PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Hardest Call

BOOK FIVE



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

Contents

1 The Club Somewhere Else 1

2 A Different Sort of Echo 5

3 Home Ice for Juno 9

4 The Smallest Touch 13

5 A Stone Comes Out 16

6 Still Four Players 20

7 The Lunch That Waited 25

8 Both Brushes Ready 29

9 The Last Thing Packed 33

Story by Mary Deuhs

AI-generated draft and illustrations

Free digital edition · HouseCall

© 2026 Mary Deuhs. Curling clubs, schools, and families may download, print, and share these free books for noncommercial educational use. Not for resale.

CHAPTER 1

The Club Somewhere Else

Piper had packed one helmet, two shoes, and enough socks for a small expedition.

Dad looked into the open bag.

“How many feet are coming?”

“Two.”

“Are you sure?”

Piper removed a pair of socks. Then she put them back.

This was her first bonspiel away from home. She did not know what the cold would be like at somebody else’s club.

Several practice Saturdays had passed since the home funspiel. Their newspaper still hung on the noticeboard, with the Too-Cold Club’s first win in one square and Granite’s extremely small eyebrows in a bottom corner. Piper sometimes read it while waiting for her friends.

Now their team had entered a junior bonspiel at the Silver Mittens’ club.

There was a registration form. There were starting times. There was a list of visiting teams, and their name was on it.

The home funspiel had been a practice day with visitors. This time they were the visitors, playing in the beginner division of a bigger event.

Piper had liked the sound of that until she began packing.

“Will we know where to go?” she asked.

“We’ll ask at the desk.”

“What if the desk is somewhere different?”

“Then we’ll ask where the desk is.”

Dad sounded prepared for almost any desk emergency.

Piper checked her gloves. At least they were familiar.

That afternoon, the four girls met for their last home practice before the trip. Nora brought the schedule in her notebook. Maisie brought a question.

“Do they have a warm room?”

“Yes,” Granite said.

“How warm?”

“I didn’t request a temperature report.”

“You could have.”

Wren studied the schedule. “We play the Silver Mittens first.”

“Juno,” Piper said.

She could picture the girl with the low bun and the pale stripes on her sleeves. Having one person to recognize made the new club seem closer.

Granite explained the beginner arrangements again. Two games. Four ends each. Two stones per player in an end, alternating with the other team. Their division would use junior stones, shortened lanes, and coaching help, like the games they had been learning at home.

“Other divisions will have different arrangements,” he said. “We’ll follow ours. If a game is tied after four ends, it stays tied.”

In their beginner division, everyone would play all their stones, even if the winner was clear before the last one.

“Do we still play the second game if we lose the first?” Nora asked.

“Yes. Both games are already scheduled.”

Piper liked knowing that their whole visit couldn’t fall off the page after breakfast.

They kept their usual order: Maisie first, Nora second, Piper third, and Wren fourth. Wren would skip. Piper would be vice-skip, taking her place at the house for Wren’s deliveries.

Then they practiced.

There was nothing particularly grand about it. Maisie had to retie a lace on the dry floor. Wren asked Ben to check her gripper. Piper sent a stone farther than she intended and watched it sail past the rings.

“Already on its way,” Maisie said. “Very keen to travel.”

Nora was working on a draw into the front half of the house. Her first stone stopped short. Her next went through. On her third try, Piper and Maisie swept together while Wren called.

The stone reached the rings and settled near their target.

Nora stood looking at it after Jo helped her up and covered her slider.

“That one,” she said.

“You want to do that one tomorrow?” Piper asked.

“I want to remember how it felt.”

Piper knew the feeling. A good shot was always easier to keep in her eyes than in her hands.

When practice ended, Nora added a small drawing to her notebook. Maisie asked what the new club served for lunch. Wren checked the starting time once more.

Piper packed her clean shoes beneath her helmet.

They were taking quite a lot with them already, even before the socks.

CHAPTER 2

A Different Sort of Echo



The new club’s front door was heavier than Piper expected.

Dad held it while she came through with her bag. For a moment, she could see only coats, boots, and the back of someone carrying four brushes.

Then the person turned.

“Wrong way,” said Wren.

Piper stopped.

“I wasn’t going anywhere.”

“I was. The warm room is that way. That door is a cupboard.”

“Did you open it?”

“Yes.”

“What was in it?”

“A very organized mop.”

Maisie appeared behind her. “We’ve already met some of the equipment.”

