PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Borrowed Shot

BOOK ELEVEN



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

The Yellow That Moved

Piper had been watching the red stone.

Then she noticed the yellow.

It had been sitting in the front of the house, quite still, while the red came toward it. Now the red touched it, and the yellow began moving farther into the circles.

A little way.

A little more.

It stopped before the middle. The red settled behind it, nearer the front.

Piper leaned toward the glass.

“Did you see that?”

“Which bit?” Maisie asked.

“The yellow. Where it went.”

On the ice, one of the older juniors held a glove out to a teammate. Their gloves met. Then they went to their next places.

Piper wanted to keep looking at the two stones.

It was Sunday, and she had come to the club without her curling bag. That felt peculiar. There were no gloves drying on top of it, no brush to carry, and no need to check whether both shoes were inside.

The four girls and their families had come to watch part of an older-junior match before lunch and a visit to the natural-history museum. They had arranged the day after practice the week before.

They had had several ordinary practices since the open house. Piper had made some useful draws, missed

some others, and taken out a stone she had meant to take out. She knew what happened when stones hit.

But she kept looking at this yellow.

It hadn't gone very far. That seemed to be the good part.

"Were they trying to put it there?" she asked Dad.

Ben stood beside her, looking through the same glass.

"It looks that way. I couldn't hear their call, but the player showed a line toward it before the delivery. I think they wanted to tap that yellow farther in."

"Tap," Piper repeated.

Nora pointed without touching the window.

"You can see where it was. The red's almost there now."

Piper looked from one to the other. She could remember the yellow's old place, although nothing marked it.

Maisie had been watching the sweepers.

"Those two stopped together. Both brushes went up."

"I was watching the person with the broom," Wren said. "They moved it before the next player started. Just a bit."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I wanted to see what happened after."

Now the other team was preparing. Piper found she wanted to watch that too.

This stone passed the yellow without touching it. It kept going toward the back of the house. A player bent to look along the ice, then stood up again.

The yellow stayed where the tap had put it.

For the rest of their watching time, Piper tried to follow the stones already there as well as the ones arriving. Sometimes somebody stood in the way. Sometimes she lost track of which stone she had meant to remember.

Once she asked Dad a question just as he was asking her something. Neither of them heard the other's answer.

They laughed and started again.

When it was time to leave, their families gathered coats and cups. The match would carry on without them.

Piper took one more look.

She could not see the yellow now. A player was standing in front of it.

"I want to try that," she said.

"The moving-it-a-little one?" Nora asked.

"Yes."

Maisie put on her coat.

"I want lunch first."

Piper's stomach made a noise loud enough for Wren to hear.

"So does Piper," Wren said.

CHAPTER 2

An Awkward Lunch Guest

At the museum café, Piper sat beside an empty chair with a very small table behind it.

"A mammoth would never fit there," she said.

Dad looked at the chair.

"We haven't invited one."

"But if we had."

"Then we'd have to tell the people at the next table."

The families had pushed two tables together. Coats hung over chair backs. There was a long wait while everybody found out which plate belonged to whom, although nobody had ordered anything mysterious.

Maisie had been given Nora's sandwich.

Nora had been given Maisie's sandwich.

They exchanged plates.

"Extremely fast cooking," Wren said.

Piper looked toward the museum entrance. Beyond it stood a model of a huge shaggy animal with curving tusks. She could see one tusk from her chair and the other if she leaned a little.

"If we did invite the mammoth," she said, "which end of the table would it have?"

"The empty end," Nora said.

"Both ends," Maisie said.

Wren looked at the model, then at her own chair.

"I don't want to be beside a tail."

"The mammoth's tail isn't the biggest bit," Piper said.

"I was thinking of a dinosaur."

Maisie stretched one arm slowly behind her, keeping it above her own chair.

“A tail reaches over. It takes your lunch.”

“Whose lunch?” Nora asked.

“Yours.”

“Then I’m sitting somewhere else.”

Piper imagined having to move every time an enormous animal turned around. She began to laugh with sandwich still in her mouth and had to stop talking for a while.

The adults were talking too. Dad was describing a cupboard door that wouldn’t stay shut. One of the other parents said theirs wouldn’t open. Piper thought the two cupboards should exchange doors, but by the time she had swallowed, the conversation had moved on.

