

“Paige, what happened to the toys?”

“What toys, Mommy?”

“The toys on the blocks, sweetie. There’s a whole bunch missing.”

“Oh. They’re dead.”

Susan knew this was part of the game, but she hadn’t seen so many die all at once. “Did they get attacked?” she ventured.

“No. They got sick.”

Susan frowned at this new aspect of the game. “They got sick? But honey, when we get sick we get better. Why didn’t they get better?”

“It was a big sick,” explained Paige. “It was pyag.”

“‘Pag’? Honey, what’s ‘pag’?”

“Pyag, Mommy. *Pyag*.”

What on earth was Paige saying? Susan twisted it around in her mind as she searched for the word, and when she found it, her blood went cold. “Honey,” she said carefully, “are you saying ‘plague?’”

“Yes,” Paige explained patiently, “pyag. So they’re dead.”