Nora was with them, holding the schedule. All four names had been checked at the registration desk. An adult volunteer showed them where to leave their coats and which bench their team could use.

The bench had a little crack in one corner. The window above it was wider than the window at home. Somewhere nearby, a clock made a brisk ticking noise, as if it was particularly pleased to be in charge of time.

Piper set her bag down.

There was a lot to notice.

On the wall beside the window hung a copy of BONSPIEL NEWS.

“Our paper!”

Juno came toward them from the next bench.

“I brought mine in. The junior coach put it up.”

Nora stepped close to look. There were the four little squares. The corrected scores. The tiny cup beside Granite.

“Your newspaper got here before you,” Juno said.

“It didn’t need to find a parking space,” Maisie replied.

Juno showed them the warm room, the water station, and the place to put their lunch bags. She pointed out the ice entrances through the glass.

“The far door sticks a bit. An adult will help.”

“Do you have a cupboard?” Wren asked.

Juno blinked.

“We’ve found it,” Wren said. “No further directions needed.”

They laughed. Piper’s shoulders loosened inside her jacket.

When the junior groups gathered, a host coach welcomed everyone. Beyond their beginner lanes, older players were preparing for longer games. Piper watched someone balance neatly at a hack, then remembered to listen.

The coach explained the day’s arrangements and the safe waiting places. Helmets stayed on for their group. Grippers had to be clean and secure. Everyone would walk carefully, keep clear of moving stones, and ask for help when they needed it.

The games had coaches nearby. They were allowed to learn.

“Tell us if a piece of equipment touches a moving stone,” the coach added. “Tell us straightaway, even if nobody else notices. We’ll help apply the rule for where it happened.”

Piper nodded with the others. She had heard the rule during practice.

At home, it had seemed a simple thing to say.

Granite arrived beside Ben and Jo. He wore his usual navy jacket, and his glasses had fogged slightly in the warm room.

“I have found your bench,” he announced.

“We found a mop,” Maisie said.

“I’ll try to improve my report.”

They warmed up on the rubber floor. Nora rolled her shoulders. Wren marched. Maisie made her arm circles smaller when she noticed a parent passing with a cup.

Piper checked her helmet strap with Dad, then checked both grippers. Their bags and notebooks stayed on the bench.

At the ice entrance, she paused.

The rings looked familiar. The ceiling was different. Voices bounced back from places she didn't expect.

Somebody called "Up!" on a distant sheet. Somebody else answered with a laugh.

Juno stood just ahead of her, waiting for the coach's signal.

"One of my teammates went to the wrong bench three times when we visited your club," she said.

"I remember," Piper said. "It nearly went in the paper."

"She's glad it didn't."

Piper grinned.

Then the coach waved them forward, and they stepped carefully onto Juno's ice.

CHAPTER 3

Home Ice for Juno

The stones had different numbers.

Piper knew they would. Nobody had packed the stones from home. Still, she looked for the little speck she liked on number seven before remembering where she was.

This red stone had a dark patch near its handle.

It did not appear to recognize her.

“Do you think they go differently?” she asked Nora.

“We get some practice deliveries,” Nora said. “We can find out.”

The shortened setup looked much like theirs, with a portable junior hack placed by the coaches. Ben and the host helper showed the girls their clear walking route. Jo checked the delivery support. Granite stood at the house with Wren.

Piper’s practice stone went too far. Nora’s stopped short. Maisie made one that nearly reached the middle and looked pleased enough to stay for a week.

Wren watched each delivery.

“A little different,” she said. “We’ll have to keep watching.”

That seemed more useful than asking the stones to behave like the ones at home.

The Silver Mittens wished them good curling. Juno and Wren checked the lineup with the coaches. A coin toss gave the Too-Cold Club the choice, and they took the hammer, the last stone of the opening end. The Silver

Mittens chose yellow handles, leaving red for Piper's team.

Jo would help at the hack. Ben would stay close to the sweepers. Granite and the host coach could help at the house and with any questions.

Maisie delivered first for their team.

Her opening red stopped short. Her second reached the house.

"Settling in," she said when she came to the waiting place.

Piper wanted to settle in that neatly.

Nora's first stone passed the target. Her second stayed in the outer ring. When Piper took her turns, Maisie and Nora swept while Wren called.

One red wandered sideways. The next stayed near the front of the house, farther from the button than a yellow.