She ate the rest of her sandwich. Wren quietly rescued a slice of cucumber that was trying to slide off her plate.

“What about a saber-toothed cat?” Maisie asked.

Piper had seen its picture on the museum leaflet beside the till. Its mouth was open, showing two long teeth.

“It might fit in the chair,” she said.

“I still don’t want it next to me,” Nora said.

“Very fussy guest list,” Maisie told her.

After lunch, the adults took their trays back and sorted out the tickets. The girls waited with their coats over their arms.

Inside the museum, the mammoth was even larger. Piper tilted her head to look at the shaggy body. Up close, the model had a small patch where the fur lay in a different direction, as if it had been sleeping on that side.

Maisie looked from the mammoth to the doorway they had just used.

"How did it get in?"

"The model might come in pieces," Dad said.

Nora considered this.

"That would make lunch easier. Invite only the head."

"That's the eating part," Wren said.

Piper laughed all the way into the next room.

CHAPTER 3

A Lap for the Cat



The saber-toothed cat was not in a chair.

It stood on a low platform behind a barrier, one paw forward and its mouth open. Piper could see why the leaflet had used that picture. The teeth were hard to stop looking at.

Maisie stood well back and gave it a tiny, polite voice.

“May I sit on your lap?”

“No,” Piper said at once.

“I’m ever so small.”

“You are absolutely not.”

The cat’s enormous mouth stayed open.

Nora read the label. Wren looked around its side. Piper tried to imagine it curled up like an ordinary cat, then decided there would still be far too much of it.

Dad waited beside the barrier while Maisie asked, in the same little voice, whether perhaps somebody else's lap was free.

Nobody volunteered.

In the next room, Nora found the beetles.

There were shallow drawers of them under glass, all sizes and shapes. Some looked polished. Others had ridges that caught the light. Nora bent closer to a row of small ones.

"Look at this green."

Piper looked. From where she stood, the beetle seemed almost black.

Nora moved aside. Piper took her place, and a bright green shine appeared.

"Oh!"

She moved her head. Dark. Green. Dark again.

Maisie tried it and made a small surprised noise each time the color changed.

Wren found a beetle with long antennae.

"It needs a wider drawer," she said.

"It fits," Nora told her.

"Only because it's being tidy."

Nora stayed at the case after the others had looked along the next one. Piper came back and found her comparing two beetles so small that Piper had passed them without noticing.

"This one has spots," Nora said.

Piper bent down again.

It did.

They waited while Nora finished looking. Then Wren found a long slab with fossil footprints behind a low rail.

The tracks crossed the slab in a crooked line. Some prints were deep and clear. One looked more like a smudge.

Wren walked slowly beside the rail, following the trail with her eyes.

“Here. Then here.”

Maisie walked beside her.

“Then lunch.”

“The footprints stop,” Wren said. “We don’t know what it did next.”

“I’m allowed to hope.”

Piper followed them back to the beginning. She liked the marks between the clear prints almost as much as the prints themselves. It was strange to look at something an animal had left without meaning to make an exhibit.

In the high room beyond, a whale skeleton hung above them.

Piper stopped beneath its ribs.

From one place, the bones overlapped. From another, she could see clear spaces all the way through. She walked to the other side with Dad and looked up at the huge skull.

“Can we go round again?” she asked.

They did.

Nora wanted to see the beetles once more too, so the families agreed on a last wander through the rooms before leaving. Nobody had to choose just one favorite.

Piper returned to the whale. This time she stood farther away. She could see the whole long shape at once, floating above the visitors' heads.

She stayed until Dad came beside her.

"Ready?"

"Nearly."

He waited.

On their way out, they passed the saber-toothed cat again. It had not found a lap.

Maisie gave a tiny sigh for it.

Piper looked at the long teeth, the big paws, and the very hopeful open mouth.

"You could try the mammoth," she suggested.

Wren shook her head.

"The mammoth hasn't got a chair yet."

CHAPTER 4

Too Many Circles



That evening, Piper tried to tell Dad about the yellow stone again.

“I know the one,” he said.

