

II.

COR UNUM, VIA UNA.

After all, nothing had been harmed. There stood the barn with its meagre store of hay, and apart from a charred patch, where the sparks had fallen on the wooden roof, and had burned some of the shingles, the house remained intact.

Earlier in the afternoon, a small boy, playing among the grass in the orchard on the slope on the South side of the house, looking up from his play, had seen a thin wreath of smoke. He saw smoke and a tiny red flame creep up from the corner of one of the gables and lick its way towards the top of the roof.

It was most fascinating to watch it go up, up. The smoke going first, the little red flame following. Then both meeting for a moment, he saw them pause and rear, flame and smoke mingling their ugly orange and gray against the yellow of the afternoon sun, their union leaving in its wake the sinister black of the burnt roof.

After that, the smoke and the flame were always together, and the ominous sound of their progress caught the ear of the child.

That was fire.

That was the bad fire, the Mother had told him