Piper went to the house for Wren's deliveries. Her voice sounded smaller beneath the new ceiling.

"Here," she called, holding the target with Granite nearby.

Wren put a hand beside her ear.

Piper tried again.

"Here!"

Wren nodded.

Her last red curled into the house and stopped closest. When the teams agreed on the score, it was one for the Too-Cold Club.

Maisie gave Wren a gloved fist to bump after they came together safely.

"We can play somewhere else," she said.

Piper smiled. Of course they could. She had known it on the way there.

Knowing it on the ice felt better.

Yellow had the hammer in the second end. This time, the Silver Mittens found the better places.

Juno made a good draw. An earlier yellow was close too. At the end, two yellow stones were nearer the button than any red.

Two to one for the Silver Mittens.

Nora stood beside Piper while the coaches helped prepare for the next end.

“My second one was nearly like yesterday’s.”

Piper remembered it. They had swept as it approached the rings, then Wren called them up. It had traveled farther than Nora wanted, but the line had been good.

“It was,” Piper said.

“I’d like to try that same sort of shot again.”

“You probably will.”

They took a short drink break off the ice. Through the glass, Juno was pointing out something to one of her teammates. She looked comfortable here, in the way Piper usually felt at home.

Piper wondered whether Juno ever worried that her team expected too much of her.

Then Maisie held up her water bottle.

“I found the warm room without Wren’s help.”

“It has windows,” Wren said.

“And a severe shortage of mops.”

Piper laughed into her cup. Water tried to go up her nose.

By the time they returned to the ice, the new club had begun to contain some of their own noises.

CHAPTER 4

The Smallest Touch

The Too-Cold Club had the hammer again because yellow had scored.

Piper and Nora stood ready to sweep for Maisie. Wren chose a broad target in the front of the house. Maisie nodded from the hack.

Her first stone slid along the open ice, then slowed before the rings.

“Up,” Wren called.

Piper lifted her brush to the side. Nora did the same.

The stone stopped short.

Maisie’s second traveled through the house and out the back. She came to join Piper for Nora’s turn, pursing her lips.

“I have tried both wrong distances.”

“There are more,” Piper said.

“Don’t tell me. I’ll find them myself.”

They waited while the Silver Mittens delivered. A yellow stone settled in the inner part of the house. It was a good one, clear of the red that had stopped in front.

Nora’s first stone missed to the side.

From the waiting place, she studied the rings. Piper could see her thinking about the practice draw. Nora looked from the yellow stone to the open space beside it.

Wren checked a target with Granite, then showed Nora.

There was room to come nearer the button.

The next yellow stopped farther out. Now it was Nora's second turn, the Too-Cold Club's fourth stone of the end.

Piper set her hands on her brush. Maisie stood on the other side, with Ben nearby.

Ready.

Nora settled at the hack. She looked up at Wren's broom, then began.

The red stone came toward them at a steady speed. Piper walked alongside, watching the little space in front of it. She knew this part. She and Maisie had swept so many stones together now that their steps sometimes matched without trying.

"Looks close," Maisie called.

Wren watched the line.

"Sweep!"

Their brushes began to move.

Piper could hear the bristles and her own breathing. The stone passed completely beyond the far hog line, the line across the ice before the house they were aiming for.

It was slowing. The open patch of rings waited just ahead.

"Keep going!" Wren called.

Piper made another stroke. She brought the brush back a little too close.

Its edge tapped the side of the moving stone.

A tiny sound. A tiny bump through her hands.

She knew she had touched it.

The red kept sliding. Maisie's eyes were on the ice ahead. Wren was watching the line. From the hack, Nora was already smiling.

Perhaps nobody else had noticed.

If Piper said it, Nora's good stone might come out. Her friends might be angry. What if this was the reason they lost?

The thought flashed through her before the red handle had finished another turn.

"I touched it!" Piper called.

Her voice cracked. She moved her brush safely away from the stone.

"I burned it. My brush touched it."

Maisie lifted her brush clear too. Ben guided them out of the path.

"Let it finish," the host coach said calmly.

Piper did not reach for it.

She watched the red stone curl into the house without touching another stone. It slowed in the open space, nearer the button than the yellow.

Then it stopped.

Nora's smile had gone.

Piper held her brush so tightly that her gloves wrinkled around the handle.

She had wanted that stone to be good for Nora.

Now she could hardly see it properly.

CHAPTER 5

A Stone Comes Out

For a moment, nobody moved any stones.

