

Editor's Note

THIS letter was discovered in the early 1970s in the basement of our family farm near Waynesville, Ohio, following my great-grandmother's funeral. How it came to be there and its authenticity have been sources of much inconclusive debate. Our family does, however, lay claim to a direct lineage to the noble Hawkes of Cornwall, and Sir Thomas Lemuel Hawke was among the 323 killed at the Battle of Slaughter Bridge in the winter of 1483. The letter and rubric were originally written in Cornish and had been severely damaged at the time of their discovery. They were pieced together, adapted, and reconstructed by me, Ethan Hawke, from a literal translation provided by Dr. Linda Shaw of Missouri Univer-

sity at St. Louis. I tried to create a tone that was true to the integrity of the time, while making the letter accessible to my children. Please forgive any obvious errors. I assure you the mistakes are mine and not Sir Thomas's or Dr. Shaw's. When struggling to convey Sir Thomas's thinking, I have used expressions and turns of phrase found in the writings of other knights (named on page 171) to articulate what I could not. The illustrations were found with the text, reconstructed, and arranged here by my wife, Ryan Hawke. The Hawkes were originally Hawkers and worked with hawks, falcons, and other birds. We are a family with a long history of ornithology.

E.H.

Cornwall, 1483

My Dear Children, Mary-Rose, Lemuel,
Cvenild, & Idamay,

A dark wind murmurs secrets into my ear as I write to you this evening. Perhaps this whisper is only the deceitful voice of fear, but I must admit, I am afraid I will never see you again.

This war with the Thane of Cawdor has raised in pitch, and so too has my belief that I will not live to enjoy the peace that follows. After my narrow escape at the Battle of St. Faegan's Fields, I began to feel compelled to pass on to you Grandfather's list of "Rules." His rubric will help instruct you should I be unable to do so in person. It's important that you, Mary-Rose, Cven, and Ida, realize these rules had been written for me, a young man

on his journey towards knighthood, but they apply just as surely to an aspiring lady.

If I return safely home from tomorrow's battle, all the better; but should I not, then turn to these pages whenever you might look for my voice in guidance. I do not want you children to use my untimely death, or any setback that life may deliver, as an excuse not to take responsibility for yourselves.

Ida, on this day, the twenty-first of July, you are only four years old, and if my fears prove justified you will not remember any aspect of me. For this I am most sad, but none of you children yet know me as anything but the tall person who scolds or encourages you, or as a voice talking to your mother as you fall asleep. I have worked too hard in the last ten years and traveled too much, and now it seems I may miss your childhoods entirely. This comes as a blow. I have been looking forward to your growing up and hoped that we could, over time, know one another in a more meaningful way.

Tonight I will share with you some of the more valuable stories, events, and moments of my life so that somewhere deep in the recesses of your imagination these lessons might continue on and my experiences will live to serve a purpose for you.

When I was a young man I didn't know how to live. Evenings I would carouse with my friends, fighting, drinking, and wreaking havoc all through the night hours. My mother died when she gave birth to me, and all during my teenage years I'd leaned on that tragedy as an excuse for my own destructive behavior. Sometimes in a moment of reflection, I would seek solace in the chapel, my heart swollen with remorse over the suffering I had caused myself and others. My soul felt wild, and I could not discern for what reason I had been born. This lack of purpose weighed so heavily on me that at times I felt despondent, as if I were made of lead and sinking to the bottom of the ocean. Other times my idle nature made me feel so light and insignificant, I

worried I might float away. Finally, this crisis inside me rose to a deafening drum. I decided to seek out the wisest man I could find and ask him to tell me how to live.

My mother's father, your great-grandfather, lived up on a wooded hill at the farthest reaches of our homeland, past Lanhydrock, up near Pelynt Barrow. Your great-grandfather had been one of the four surviving arrow retrievers for King Henry V's longbowmen at the Battle of Agincourt at the age of eleven. He was later knighted by King Henry himself. Widely admired throughout Cornwall, Grandfather was a powerfully built man with a wide gap between his front teeth. I had met him on only a handful of occasions, as he and my father had a troubled relationship. (Lemuel, you might remember Grandfather. He tried to give you a toy wooden dagger and you cried, "He looks like a dead person!" Grandfather laughed.)

I came to his door and knocked. When he answered I said boldly, "Everyone claims you are the wisest man of the realm. Please tell me how I should live. Why should I not cheat or