PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Eighth End

BOOK TWENTY TWO



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

Contents

1 Two More Boxes 1

2 A Point on Paper 5

3 The Visitors 9

4 Answers in Yellow 12

5 Halfway Is Four 15

6 The Point They Took 19

7 Choosing Nothing 22

8 The Eighth End 26

9 One Stone Left 29

10 What They Kept 32

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CHAPTER 1

Two More Boxes

Piper counted the boxes twice.

There were eight.

The score sheet lay on the warm-room table between her and Wren. Jo had put their team name at the top. Underneath it, eight little spaces waited for things that had not happened yet.

“Two more than the Owls game,” Piper said.

“Still eight when I count,” Wren told her.

Piper ran a finger along the empty row without touching the paper. Their first full-length away game had ended five to four. At the time, six ends had felt like plenty of room for a game. Now she wanted the extra two.

She also wanted to know who would be filling the other row.

Several weeks of their fifth season had passed since the visit. The Too-Cold Club had played at home, worked on the things they had brought back and stopped talking about the trip at every single practice.

At most practices, somebody still mentioned it.

Maisie came over with Nora.

“Who are we?” she asked.

“The same people,” Wren said.

“Good. I’ve brought their things.”

Maisie dropped four gloves on the table. Piper claimed one. Wren claimed two. Nora explained that the remaining glove belonged to Maisie herself.

“I wondered why that one looked familiar.”

Jo pulled out a chair.

Their club was arranging a junior challenge day. Teams from several clubs would come for one longer game apiece. The coaches had matched groups with enough experience to make the games useful. The Too-Cold Club's visitors were called the Kestrels.

"They've been playing eight-end games for a while," Jo said.

"Are they good?" Piper asked.

"They'll make you work."

Piper liked that answer until she imagined having to do the work.

Jo had been building longer sessions into their practice, with breaks and checks along the way. All four had managed the extra deliveries comfortably. They were using the full-size stones and full sheet they knew now. The challenge would add a longer competitive game, with a proper seated break halfway through.

It would not add a second match on top.

Jo asked each girl how the longer sessions had felt. Nora wanted to know how much time they would have after the fourth end. Maisie asked whether they could bring their usual food. Wren wanted to see the visiting team's name written down.

Piper wanted to say yes before anybody finished.

She waited while Jo answered.

Then each girl said she wanted to play. Their families had already talked over the date. Jo would confirm the entry after today's check-in.

"Same lineup?" Nora asked.

"Same lineup," Wren said, looking around the table.

Maisie would lead. Nora would play second. Piper would deliver third and be vice. Wren would skip and deliver fourth.

Piper had tried skipping a whole friendly when they were younger, and she still took practice turns at calling. She remembered how busy the house could feel even before anybody put a stone in it. With Wren beside her now, she had more to offer than she had then.

She wanted to help make a whole eight-end game.

“What do the extra ends change?” she asked Jo.

“Some choices,” Jo said. “We can look at a few before the day.”

Piper looked at the score sheet again. She had been imagining two more chances to score.

There would be two more chances for the Kestrels too.

She took her glove off the paper and let Wren have a proper look.

Maisie read the team name at the top.

“Do you think they’ll ask why we’re called that?”

“Probably,” Nora said.

“We were cold a long time ago. We’ve been warm quite often since.”

Wren looked at her. “Are you asking to change it?”

“No. I like it. I just wonder what they’ll think.”

Piper wondered too. The Kestrels sounded quick. The Too-Cold Club sounded like four girls who needed another pair of socks.

Then she remembered all the games the name had been in. Wins, losses and ties. People at the club knew who it meant.

“I want to keep ours,” she said.

“So do I,” Wren answered.

Nora smoothed the corner of the score sheet. “We can be good and cold.”

“Experienced at cold,” Maisie said.

Jo smiled and collected the spare papers. There were still other teams to check with, ice time to confirm and visiting coaches to speak to. Piper watched her tuck the names into a folder.

Their new game had started becoming real before anyone delivered a stone.

On the way out, Piper looked back once. Wren was putting her two gloves into the correct pockets. Nora had found Maisie’s bottle. Maisie was explaining that she knew where it was now.

Piper held the door for them. She wanted all four of those names on the eight-box sheet.