The house looked almost exactly as Piper had hoped it would. Nora's red was closest. Yellow lay farther out.

But the touch had happened.

The host coach came beside the house. Granite stayed near Piper and Maisie.

"Where was the stone when your brush touched it?" the coach asked.

"Past the far hog line," Piper said. "Before the rings."

She pointed without stepping into the house.

"And did it move any other stones?"

"No."

The coach looked at the other players, who agreed. Everything had stopped now.

"Juno, this choice belongs to your team," the coach said. "For contact here, you may have that red removed, with any displaced stones put back. Or keep the finished positions. Or put affected stones where you reasonably think they would have stopped without the touch."

Piper stared at the red.

There were choices. She wanted very badly for Juno to choose the one that left it there.

Juno spoke quietly with her teammates. Then she returned to Wren and the coach.

"We'd like the touched stone taken out."

Wren nodded. "Okay."

The coach confirmed the decision. No other stones needed moving back. Once everyone was clear, he slid the red safely out of play.

Its place in the house became empty.

Piper's throat hurt.

"Thank you for telling us," Juno said.

Piper nodded because she couldn't trust her voice.

Granite came a little closer.

"Would you like a moment at the side?"

She nodded again.

They walked carefully to the waiting place. Ben stayed with the girls while the host coach checked that both teams were ready to pause. Nobody was hurrying them.

A tear slipped down beside Piper's nose. She wiped it with the back of her glove, which was not a very good handkerchief.

"I'm sorry," she said when Nora joined them.

Nora looked toward the empty patch in the rings.

"I thought it was going to be a good one."

"I know."

Piper wished Nora had said anything else. She wished she could give her the stone back without giving everyone a secret too.

"I was trying to help it."

"I know that as well," Nora said.

Maisie stood beside Piper. For once, she didn't have a joke ready.

"I didn't see the touch," she said.

"It was my brush."

"I believe you."

Piper looked down at it. She had never particularly disliked a brush before.

Wren came over after checking the decision with Juno. She stopped in front of Piper, holding her own broom against her jacket.

“You did the right thing.”

“But we had the closest stone.”

“I wanted it to stay too,” Wren said. “But it was Juno’s team’s choice.”

Piper swallowed. Her friends were all looking at her. She had expected their faces to be different now.

“You’re not mad?”

Nora took a moment before answering.

“I’m disappointed about my shot,” she said. “I wanted to see where it would go. But I’m glad you told.”

Piper looked at Nora’s hands. They were still holding her brush the same way.

“Okay,” Piper whispered.

Maisie moved her brush to her other hand.

“I’d rather lose than win because we kept a secret,” she said. “Even a very small secret with a red handle.”

Piper made a sound that was half a laugh. Another tear arrived anyway.

Wren glanced toward the house. “We can still play. When you’re ready.”

Granite held out a clean tissue from his jacket pocket. Piper took it gratefully.

“Coaching equipment,” he said.

She wiped her nose properly this time.

There was still a little ache in her chest. The empty place in the rings had not filled itself.

But Maisie was waiting beside her. Wren had gone to check their next target. Nora touched Piper’s sleeve before returning to her place.

“Come on,” she said. “Your stones next.”

CHAPTER 6

Still Four Players



Piper’s first delivery after the pause stopped short.

She had remembered her feet. She had looked at Wren’s broom. Her hand had finished softly.

It was still short.

Jo helped her stand and checked that her slider was covered before she walked away.

Piper wanted to say sorry again.

Then Maisie pointed at the stone.

“Mine has company.”

Their two short reds waited in front of the house, nowhere near close enough to count.

Piper let out a small breath.

She could miss an ordinary shot. The whole team did not need an apology every time.

Her next red reached the rings. It stopped farther from the button than the nearest yellow, but closer than the other yellows.

Nora and Maisie had swept it. Wren had called.

Piper watched Nora walk carefully toward the waiting place afterward. There was no terrible look on her face. She was rubbing her cold fingers together inside her gloves.

When Wren delivered, Piper took her place at the house.

The first target she chose needed moving a little. Granite helped her see the clearer path. She set the broom again.

Wren looked toward her.

Piper gave a small nod.

There was work that needed her voice, even while it felt wobbly.

The teams kept taking turns. The Silver Mittens tried to improve their position, but their later yellows did not finish nearer than Piper's red. Wren's first stone stopped short. After the final yellow, she sent the last red into the outer part of the rings.

