



quarto translations

“The biggest mistake we Vampires and others in the Hidden Kingdom ever made was to hide away – for what you Humans cannot see, you fear and what you fear, you would make monsters of.



Dear Sirs

One very cold day, just over ten years ago, I found myself standing alone at a wind-swept train station in Newcastle. My being there was thanks to a letter from a complete stranger. I did not know it at the time, but this letter and the short walk I was about to take would change my life forever.

My name is Robin Bennett, and I am the founder of a small language translation bureau called Quarto Translations in Henley-on-Thames. The letter I had received a week previously invited me to come to Newcastle in order to view three large volumes that appeared to be in an unknown tongue. A pretty generous fee for my time was offered, plus a lot more money if I was able to identify (and translate) the strange writing.

The letterhead itself bore the name *Tyne Antiquarian & Rare Books*, gave a residential address but no phone number and ended with the initials, *A.G.F-P*.

The lack of a proper name at the end of the letter and the general air of mystery about the whole business meant that, when I arrived at the right street, I was very much looking forward to the interview with ‘A.G.F-P’ and to seeing the volumes themselves.

After a few wrong turns, I finally tracked the address down to a nondescript house in a nondescript street. The entrance was half-hidden in an alcove whose door seemed to have been shut several years previously and not opened since for any reason. I pushed through the poppies that seemed to be thriving in the otherwise bare front garden and looked for a buzzer in vain. I then gave the door a tentative knock, followed, on reflection, by a good kick.

Inside I heard an odd noise as something scuffled across bare wooden boards. I leaned closer to the door, to locate the source of the noise but as I peered into the grubby, stained-glass window panel, some primitive instinct told me to be fearful. Nothing, at first, stirred within and all I saw was the blurry outline of shelves and boxes and books; however, some indefinable sense of danger made the hairs on the back of my neck rise and I gave an involuntary shudder.

Then, just as I was about to pull away from the murky view I had of this old room with its lurking presence, something moved – *right* in front of my eyes. The figure was small - no larger than a few centimetres from head to toe – and it seemed to hover in front of my face. Just then, whatever it was moved closer and, for the briefest of instants, I had a very clear view of a pair of small but exceptionally piercing dark blue eyes that bored into mine. Almost as soon as the connection between me and It was made, it was severed as the creature flicked away from my view and was gone.

Since I had turned into the street there had been no sign of life anywhere, so I was startled when I heard a loud sniff that appeared to come from my left leg. I turned this way and that and eventually identified the source of the sniff as being a small boy standing just behind me. ‘Hello,’ I said and had turned to resume my assault on the door when I was interrupted.

‘Ee’s not ’ere.’

‘Who’s not here?’ I asked mid-thwack.

‘Mr Fancy-Pants.’

‘Mr *Who*?’ I asked instinctively. ‘Go away,’ I added.

The boy didn’t seem at all put out. ‘Arnold G. Fancy-Pants. That’s what me mam calls ’im anyway. I think ’is name’s Fal-something-Palmer. But anyway, likeisaid, ’ees not ’ere.’

Right initials, I thought. ‘So where is he then?’

‘Ees *ded* ... they carried ’im out in a box on Sunday...’e was that *owld*...’

‘Oh,’ I said, ‘I see.’ I ran my hand through my hair. ‘Does anyone else live here?’

The boy chewed his lip. ‘E used to ’ave a cat,’ he said eventually. ‘But I ain’t seen it for ages.’

‘Thank you,’ I said, feeling irrationally cross with Mr Arnold G. F-P. for dying and not telling me about it. However, there was nothing for it but to walk back to the station and catch the next train to London. I looked with mixed feelings at the closed door, noticing for the first time that it had the outline of a cup carved intricately into the wood. Then I gave the small boy fifty pence, a short lecture on personal hygiene, and went home.

Three weeks later there was a further turn to these mysterious events when a bulky package arrived from a firm of solicitors in Sunderland.



Their client, Mr Arnold Falaise-Palmer, had left recent instructions that in the event of his death (which, given the weather in the North of England, was most likely imminent), the three volumes enclosed be sent to me for language identification. The books were in poor condition and unlikely to be worth much but any proceeds from the sale should be given to his niece and sole heir, Ms Natalie Falaise, of Lille, Northern France.