CHAPTER 2

A Point on Paper



The next Saturday, Maisie lost an end up her sleeve.

It was a small paper card. She had pushed it forward on the table and somehow taken it with her when she lifted her arm.

“Seven has gone,” Nora said.

They checked under the score sheet. They checked beneath Piper’s notebook.

Wren pointed at Maisie.

“Found it.”

Maisie peeled the card off her cuff.

“I was keeping it warm.”

Jo waited until everyone stopped laughing. The cards showed different late-game scores. Beside them, she had drawn a few simple houses with stopped stones.

They had finished their on-ice work. Now they were changed, fed and curious about a choice that seemed wrong to Piper.

Jo's drawing contained one yellow in the rings. Red had the last stone. There were no reds in the house.

"If red hits and stays, how many?" Jo asked.

"One," Piper said.

"And if red takes the yellow out and rolls out too?"

"A blank."

Piper knew blank ends. Their first win, years ago against the Sliders, had finished with one. Nobody had planned that empty house. Lots of stones had simply found somewhere else to stop.

This drawing was different. Jo was asking them to choose it.

Wren tapped the card beside the house. The score was tied with two ends left to play.

"If we blank this one, we keep last stone for the last end."

"And if we take one, we're ahead," Piper said.

"Both true," Jo said.

Piper looked from the point to the empty house. She liked the point. It existed. The things they might do in the last end did not exist yet.

Nora moved another card beside the same drawing. This score had red one behind, in the final end.

"I wouldn't want a blank there."

"No," Wren said. "We'd lose."

Maisie inspected the card. “I prefer seven in my sleeve.”

Piper smiled. Then Jo asked which shot they thought they could actually make. A hit that stayed and a hit that rolled out needed different contact. Wanting an empty house did not make the second one easy.

They had practiced both kinds of hit in their recent sessions. Sometimes Piper’s shooter stayed when she wanted it gone. Sometimes it left when she would have liked to keep it.

“We need the score,” Nora said. “And how many ends are left.”

“And the stones,” Wren added.

“And whether we like the shot,” Piper said.

Jo nodded. She changed the drawing, adding a red farther out.

“Now check it again.”

This time, taking out the yellow and rolling out would leave that red to score. It would not be a blank at all.

Piper leaned closer. She had been watching the yellow so hard that she had forgotten the red.

They tried several different pictures. Sometimes Piper wanted the point. Sometimes Wren did. They did not always agree at first, and Jo did not put a star beside every empty house.

When they packed up, Piper kept looking at the drawing with only one yellow.

“I’d still want to put something on the board,” she said.

“Me too,” Wren answered. “I’d want to know why we weren’t.”

Piper tucked the picture inside her notebook.

That seemed like something a vice could help with.

Outside, Maisie checked both sleeves before putting on her coat.

“Just in case I’m carrying Saturday.”

CHAPTER 3

The Visitors

The Kestrels arrived with a bag that squeaked.

Only one wheel did it. Piper could hear the difference as the bag came through the door.

Squeak. Quiet. Squeak. Quiet.

“That’s Cora’s,” said the girl pulling it. “She says it’s a warning.”

“I can hear when you take my bag,” Cora said behind her.

Piper laughed before she remembered that these were the stronger opponents.

The girl with the bag was Tamsin, their skip. Cora played third and vice. Their lead and second were already looking for the changing area. Jo showed all four where to go.

Piper stood beside Wren, suddenly aware that their own club was an away building for somebody else.

“The hooks nearer the end are lower,” she told Cora.

“Thanks.”

Cora took her bag back. The wheel announced her departure.

There were other visiting teams, adults greeting one another and a little crowd near the noticeboard. Piper found the Too-Cold Club on the day’s list. Their names faced the Kestrels’ names, with a space beside them for the result.

A longer game. Stronger visitors. Their own ordinary names.

She liked seeing all those things together.

After changing, the girls listened to the welcome. The coaches went over the format with both teams. Eight ends. A long seated break after four. There would be brief water pauses after two and six, and anyone who needed help should ask at once. A tie would stay a tie for this local challenge.

They could speak with their coaches during the halfway break. Each team also had one requested coaching pause during play, when it was their turn and every stone had stopped. Jo would watch from the permitted place otherwise.