At the end, the yellow that had been closest after Nora's stone came out was still closest.

One yellow point.

The Silver Mittens led three to one, with one end left.

Piper followed her friends off the ice for a short water break. She sat on the bench beneath the newspaper.

Nobody began talking immediately.

At last, she said the part that still felt stuck.

“For a second, I didn’t want to tell.”

Maisie looked at her.

“I thought you might all be cross if we lost.”

Nora held her cup between her hands. Wren leaned forward, elbows on her knees.

“Did you think we’d want you to hide it?” Wren asked.

Piper looked down.

“When you say it that way, no.”

“But in your head?”

“In my head it was very loud.”

Maisie nodded slowly. “My head does that.”

Piper picked at the edge of her glove.

“I still nearly kept quiet.”

“You told while it was moving,” Nora said. “We heard you.”

The clock ticked above them. Somewhere on the other side of the room, a spoon fell onto the floor with a clatter.

Piper had been waiting for somebody to discover the bad thought and change their mind about her.

Her friends already knew it now.

“When you stopped smiling,” she told Nora, “I thought you were wishing somebody else had swept.”

Nora shook her head.

“I was thinking about yesterday. I wanted you all to see me do that shot again.”

“We saw the start,” Maisie said. “It looked good.”

“I wanted the whole thing.”

“I know,” Piper said.

Nora looked at her cup. “I didn’t know what to say when it came out. That doesn’t mean I wanted you to keep quiet.”

Piper turned that over in her head. She had seen Nora’s face and decided she knew everything behind it. She had been wrong.

“You can tell me if you’re upset,” she said.

“I did.”

“You did.” Piper gave a small, embarrassed smile. “I’m catching up.”

Wren stood up and reached for her helmet.

“I want to play the last end.”

“So do I,” Nora said.

Maisie looked at Piper. “Four of us?”

Piper set down her cup.

“Four.”

They checked their gear and returned to the ice. Red kept the hammer because yellow had scored again.

Piper swept carefully for Maisie. For Nora, she let Maisie take the space nearer the moving stone while she kept the distance Ben had shown her. They listened to Wren’s calls together.

The brushes stayed clear.

Later, Piper’s second delivery settled close to the button. A yellow lay farther out. When Wren came to play, there was a chance to add another red for a tie.

Piper held the target.

She wanted Wren to make it. She wanted all sorts of things.

The final red traveled on a good line but stopped short of the rings.

Piper watched until it was still.

Only her red counted. One point for the Too-Cold Club.

The game ended three to two for the Silver Mittens.

There was no way to know how all the later shots would have gone if Nora's stone had stayed. Piper could invent a different ending in her head, but nobody had played that game.

They had played this one.

She shook Juno's hand.

"Good curling."

Her voice came out clearly.

"Good curling," Juno said.

Then Nora held out her own hand, and Maisie followed, and Wren.

Piper stayed beside them until everyone was finished.

CHAPTER 7

The Lunch That Waited



Piper’s sandwich had become rather flat.

She unwrapped it at the warm-room table and inspected the middle.

“My apple sat on it.”

“A serious packing error,” Maisie said. “Apples can’t be trusted with bread.”

Nora moved her lunch bag to make room. Wren set four water bottles along the edge of the table, far from everyone’s elbows.

Piper sat down with her friends.

She had imagined lunch differently. Before the trip, she had pictured them talking about their good shots, perhaps saying how easy it was to play away from home.

She had not pictured a used tissue in her pocket.

Juno came over with two of the Silver Mittens. They asked if they could join the table.

Piper moved her bag off a chair.

For a moment, she felt awkward. Juno had chosen to take their stone out. Piper had spent several unhappy seconds wishing she would choose something else.

Now Juno was trying to open a banana with one hand while holding her drink in the other.

“Put the drink down,” Wren suggested.

“I keep thinking I can do it.”

“You can also use the table.”

Juno looked at the table as if it had just arrived. Then she set down her cup, and everyone laughed.

They talked about the new club’s benches and the door that stuck. One Silver Mitten had brought two left gloves, which nobody noticed until she put them on. They had found a spare pair at the desk.

Piper slowly ate her squashed sandwich.

Juno wasn’t avoiding her. Neither were her teammates. The game had finished, and they were having lunch together.

After a while, Piper said, “I hoped you’d let the red stay.”

Juno stopped peeling her banana.

“I know.”

