

You are born with a mother and a father, always in a place. The place is part of you, as inescapable as a fingerprint. Where are you from? In your heart, you know the truth. You are from the place you were born. I am from a town in Nebraska once known as Miagrammesto Station. I have never truly lived any- where else. I never will. You are new here. Welcome. You are about to meet a great many people, too many to keep track of at first. Don't worry. You needn't remember them all. Some will become friends, others mere acquaintances. You'll forget a few that matter, hang onto a few that don't. Our little place includes a man unable to discern the difference between destiny and storm warnings, one with religion but no faith, one with faith but no religion, a kid known as Samson the Methodist, and a quartet of confused lovers. Here's a tip: among the folks inhab- iting these pages are a librarian, a con man, an enchantress, and a skeleton. Keep your eye on them. They will help answer the question of how a place called Miagrammesto Station became home to the long- lost Oracle of Delphi.

My name is Peter Goodfellow—Delphic Oracle, Nebraska city manager and inmate at the Luther Burbank Correctional Facility. I'm also the parish priest at St. Mary's— Father Peter— but don't be put off. It's a job, so these pages will not narrate a religious fable, but the stories of three families: the Goodfel- lows, the Penrods, and the Thorntons. Some of what I'll tell you was acquired as a boy at the knee of my great-grandmother, Willa Louise Goodfellow. She was born when our town was known as Miagrammesto Station and died at one hundred years and six days old after it had become Delphic Oracle. Grammie Willa knew everything about this little settlement just north of the Platte River, including the story of Maggie Westinghouse and the notorious July Pennybaker. "In a time when Delphic Oracle was known as Miagrammesto Station, a fox named July Pennybaker came to town," Grammie Willa claimed. "The fox was sly, but he chose to pursue a clever hen. Bent on chicanery, he ended up seeking redemption."