The girls had gone over today's arrangement at practice, and they checked it once more together.

Piper fastened her helmet. Nora checked her glasses. Maisie discovered that she had put a glove on before doing her zip, and took it off again.

They warmed up and used their practice turns. The familiar building helped, though it did not make all the stones familiar. One of Piper's draws went too deep. Wren's first hit stayed where she wanted; her next shooter went out.

"Keeping both kinds available," Wren said when she came down.

Piper smiled. "Very thoughtful."

Across the sheet, the Kestrels were making their own practice shots. Tamsin missed a draw, then watched carefully when Cora delivered. Nobody looked shocked that a stone had missed.

Piper tried to remember that.

The Too-Cold Club won the toss and chose the hammer, the last stone in the first end. The Kestrels chose yellow.

Piper shook hands with each visiting girl. Cora's glove was warm.

"Good game," she said.

"Good game."

Maisie and Nora went to their starting places. Wren checked the empty house. Piper joined Nora, broom ready.

Ben was behind the glass. Piper saw him lift one hand. She lifted hers, then turned back toward the ice.

The Kestrels' lead was ready to deliver the first yellow.

Piper had looked at the eighth box plenty of times.

Now they had to play the first.

CHAPTER 4

Answers in Yellow

Piper's first red did exactly what she wanted.

It hit the exposed yellow on the left, sent it through the back and stayed in the house.

She came down feeling pleased.

Cora removed it.

Piper's second hit did the same useful thing.

Tamsin removed that one too.

"They have answers," Piper murmured as Wren came to join her.

Wren studied the yellow. "We'll need another."

By the last two deliveries, only one yellow was nearer the middle than the farther stones. Tamsin had put it there with her last draw. Wren took it out and kept her red.

One point for the Too-Cold Club.

Piper agreed the count with Cora. It felt good to raise one finger toward her friends. The Kestrels might be experienced, but they had not brought all the points with them in their squeaky bag.

The visitors had last stone in the second end.

Maisie began with a center guard. It stopped outside the rings, in a useful place. The Kestrels went around it. Maisie's next draw came a little wide, and soon yellow stones were making the middle crowded.

Nora took out an exposed one on the right. The Kestrels replaced it. Piper tried to draw nearer on the left and stopped short.

On her next turn, Wren called an open hit. Piper made it, although her shooter rolled out.

That removed one problem. It left others.

Wren's final draw reached the middle, but two yellows were nearer. Tamsin's last attempt stopped farther away and did not add a third.

One to two.

At the short water pause, Piper leaned against the approved resting place beside her friends.

"I liked your guard," she told Maisie.

"I did too. Then other things happened."

Nora capped her bottle. "Quite a lot of other things."

They watched a helper check that the walkway stayed clear. Nobody had to solve the whole game during a drink.

In the third end, Maisie put a red behind her own corner guard on the left. This time it stayed long enough for Nora to add one nearer the middle.

The Kestrels removed Nora's red, but her next draw stopped in a different open place on the right.

Piper could see two places to build from now.

Her first draw went too far. Cora's reply left an exposed yellow near the middle, and Piper removed it with her second stone. Her red stayed.

Tamsin chose Piper's red for her first hit. Yellow replaced it. Wren took out the new yellow, keeping her shooter.

Tamsin's last draw stopped nearest.

Piper came to look with Wren. An open hit would remove it. If Wren's red stayed, that red and Nora's right-side draw could both count. A farther yellow was

nearer than Maisie's early stone and Wren's first shooter.

"Two if yours stays," Piper said.

Wren checked the route. "That's the one."

Piper held the agreed target. Maisie and Nora stood ready to judge the weight.

The red made a clean, firm sound against yellow. Yellow went out. Red stayed.

Piper grinned before she reached Cora to agree the score.

Two red.

Three to two for the Too-Cold Club.

As they moved to the other end, Maisie came beside her.

"Your face did the counting before your fingers."

"I saw two."

"So did your whole head."

Piper laughed. She liked having a head that did that.

At the next house, Tamsin was already looking at where she wanted the Kestrels' stones to go.

Five ends remained.

CHAPTER 5

Halfway Is Four



The fourth end began with Maisie’s red in the wrong place.