“I know you were allowed to take it out.”

“Our team thought we should,” Juno said. “We couldn’t tell what the touch changed.”

Piper nodded. She couldn’t tell either. She only knew what her hands had felt.

“It was still hard watching it go.”

Juno glanced at Nora.

“I’m sorry your shot came out.”

“Me too,” Nora said. “I’d like another go at that draw this afternoon.”

“Who are you playing?”

“The Pinecones,” Wren said. “On the same beginner lane.”

Juno pointed toward a table near the window. “They’re over there. Ada’s their skip. She has the orange bottle.”

Maisie looked over.

“Do they know where the cupboard is?”

“Probably. It’s been a very popular door today.”

Piper smiled. She took another bite.

The afternoon game was beginning to feel like a real thing again, instead of a long time she would have to spend remembering the morning.

After the Silver Mittens left to collect their gear, Nora opened her little notebook. She showed Piper the drawing from yesterday’s practice.

“I’m keeping it.”

“You should.”

“I know. I mean, I don’t have to cross it out because of today.”

Piper studied the penciled stone. Nora had made a small arrow beside it, showing where she wanted the next one to go.

"I'm sorry I touched yours."

Nora nodded.

"I know," she said. "Will you sweep for me again?"

Piper's stomach tightened.

"What if I do it again?"

"We can ask Ben to check our spacing first," Nora said. "I still want you there."

Maisie leaned in from the other side.

"I want him to watch mine too. I was getting crowded near the rings."

Wren closed her lunch bag. "And I want everyone to hear my calls. Including me."

Piper looked around the table. Each of her friends had something she wanted to work on.

She wasn't being sent away to become a different, mistake-free Piper before she could join them again.

"Okay," she said. "Let's ask."

CHAPTER 8

Both Brushes Ready

Before the second game, Ben watched them practice their sweeping steps on a clear, unused patch of ice, with no stone moving.

They had warmed up and checked their helmets and grippers again. The other coach kept the space clear while Ben helped Piper and Maisie find room for both brushes.

“A little farther apart,” he said. “You don’t need to crowd each other to help.”

Piper tried the movement slowly. Her brush finished out to the side.

Maisie adjusted her feet.

Wren called, “Up!”

Both brushes lifted safely away.

“Again?” Piper asked.

They tried it once more. Then Nora swapped places with Maisie so they could check their other pairing.

No one was making a speech about it. They were moving their feet and brushes, seeing what worked.

Piper liked that.

The Pinecones came to greet them. Ada, their skip, set her orange bottle on the bench before stepping onto the ice. She and Wren checked the score sheet with the coach.

The Pinecones won the coin toss and chose the hammer. The Too-Cold Club chose red handles again and would deliver first.

Piper wished the other team good curling. Then she went to sweep for Maisie, with Nora beside her and Ben close by.

Maisie's first stone stopped just inside the house.

It didn't stay closest. The Pinecones made two good yellows later in the end, both nearer than the reds. They scored two.

Piper was disappointed. So was Maisie, who had liked the look of her first stone very much.

They still had three ends to play.

Red had the hammer in the second. Nora's first delivery came toward Piper and Maisie along a clear path.

Piper felt her fingers tighten on the brush.

Then she checked her space. Maisie was where they had practiced. Ben was nearby. Wren's voice came from the house.

"Sweep!"

Piper put her brush down.

She kept her steps steady, watching the ice in front of the stone. The bristles worked beside Maisie's. She could hear their two different swishing sounds.

"Up!"

They finished to the sides and lifted clear.

Nora's red curled into the front half of the house. It stopped near the place she had been trying to reach.

Piper turned toward the hack.

Nora was smiling.

This time, Piper could smile back without anything stuck behind it.

Later deliveries came and went. Some stayed in the house, but none finished closer than Nora's red. When the end was complete, it counted for one.

Two to one for the Pinecones.

Nora came beside Piper at the waiting place.

"That one felt like it," she said.

"Yesterday's?"

Nora nodded.

Piper held up her glove. Nora bumped it.

The third end began with yellow holding the hammer. Maisie's second red found a good place near the middle. Piper and Nora had swept it together. Wren had called them up just in time.

"I shall visit it after the game," Maisie said. "Bring it flowers."

"You can't leave flowers on the ice," Wren told her.

"Then a strongly worded thank-you."

The Pinecones tried to get closer. So did Piper and Wren. Nobody managed it. Ada's final yellow went through the house, leaving Maisie's red nearest.