“Yes, but I want to show the whole bit.”

She found a pencil and a piece of plain paper. At the kitchen table, she drew a large circle, then smaller circles inside it.

Dad pulled out the chair beside her.

“The yellow was here.” She added a little circle. “And there was a red over there. I think.”

Another little circle.

“There was definitely one here.”

“Before the tap?”

Piper held the pencil above the paper.

“Maybe after.”

She rubbed that one out. It left a gray patch. Then she put a different circle back in almost the same place.

The picture in her head had seemed complete on the way home. Now she couldn’t remember whether the stone on the right had been red or yellow, or whether it had arrived later.

She had wanted to bring the whole arrangement to practice. She could ask the coaches to set it out. Then she could try the shot exactly as she had seen it.

Except she hadn’t seen exactly all of it.

“The red came this way.” She drew an arrow. It ran through a circle that she was fairly sure shouldn’t be there.

Piper looked at the paper for a moment.

“I’ve put something in its way.”

Dad leaned closer.

“You might have drawn two different turns together.”

“I think I’ve drawn about three.”

She laughed, but she didn’t want to give up the picture she had liked.

The yellow had been in one place. Then it had been in the place the players seemed to want. That was the part she kept seeing.

Piper turned the paper over.

“This is what I want.”

She drew one little circle and an arrow just beyond it.

“I want to move the stone that’s already there. A little farther in. On purpose.”

Dad nodded.

“That sounds like a question you could bring to Jo and Granite.”

“Can we try that with our stones?”

“That’s a good way to ask. Tell them where you’d like the first stone to finish.”

Piper added a second, larger circle around the end of her arrow. A place, rather than a tiny dot.

“I don’t know how to make it go only that far.”

“You can ask that too.”

She put the pencil down.

On the other side of the paper, her complicated game still existed. It would probably remain a game nobody could play.

Piper folded the paper with the simple side out and put it beside her curling bag.

Then she went back to the kitchen.

“The whale had so many ribs,” she told Dad.

He moved his mug out of the way, and she spread her arms to show him.

CHAPTER 5

Just Two Stones

At the next regular practice, Piper unfolded her paper for Jo.

“I saw a shot I want to try. Could we move a stone that’s already in the house a little farther in? With our stones?”

Jo looked at the drawing.

“Where would you like it to finish?”

Piper pointed to the space around her arrow.

“Somewhere in there. I made the circle big.”

“That gives me something to work with.”

Jo took a moment to talk with Ben and Granite. Then she came back to the four girls.

“We can try a short tap exercise after our warm-up and first draws. We’ll use our usual shortened start and junior stones. I’ll show you first.”

Piper put the paper safely in her bag.

The beginning of practice happened in its familiar order. They warmed up, checked their helmet straps and clean grippers, and took their first turns. Jo checked the portable hack and reminded them of the release cue. Ben watched their spacing while they swept. Sliding soles were covered before walking.

Piper and Maisie swept Nora’s draw into the house. Piper’s own draw ran too far. She had to wait for that red to stop before she could go and look at it.

Then the coaches cleared the lane for the new exercise.

Ben placed a yellow junior stone fully inside the front rings. There were no other stones in the house.

“Only that one?” Piper asked.

“And the one coming,” Jo said.

Piper looked at the bare circles around it. The older players’ house had seemed much busier.

Granite stood to one side.

“Where do you want the yellow to go?”

Piper pointed to a broad patch farther toward the middle, still in front of the button.

“About there.”

Wren looked from the yellow to the patch.

“So it stops before the middle?”

“Yes.”

Granite and Jo checked the line with them. Jo showed where they would stand and where the sweepers would step clear. For these tries, brushes would come up and the sweepers would move safely aside before the stones touched. Then everyone would watch both stones until they stopped. The adults would reset them.

The girls waited together at the side for Jo’s demonstration.

From closer to the house, Jo sent a red gently toward the yellow. It met the yellow near the middle of its front face.

The yellow moved into the broad patch. The red slowed close to where the yellow had begun.

Piper watched until both were still.

“That,” she said. “That’s the bit.”

“That’s a tap,” Jo said. “We can start exploring it. You won’t have it all worked out today.”

