

History of Mandarin Fum-Hoam

By Thomas Simon Gueulette

I cannot, madam, call to mind the first adventures of my life, without some horror; since the very moment I left the celestial sphere to come down upon the earth, I animated an unhappy infant who became afterwards a monster of cruelty. It was in Persia where I was born, under the name of Piurash. My father, who was but a poor shepherd, left me a very small estate; but I managed my intrigues so as to get into the confidence of Siamak, one of your Pischdadan kings, and obtained the first honours and dignities of the kingdom. The horrible luxury wherein I lived might have made me, one would think, look upon honours with some contempt; but the thirst of dominion was so predominant in my soul that I made a scruple of nothing to attain it. As I was Siamak's chief favourite, I had every moment free access to him; but being weary of living sneakingly under him, I cruelly murdered him, and easily seized upon his throne; after which I committed so many crimes that the world looked upon me as an abominable tyrant. There was no violence, no injustice that I stuck at; no new punishment that I did not invent to destroy those who pretended to oppose my will; but Heaven, who was weary, no doubt, to see me commit so many crimes, was willing to humble me with a cruel distemper. The extreme disorder wherein I had passed my youthful days occasioned a putrefaction in my bowels; insomuch, that I became, even while alive, the food of the vilest creatures without any hopes of getting rid of them. My body became, in short, one great ulcer; and, dying as I did, in long and terrible torments, I left behind me in Persia a fearful example of the Divine justice. But observe, madam, continued Fum-Hoam, a surprising metamorphosis for its singularity! My soul was no sooner departed out of the body of this cruel King of Persia, but it was immediately enclosed in that of a flea. Though this change was a great humiliation to me, yet for some time at least I had the satisfaction not to see myself deprived of human blood, which I was so greedy of before; and had several opportunities in this little body of exercising some singular strokes of my vengeance. When I was Piurash I had a seraglio filled with the most beautiful women in the East, and kept by slaves, who at the least turn of my eye trembled for fear. No sooner was I dead than one of my wives, whom I loved best, and who made sincere returns, as I thought, to my endearments, gave an uncontrolled loose to her passion; she fell distractedly in love with a young Persian who worked in my gardens, and who, to gain the easier admittance, counterfeited a fool; she introduced him into her chamber, and gave him the place I was accustomed to have.

You will hardly forbear laughing, madam, when I tell you how I swelled in my little body with rage, to hear my favourite sultana's railleries, the imprecations wherewith she loaded my memory, and the transports wherewith she received the caresses of her lover. I threw myself that instant with fury upon the beautifullest body in all Persia, bit her in a thousand places, and made her all over blood; till at last, being mad, and blinded with my growing rage, I threw myself designedly into my perfidious sultana's fingers, and there received my death.—Ah! ah! a very pleasant and jocular adventure! cried Gulchinraz, laughing; but what became of the soul of the illustrious Fum-Hoam afterwards?—You are very pleasant, madam, I perceive, replied the mandarin, the conclusion of this story I

knew would cure your seriousness; but though you look upon it as a mere fiction it is nevertheless very true.