him away."*

A big, burly man approached from behind. He grabbed Ahmed by the shoulder, leading him away to a nearby jeep, as the official and the officer looked on with knowing glances.

The breach had been fully sealed—for now.