She had wanted a guard. It had slid into the front rings instead.

Tamsin noticed.

The Kestrels’ lead took it out and stayed.

Piper watched the yellow settle. A red inside the house could be removed straight away. That was part of what had changed when Maisie’s draw went farther than they intended.

“Too much,” Maisie said.

“Still your next one,” Nora told her.

Maisie’s second reached the guard area. The Kestrels used the other side.

They did not rush. They did not try to put everything behind the same red. Whenever the Too-Cold Club made something useful, another yellow came to trouble it.

Piper felt the end getting away from them before her own turns.

Her first hit removed a yellow on the right. Her second missed a different yellow on the left. By Wren’s last stone, two yellows were counting.

They asked for a draw nearer both.

Wren’s red went deep. It stopped closer than one yellow, but farther than the other.

Tamsin had the hammer. She drew a second yellow inside Wren’s red.

Two yellow points. The Kestrels led four to three.

Piper agreed it with Cora. She had wanted to go in ahead. Instead, she went in knowing how often the visitors had made them try something else.

The girls changed and sat together for their halfway break. Their helmets rested beside them. Maisie turned one glove inside out while taking it off and stared at it as if it had chosen a difficult moment to become unfamiliar.

“Thumb’s gone.”

“It’s inside,” Nora said.

“I know where it lives. I can’t make it come out.”

Wren helped her poke it through. Piper watched them, then began undoing her own bottle.

Four ends used to be a whole game. Today they had four left.

Jo let them eat and rest before asking how they were doing. Nobody wanted to stop. Piper's arms knew she had swept, but they had felt like this in the longer practice sessions too. She told Jo honestly.

Then Wren said, "They keep making us play their shot."

"What do you mean?" Jo asked.

Wren described the fourth end. Nora added where her own second draw had gone. Maisie explained the opening red that had entered the house.

Piper wanted to jump to a plan for scoring three.

Instead, she let Wren finish.

"I'm choosing the reply," Wren said. "But sometimes I don't think far enough beyond it."

Piper looked at her friend. She had stood at the house often enough to know that a reply could use up quite a lot of thinking on its own.

"When I come down after my second," she said, "we can check what we'd have left if yours works."

"And if it doesn't quite work," Nora said.

Wren nodded. "That would help."

Jo asked them to describe one position they remembered. They chose the third end, when Wren's last hit could bring two.

Piper had counted the reds. Wren had chosen a shot she liked. Maisie and Nora had understood what they were sweeping for.

They had already done some of the work they wanted.

They did not fill the entire break with it.

After Jo left them to rest, Maisie began trying to fold her gloves so all the fingers lined up. They refused.

Piper helped with one. Nora helped with the other. Wren inspected the result.

“Still gloves,” she reported.

“Excellent,” Maisie said. “We’ll need those.”

When the break was over, they changed, warmed up again and went back to the sheet.

Piper looked toward the scoreboard.

Four to three for yellow. Halfway.

She could feel the other half waiting.

CHAPTER 6

The Point They Took

In the fifth end, Piper did not want a blank.

There were too many yellows in the house for that to be a sensible wish. The Kestrels had drawn behind one another, and removing every scoring stone would have needed far more than the one red Wren had left.

Piper crouched beside her friend.

Two yellows sat close to the middle. An open draw on the right could beat both. It would be difficult, but Wren had made draws into that part of the house during practice.

“One to tie it,” Piper said.

Wren checked the route with her.

The Kestrels had finished their deliveries. Wren’s red would be the last stone of the end.

Piper held the broom, watching the line as Maisie and Nora judged the weight.

“A little light,” Nora called.

Piper called them to sweep. They worked ahead of the red, listening for the change in her voice.

“Up!”

The brushes came clear. The stone curled toward the middle and slowed.

It stopped nearer than both yellows.

Piper straightened with a wide smile.

One red. Four each.

Wren came down and met her glove. Maisie and Nora joined them.

Piper had no difficulty liking that single point. It had taken all four of them to make it, and it was what the position offered.

The sixth end was less kind.

The Kestrels had the hammer. Tamsin asked her lead for a draw in the open right wing. Maisie's opening guard stood nearer the middle, and the next yellow went to the left.

The visitors were spreading them out again.