The books, when I unwrapped them, were certainly antiquarian *looking*, as far as I could tell. Nevertheless, as the solicitors pointed out, they seemed to have been ill-treated over the years and they may well have been fairly new, just beaten up. The binding looked like it had been done in someone's kitchen using cheap glue and a blunt knife and the pages were dog-eared and contained an array of stains: some of which, on closer scrutiny, looked suspiciously like dried blood.

As for the language, it looked familiar but at first glance I hadn't a clue as to its origin, except to say it was probably Indo-European *in root*. This didn't help me much – nearly everything is Indo-European in root. However, nothing I looked up and none of the translators I asked could make out any meaning in the sentences, even if some of the words looked strangely familiar. I eventually concluded that it was most probably written in some sort of private code.

I sat down to write Ms Natalie Falaise a letter explaining the background to the books, her uncle's stipulation in his will and my opinion as to the origin and (most probably) limited value of the books. I suggested that, as a blood relation, it would be better if she took it upon herself to sell the books. If she made some money out of it, then I would be grateful for a small fee for an hour or two's work; if not, then no matter. I added that I had not known her uncle but was very sorry, all the same, for her loss.

A few weeks later I received a reply from Ms Falaise in perfect English. She started by thanking me for my letter and suggested we meet at the Eurostar exit in Waterloo station that weekend where she was getting a connecting train to visit old university friends in Exeter. As to the value of the books, she begged to differ with me – her uncle, whom she had only met a few times in as many years, had spoken of them on a number of occasions and had strongly hinted that their value was greater than anything he had acquired in his long career as a rare book dealer.

This time at least, there was a phone number on the letter and I rang to confirm with her. That job done, I went to put the books back in the packaging. I was reflecting on what a sweet vivacious girl she sounded on the phone, when a sheet of paper that half fell out of the first volume caught my eye. I instantly recognised the handwriting as that of my late correspondent, Mr Arnold *Fancy-Pants*.

On it he had written simply, *GK/Ltn/AROM...?*

Given the context, I presumed the first two were his shorthand for Greek and Latin and whilst I wasn't sure what 'AROM' actually was, I was pretty confident that it was simply his

abbreviation for another language. Looking it up in *Dalby's Dictionary of Languages*, 1990 edit., confirmed that it was most probably Aromanian: a dialect of Greek spoken in the North of the country and a root and relative neighbour of modern Transylvanian.

I met Natalie at the station. She was blond, very pretty and unreasonably cheerful, considering she'd been stuck on a train for nearly four hours, and before long we were getting along very well. In a nearby pub by the river, I fished out the books and showed them to her, and I also handed over Uncle Arnold's short handwritten note. She tucked her hair back behind her ear, stared at the paper for a few moments and then thumbed the volumes. Meanwhile I was quite happy to drink my beer and enjoy studying her in profile. When she looked up, she smiled almost apologetically and said, 'I'm sure you've thought of this already but could the writing not simply be a mixture of all three?'

And there you have it.

I knew immediately that firstly she was almost certainly right and that secondly, if I wasn't already, that I would very soon fall in love with Ms Natalie Falaise of Lille, Northern France.

In fact, we were married in the spring of 1997. Since then, on and off, the business and children allowing, I have worked on the translation. At first it was hard going but initial successes and a growing *fascination* in the actual contents kept me going. The writing was indeed an odd mixture of all three of the above languages, and after some time I realised that the writer was just lazy and had simply used whichever word in whatever language came to mind first.

The volumes told the explosive and moving story of an intelligent species - no larger than the forefinger you are using to hold down this page - that has lived amongst us, largely in secret, for thousands of years. These creatures are very close to the best of us in so many ways - in their language, good humour, courage and sense of fairness - but utterly different in others, such as their inhuman turn of speed, the grace of angels, their obsession with blood and, most importantly, their gift for magic. They go by many names: Nosferatu, Vykolakas, Strigoi...

However, these days, we simply know them as *Vampire*.

Small Vampire is a name all of my own – they never refer to themselves in this way. They do not actually see themselves as small, rather that we Humans are lumbering, ungainly and ridiculously BIG. Another title for these stories might also have been, *Vampires – the truth*, or, *The Secret History of the Hidden Kingdom*. But I am calling it *Small Vampires* simply because it is catchier and because it describes them in a way that at least partly explains why so few Humans have met one. It also explains why most of us stoutly believe Vampires only exist in books, films and in the imaginations of people who find the idea of knowing someone who wants to bite them on the neck romantic.