One more for the Too-Cold Club.

Two each, with one end left. Yellow kept the hammer because red had scored.

Piper glanced at the board. A win was still possible. She wanted one.

But she no longer felt as though she had to bring one back from the house before her friends could be pleased she had come.

The last end belonged to the Pinecones. Their third player put a yellow close to the button. Wren's final red was her team's nearest, but it stayed farther out.

Ada still had the last stone. It came into the rings and stopped nearer than Wren's red too.

Two yellow points. Four to two for the Pinecones.

Piper let herself sigh.

Maisie sighed beside her.

"Both games," Maisie said.

"I know."

They had lost both games on their first trip away.

They shook hands with the Pinecones. Nora told Ada she liked the last draw. Ada thanked her, then complimented Maisie's stone from the third end.

Maisie brightened.

"It's expecting flowers," she said.

Ada looked puzzled.

"It has been a long day," Wren explained.

CHAPTER 9

The Last Thing Packed

By the time Piper changed into her outdoor shoes, she was hungry again.

This seemed unreasonable. Lunch had happened. She had evidence: the empty wrapper in her bag and a small amount of apple juice on her sleeve.

Maisie said curling used up sandwiches quickly.

Wren said the afternoon snack table was still open.

That was the most useful thing anyone had said for several minutes.

The girls left their bags neatly under the bench and joined Nora at a table by the window. She had found four chairs together. There was a plate of crackers in the middle and enough space for their cups.

Granite came over with the checked game sheet.

“Would you like to see it before I hand it in?”

Wren read the names and scores. Three to two for the Silver Mittens. Four to two for the Pinecones.

“That’s right,” she said.

Piper looked too.

The numbers were ordinary numbers again. They couldn’t show how hard it had been to open her mouth beside Nora’s moving stone. They couldn’t show the feeling of being asked to sweep again.

They did show who had won the games.

That belonged on the sheet as well.

Granite took it to the desk.

Nora crunched a cracker. “I’m glad we came.”

“Me too,” Wren said.

Maisie nodded. “Although I think we should be allowed to bring our own sandwich-flattening apple next time.”

Piper smiled, then looked down at her cup.

“I’m glad now.”

Nora waited.

“In the morning, after the touch, I wanted to be at home,” Piper said. “Somewhere nobody was looking at me.”

“You could have asked for a longer break,” Wren said.

“I know. I don’t mean that. I wanted to go back to before I did it.”

Maisie rested her chin on one hand.

“That would be a very useful bus.”

“A busy one,” Nora said.

Piper laughed. She could imagine the queue.

Juno stopped beside their table with her jacket over one arm. She asked how the afternoon game had gone.

“We lost,” Piper said. “Nora made her draw.”

“And Maisie scored in the third,” Wren added.

Juno smiled at them. “Are you coming to another one?”

The four girls looked at one another.

“We’ll ask our parents and the coaches,” Nora said.

“I’d like to,” Piper said.

There. She had said that easily.

Juno waved goodbye and went to find the rest of the Silver Mittens.

At the next table, a family was trying to fit a helmet into a bag already full of boots. Piper watched for a moment.

“Boots first,” she murmured.

“What?” Maisie asked.

“Nothing. I’ve been studying bags.”

This gave Maisie an idea. She began the old memory game where everybody had to remember what the others had packed.

“I’m going curling, and in my bag I’m packing a brush.”

Nora added gloves. Wren added a helmet. Piper added her extra socks.

On the next round, Maisie packed an elephant.

“A small one,” she said, before Wren could object.

Nora added a notebook for the elephant. Wren added a chair for whoever had to wait while Maisie packed it.

Piper tried to repeat the list. Halfway through, she forgot the gloves.

“Can I start again?”

“Yes,” Nora said.

Piper began again. Brush. Gloves. Helmet. Socks. Elephant. Notebook. Chair.

“And a very small coach,” she finished.

Granite had returned from the desk. He looked at the four girls, then at Piper’s bag beneath the window.

“I require a window seat.”

“There’s an elephant in it,” Maisie told him.

“Then I require a different bag.”

Wren began to laugh. Nora followed. Maisie tried to explain the seating arrangements and couldn’t finish.

Piper laughed with them until she had to put down her cup.

For a while, nobody remembered whose turn it was.

Piper leaned forward, still laughing.

“Start again,” she said. “The elephant forgot its gloves.”