Nora made a useful hit. Her next draw stopped short. Piper removed a yellow on the left, and Cora removed her red. Piper's second hit caught too much of the side. Both her red and its yellow target left the house.

By Wren's first turn, the Kestrels had a yellow near the middle and another farther right. Wren removed the middle one and stayed.

Tamsin took that red out. Her shooter stayed nearer than the right-side yellow.

Wren had one red left. She tried to draw nearest, but the red stopped beyond the closer yellow in the count. It was still nearer than the yellow on the right.

Piper wanted Tamsin's last stone to go wrong.

Tamsin drew into the open left side and made another counting yellow.

Two. Six to four for the Kestrels.

At the water pause, Wren looked down the sheet.

"We've only got two ends now."

Piper heard the only. Eight had looked enormous on paper. Six completed ends seemed to have folded themselves away.

Maisie took a drink, then held her bottle with both hands.

“Can we still get two in one?”

“Yes,” Wren said.

“Then I’d like that.”

Piper looked at the score. She would have liked three, or four, or a very large amount. But they could not order points before seeing the house.

“We’ve got last stone,” Nora said.

Piper nodded. Yellow had scored, so the last red would be theirs.

She thought about the paper cards. She had enjoyed moving them around a table with a dry pencil and no score of her own to worry about.

Now every number seemed much more attached to her.

Wren put her bottle away.

“Let’s make a useful beginning.”

Maisie went to get ready. Piper followed Nora to their sweeping places.

The seventh box was still empty.

CHAPTER 7

Choosing Nothing



The seventh end did not grow the way Piper hoped.

The Kestrels put a guard near the center. Wren chose a corner guard on the left for Maisie. Yellow drew into the middle, and Maisie tried to come around her own guard.

Her second red stayed exposed in the left side of the house.

The Kestrels' second took it out.

Nora removed that yellow, but her shooter went out too. The next yellow drew into the right side. Nora took it out with her second red, and both stones left again.

Piper watched her friends return to the waiting places.

Two good hits. No red in the house.

Cora drew another yellow near the middle, on the other side of the earlier one. Wren asked Piper to remove the new yellow and leave her red.

Piper got the first part.

Her shooter slid away as well.

Cora's next yellow stopped as a guard on the right, outside the rings. It left an open route to the yellow still in the middle.

Piper looked at Wren before her second turn.

"Hit and stay?"

"Yes."

This time Piper's red stayed.

She came down relieved to see it. Then Tamsin removed it with her first yellow.

Piper went to the house for Wren. The stopped yellow was the only stone in the rings. Guards remained outside, but the hit was open.

Wren took it out. Her red stayed.

Tamsin took that red out with her last yellow.

Once again, one yellow sat in the house.

Piper glanced at the scoreboard. Six to four. This was the seventh end, and Wren held their last red.

"Hit and stay for one," she said.

Wren did not answer immediately.

Piper saw her looking at the rings, then the board, then the lone yellow.

"Or hit and go out," Wren said.

Piper's stomach gave a small turn.

They had just spent fifteen deliveries trying to make something useful. She could see a point they might take. It was sitting there, in the space the yellow occupied.

“If we take one, we’re only one behind,” she said.

“And they have last stone in the eighth.”

Piper knew that. She had known it at the table too.

Maisie and Nora came down when Wren asked them. Every stone was still, and the Kestrels waited clear.

“We can use our coaching pause,” Nora said.

They had not used it earlier. Wren requested it, and Jo came to the place agreed before the game.

Piper expected an answer as soon as Jo saw the yellow.

Jo asked what they were considering.

Wren explained both choices. Piper added the part about taking one now. Saying it aloud made it sound reasonable. It was reasonable. That did not settle the decision.

“If we take one,” Jo asked, “what would you need in the last?”

“A steal to tie,” Piper said. “One while they have the hammer.”

“And with a blank?”

“Two to tie. But we’d throw last.”

Wren looked at the target stone.

“I like this hit. I’ve made the roll out in practice.”

“Do we have any other red left inside?” Maisie asked.

Piper checked the whole house. Maisie’s second red had gone. Nora’s shooters had gone. Both Piper’s stones and Wren’s first had gone.

“No.”

Nora looked at the guards. None touched the rings.