For the individual exercise, they would take turns at the different jobs. Piper would deliver first, Wren would hold the target broom with Granite, and Maisie and Nora would be the sweepers with Ben. When they changed jobs, the delivery lane would be stopped and clear.

Ben reset the two stones. Piper went to the familiar hack with Jo.

From there, the yellow looked much smaller.

Wren checked the broom with Granite. Piper looked at it, began her delivery, and released the red.

Maisie and Nora followed. It was traveling briskly.

“No sweeping,” Wren called.

Before contact, the sweepers lifted their brushes and stepped clear.

The red struck the yellow. The yellow moved through the patch Piper had wanted, passed the middle, and stopped in the back half of the house. The red stayed nearer the front.

Piper waited for both to settle, then came along the side after Jo helped her up.

“It definitely moved.”

“Farther than your place,” Wren said.

Piper nodded. The yellow was perfectly easy to see.

It was just much too far away.

CHAPTER 6

Where It Finished

Maisie came to look from the clear side of the house.

“Your red was still going quite fast when we stepped away,” she told Piper. “Faster than Jo’s.”

“I felt that at the start,” Piper said.

Jo joined them.

“Next turn, we’ll try a little less weight. Keep the same sort of smooth delivery.”

Piper looked once more at the yellow before Ben reset it. She had been pleased when her red made contact. The yellow hadn’t finished moving by then.

Now she knew which part she wanted to wait for.

Maisie delivered next. This time Piper swept with Wren, with Ben nearby.

This red came much more slowly. Piper could see that it needed help to reach the yellow.

“Sweep,” Nora called.

They brushed, then lifted and stepped aside at the agreed place, well before the target.

The red reached the yellow with a small click.

The yellow moved, but barely. It stopped before the patch they had chosen.

Maisie arrived after everything was still.

“I sent it a very small message.”

“It arrived,” Nora said.

“Just.”

For Nora’s turn, Piper took the house. Before going back to the hack, Nora looked at the target.

“I think mine will get there.”

It did. But it met the yellow off to one side. The yellow moved inward and sideways, finishing beside the chosen patch rather than inside it. The red went off the other way and stopped farther out in the rings.

Piper had lifted her target broom clear and stayed at the side. She watched both stones finish before Nora came to join her.

“It went that way,” Nora said, pointing at the yellow.

“I was still looking at the red,” Piper admitted. “Then I saw it.”

Granite showed them the part of the yellow the red had touched, without moving either stone.

Nora bent a little to look from the clear space.

“Not the middle.”

“That’s right.”

For Wren’s turn, Maisie held the broom, and Piper swept with Nora. The red reached the yellow fairly squarely. The yellow stopped near the far edge of their broad patch.

Wren stood beside Jo until both stones stopped. Then she came to look.

“That was nearly too much,” she said.

“But in your place,” Maisie told her.

“In the place.”

They each had a second turn in the same order and with the same jobs.

Piper tried the lighter delivery Jo had suggested. This time her red missed the yellow entirely and traveled into the house beside it.

For a moment, the two stones looked as though they had always been there.

Piper let out a small breath.

“Well. It certainly hasn’t gone too far.”

Wren smiled, then looked back along the path with Granite.

Jo had watched Piper’s delivery.

“Your hand went across just as you let go,” she said. “We’ll keep working on sending it along the line.”

Piper looked down at her hand. She had been thinking so much about less weight that she hadn’t noticed.

Maisie’s second try missed on the other side. Nora’s stopped just before contact. Wren’s moved the yellow beyond the patch. None of the second turns looked quite like the first.

When their short block ended, the coaches put away the target stone.

Piper wished she had another turn. She also wanted a drink. The drink won first.

After their break, they practiced ordinary draws with their usual team jobs. Maisie led, Nora was second, Piper was third and vice, and Wren was fourth and skip. Each had one delivery before the adults cleared for the next round.

Piper swept with her friends. When Wren went to deliver, Piper took the house and checked the broom with her.

There was plenty to do without a yellow target.

Before leaving, Piper asked Jo, “Could we try the tap again at another practice?”

“We can return to it next session,” Jo said.

Piper put the folded paper back in her bag. She wouldn’t need to redraw it.