A Small Vampire is actually about the size of a dragonfly. They travel widely, and you've almost certainly *seen* several and indeed been bitten by one or two right in your own back garden. You most probably thought that it was a mosquito, or a horsefly, and then forgot about the bite because it didn't itch or go red. But if you looked very carefully, you would have seen not one tiny pinprick bite mark, but TWO. I put this in capitals because it is important. The TWO holes represent one for each of the sharp little teeth of the Small Vampire.

If you happened to catch one, which is very unlikely given their skill at magic and how fast they can move, and you looked at him (or her) under a magnifying glass, you would see that he had dragonfly-like wings that fold neatly away behind his back and (if he is not wearing his usual light armour) you would see very soft, mole-like down or fur covering his body. This velvet fur is mostly black, but with a flash of white around the neck and where his tummy starts. The effect is as if they are wearing a perfectly tailored evening suit. Even more striking are their faces, which are basically human, in a way that's hard to explain. Under a very strong magnifying glass, female or *Duchess* Vampires are nearly all very beautiful, and the males elegant and charming, with just the hint of something proud and rather dangerous about them.

Apart from their size, it is important to know that Vampires are most certainly *not* the wicked creatures of the night with foreign accents that Hollywood has had us believe. However, they *are* steeped in magic and, like any other creature from the Hidden Kingdom, they are unquestionably cleverer than any of us.

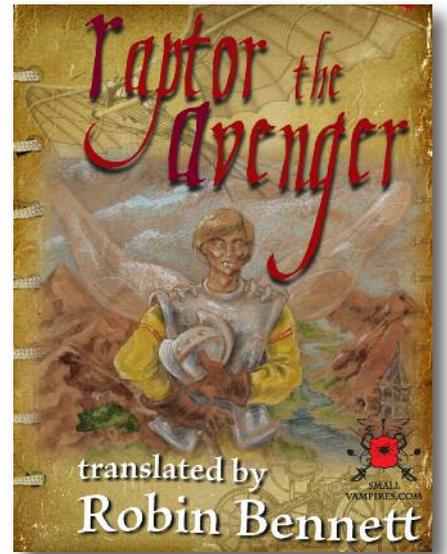
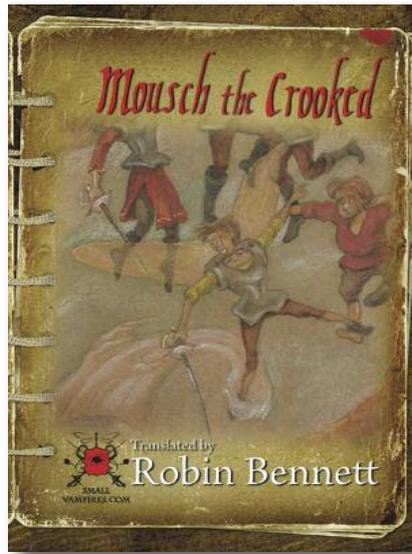
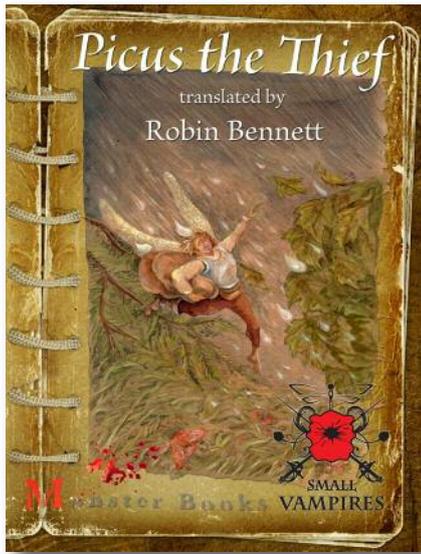
How they came into being is lost to us but what is almost certain is that they have been here from the start. The first volume begins nearly two thousand years ago, when civilised Humans were only just starting out – mostly unaware, even then, of the existence of these small but immensely powerful creatures.

So there it is then, the secret history of Small Vampires. It is a story that started when the Empire of Man was still new and Vampires, the most powerful but also the best of all creatures, ruled with fairness, grace and good humour...

Yours faithfully

Robin Bennett





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