They could make a genuine blank if both the yellow and Wren's shooter left the house.

Jo let them choose. She checked that all four understood the plan, then returned to her watching place when the pause ended.

Wren wanted the blank.

Piper still wanted the point. She also knew why Wren wanted last stone in the eighth. The choice would give them one final reply after the Kestrels had finished.

"All right," she said. "Both out. Keep the hammer."

They checked the contact and the aiming target. Piper held the broom.

Wren delivered.

The red came down toward the lone yellow. Maisie and Nora watched, then stayed clear.

Contact.

Yellow went through the back. Red moved across and crossed the side line.

Piper looked around the rings once more.

Empty.

She agreed the blank with Cora. The score did not change.

Then she turned to Wren and nodded.

They had chosen that.

CHAPTER 8

The Eighth End

The Kestrels delivered first again.

Piper watched their lead settle at the hack. After a blank, the same team kept the hammer. Wren would have the final red of the game.

It was a useful thing to have.

Piper wished it felt more like two points already.

Yellow's first stone stopped as a center guard. Wren asked Maisie for a corner guard on the left. Maisie made it, then came down with a serious little nod instead of a joke.

The next yellow reached the front-middle rings, behind its guard.

Maisie drew around her own corner guard. This red curled a little farther in than the one she had left exposed in the seventh. It stopped in the house on the left.

Piper met her glove when she arrived.

"That's there."

"I'd like it to stay there," Maisie said.

The Kestrels' second attempted to reach it. Her yellow caught the corner guard. Both stones stayed in play outside the rings. Maisie's red in the house remained.

Nora's first draw came into the open right side, a little too far from the middle. The next yellow stopped closer on that side.

Wren looked at Nora. There was an open hit on the new yellow.

Nora made it. Her red stayed, nearer the middle than Maisie's left-side red.

Cora removed Nora's shooter.

Piper went to deliver. The yellow in Nora's old place was exposed. She could take it out and leave her own red there.

She settled, looked at Wren's broom and made the hit.

Her shooter stayed.

Coming down, Piper saw three stones inside that mattered most. The Kestrels' early yellow near the front-middle was nearest. Her red was next. Maisie's was farther out on the left.

Cora drew a new yellow nearer than Piper's red, in an open patch on the right.

Two yellows ahead of them again.

Piper heard Wren call her over.

"The new one out," Wren said. "Keep yours if you can."

The yellow was reachable without disturbing the center guard. Piper checked the line.

She made the hit, but her shooter rolled too far and left the house.

Cora's new yellow was gone. The older yellow was still nearest, followed by Piper's first red and Maisie's.

Tamsin drew another yellow nearer than either red.

Piper came to the house for Wren. She felt the end closing around the remaining turns. Both teams had finished their first six deliveries. Tamsin had now added her first stone. Wren still had both of hers.

"We can remove the new one," Piper said.

Wren checked it. "Then see her last."

Piper nodded. She did not try to finish the end in her head.

Wren's first red caught Tamsin's yellow on the nose. Yellow went out. Red stayed, nearest of all.

The Too-Cold Club were counting one.

Piper looked toward Tamsin, who was already studying the house with Cora.

Their blank had kept a last chance for Wren.

It had not taken away the Kestrels' chance before it.

CHAPTER 9

One Stone Left

Tamsin chose the open hit on Wren's red.

Piper stood in the waiting place and watched the yellow come down. She hoped it would miss to the outside. She hoped it would catch too little. She hoped for several things without saying any of them.

The yellow met Wren's red squarely.

Red went out. Yellow stayed nearest.

Piper breathed out through her nose.

Wren came beside her. One red remained to be delivered.

Tamsin's last yellow was nearest. The Kestrels' early front-middle yellow was next. Piper's red was third, with Maisie's farther away and Nora's first draw still farther out on the right.

An open hit on Tamsin's yellow would not make two. If Wren stayed there, her shooter would count, but the earlier yellow would still beat Piper's red.

Piper checked another route. There was room to draw around the center guard and finish nearer than both yellows. That would also score only one. They needed a different result.

Wren crouched to look from the side.

"The two yellows," she said.

Piper followed her broom. Tamsin's last yellow sat a little behind and to one side of the earlier one. A hit on the front yellow at the right angle could send it onto Tamsin's stone.