CHAPTER 7

A Little Farther In



At the following practice, the yellow began in the same place.

There had been a warm-up, familiar draws, and time for everybody to settle into moving on the ice. Now Ben set the target fully in the front rings, and Jo checked the lane.

Piper could point to the broad patch without taking out her paper.

“Still there?” Wren asked.

“Still there.”

They used the same two-stone exercise, with a turn each. This time Maisie went first, then Nora, then Wren, then Piper. Jo reminded them of the clear places before they began.

Piper watched from the house for Maisie, while Nora and Wren swept. Maisie's red made contact, and the yellow stopped a little short of the chosen patch.

Nora's red missed. Wren's touched the yellow off-center and sent it too far to the side.

Each time, everyone watched both stones finish before Ben reset them and they changed jobs.

Piper had been one of Nora's sweepers, then held the broom for Wren. Now she went back to the hack for her own turn. Wren took the house again, with Maisie and Nora ready to sweep.

Jo stood nearby.

Piper looked at the broom. She remembered the first red that had hurried all the way to the yellow. She remembered her hand going across on the next try.

This time she wanted the smooth, lighter start along the line.

She began.

The red left her hand and traveled away. Piper stayed with Jo while Maisie and Nora went alongside it.

"A little," Wren called.

The brushes moved.

"Up."

Maisie and Nora lifted their brushes and stepped safely clear before the red reached the yellow.

There was a click.

Piper watched the yellow.

It moved into the patch. It kept going a little, then slowed and stopped, still before the middle.

The red had settled closer to the front, near the yellow's old place.

Both were still.

Piper grinned.

"There."

Jo helped her up. Once her sliding foot was covered, Piper took the safe side route to Wren.

They looked at the two stopped stones together.

"That's where I meant," Piper said.

"Yes," Wren said. "It is."

Maisie rested her brush head on the ice beside her own feet.

"That one didn't rush past us."

Nora looked at the red, then at the yellow.

"They both stayed close to the front."

Piper would have liked to leave them there for the rest of the morning.

But the block was finished, and Ben had other practice to set up. She took one last look before he cleared them.

At the house, Granite adjusted his glasses.

"What will you want to watch next time?"

"Whether I can make it finish there again," Piper said.

That was enough of a question for now.

CHAPTER 8

Still Room for the Cat

Later in the same session, Piper called Maisie and Nora to sweep Wren's draw.

The red needed help to reach the house. They worked together until Piper called them up. It stopped in the rings, farther out than Wren had wanted.

Wren joined them after it was still.

"A bit more next time."

Piper nodded. In this team block, everyone was back in their usual place. She had delivered after Nora, and now Wren was taking the last turn of their round. The adults would clear the stones before they began again.

There was no yellow set out to tap. Wren had wanted a draw, so that was what they had tried.

Piper's next draw went wide. Her next turn at the house was better: she checked Wren's small move of the broom before Wren started, and Maisie heard her call clearly.

By the end of practice, Piper was ready to take off her helmet.

In the warm room, she found the folded paper at the top of her bag.

Maisie looked over her shoulder.

"Is that the shot?"

"That side is. The other side is three games all at once."

Piper opened it. Nora and Wren leaned over too.

There were the crowded little circles, the rubbed-out patch, and an arrow going straight through the middle of something.

"I don't think the older players did this," Piper said.

"Possibly while we were having lunch," Wren suggested.

Piper laughed and folded it back to the simple side.

Dad brought his bag over. While the other parents gathered their things, Nora began telling him about the tiniest spotted beetles. She had remembered them during the week and wished she had looked more closely at the drawer below.

"I want the footprints again," Wren said.

Piper wanted to go beneath the whale. She liked remembering how the bones had changed when she walked around them, although they had stayed quite still.

Maisie made the little cat voice.

"I'm still waiting."

Dad looked at her.

"The saber-toothed cat," Piper explained. "It wants a lap."

"Oh. That one."

"It could sit on a sofa," Nora said.

"A whole sofa," Piper said. "All to itself."

Maisie considered this as the cat.

"May I have a cushion?"

Wren pulled on her coat.

"Fine. But nobody's sitting at the teeth end."