A double takeout. Two yellows out with one red.

They had practiced open doubles under Jo's eye. Piper had watched Wren make this kind of shot. She had also watched the second yellow stay.

"If both go," Piper said, "mine is next to yours."

"And if mine goes out too, yours and Maisie's can count," Wren said.

They checked. There were no other yellows in the house. Every other yellow from the end had been removed or remained outside the rings.

Two reds would tie the game.

The guard left the angled hit available from the open side. Piper and Wren checked the contact carefully. Maisie and Nora came close enough to hear the plan, then took their places.

Piper held the target.

She wanted to make the whole room quiet for Wren. She could not. Somewhere behind the glass, a chair moved. On another sheet, somebody called.

Wren delivered her red.

It reached the front yellow and struck.

The yellow traveled back toward Tamsin's stone. They touched. Tamsin's yellow moved toward the back of the house.

Keep going, Piper thought.

The front yellow went out. Wren's shooter rolled away and crossed the side line.

Tamsin's yellow slowed in the back rings.

It stayed in the house, farther from the middle than Piper's red, but nearer than Maisie's.

Piper knew before Cora joined her.

One red.

They checked the count together anyway. It was clear.

The Too-Cold Club had scored one. The Kestrels had won six to five.

Piper looked at Wren. Her friend was still coming down the safe side, watching the yellow that had not gone far enough.

Piper walked to meet her.

"I wanted the second one out," Wren said.

"So did I."

They stood together for a moment. Then Maisie and Nora joined them, and the four girls went to shake the Kestrels' hands.

CHAPTER 10

What They Kept

Piper did not want to talk about the blank on the changing bench.

She wanted to remove her shoes, find her ordinary ones and put the score somewhere she did not have to look at it for a minute.

Six to five.

If they had taken one in the seventh, they would have had another point.

The thought arrived before she could stop it.

Then she remembered the eighth end would have been different. The Kestrels would have delivered last. Wren would not have had that final red after Tamsin's hit.

Piper sat with one shoe in each hand.

Maisie looked at her.

"Those usually go on the floor."

Piper set them down.

"I was doing something else."

"I could tell."

Nora sat on her other side. Wren was loosening her helmet strap.

"I still like the blank," Wren said quietly.

Piper turned toward her.

"I don't like the score."

"Neither do I."

They were silent for a little while. Across the room, Cora's bag gave one small squeak.

Piper almost smiled.

When Jo came over, she congratulated them on finishing their first eight-end challenge. Then she asked which part they wanted to talk through while it was fresh.

Piper chose the seventh.

They described what they had known before Wren threw. They were two behind. One end would remain. A blank would leave them throwing last. One point would leave them needing to steal.

“We chose the shot I liked,” Wren said. “And made it.”

“And we got a chance for two in the eighth,” Nora said.

Maisie leaned forward. “We didn’t get the two.”

“No,” Jo said.

Piper was glad she did not try to make that part sound nicer.

“The blank didn’t owe us a win,” Piper said after a moment.

Jo asked whether she would choose it every time there was one yellow and an open hit.

Piper shook her head. “We have to see the score. And what’s left.”

“And what we can make,” Wren added.

They talked about the double too. Wren wanted to work on the contact that would send the first yellow more firmly onto the second. Piper wanted to stand beside her while they chose it, then watch a few from the other end.

Maisie wanted more chances to bring a draw around her corner guard. Nora wanted her right-side draws nearer the middle.

Four people still had work of their own.

Before the visitors left, Tamsin came to their table with Cora.

“That last one nearly got both,” Tamsin said.

“Nearly,” Wren agreed.

“Good game.”

This time Piper could answer without needing to push the words out.

Cora lifted her bag to carry it out. For once, it left quietly.

At home, Ben asked whether she wanted her score sheet put somewhere safe.

“Yes.”

Piper took it to her notebook herself. Eight boxes were filled now. One contained a zero. She knew exactly why it was there.

She did not turn the zero into a star. She did not cross it out either.

On the next page she drew the two yellows from the final end, then called Ben over to show him what had nearly happened.

He listened. When she finished, he asked where she wanted her red to strike.

Piper pointed.

“Here. I want another look at that.”