PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

# Piper and the Impossible Saturday

BOOK EIGHT



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

# A Face in the Sky

Maisie's kite looked worried.

It had broad stripes, two round eyes, and a little straight mouth. Every time it tipped sideways, it seemed to have remembered something terrible.

"The bath is still running," Wren said.

"The toast has escaped," said Nora.

"It left its trousers on a bus," Piper said.

Maisie considered the striped diamond floating above them.

"It hasn't got trousers."

"Exactly."

The four girls were in a big open field with Ben. Summer was nearly over, but the grass was still dry enough to sit on, and Piper's curling bag was still in the cupboard at home.

They had seen one another during the summer. There had been games at Piper's house, afternoons outside, and one visit when they had spent a surprisingly long time looking for a beetle that was on Nora's sleeve.

Today Maisie had brought her kite.

Ben had checked the weather and chosen a clear part of the field, well away from roads, trees, power lines, and other people. He had helped Maisie get it into the air. Now she stood beside him with the chunky winder in her hands.

Its single line slanted upward. The plain ribbon tail flicked below the stripes.

Piper had expected the kite to look smaller up there. Instead, the whole patch of sky around it seemed larger.

“Can I have a turn?” she asked.

“When we bring it down,” Maisie said. “Ben’s helping with that bit.”

They brought the kite down before changing over. Ben wound the line away.

Piper held the striped kite gently by its two side corners while Ben checked the winder. Up close, the face looked even more worried.

Then Ben helped with the next launch while Piper held the winder.

There was a small tug in her hands.

“Oh.”

The striped face rose. It leaned left, straightened, and stayed there, its tail making quick little movements.

Piper kept both feet planted in the grass. Ben stood beside her. She could feel the kite through the winder even when she looked away from it for a moment.

It was like having something to hold that was also in the sky.

“Now it’s forgotten its name,” Nora said.

“Stanley,” said Maisie.

“Has it always been Stanley?”

“Since you asked.”

Piper watched Stanley for a while. She liked the tiny changes. A twitch of the tail. A lean. A small, steady pull that became a little stronger, then softened again.

When it was Nora’s turn, Piper wanted more time.

She gave the winder back to Ben anyway.

Later, with the kite safely down and the line wound away, they sat beside their bags for a snack. Wren had found a dry bit of grass stuck inside her sock. She held it up as though it had arrived by invitation.

“Visitor,” she said.

Maisie took a folded leaflet from her bag.

“There’s a kite afternoon after curling starts again. At the recreation hall. You make one, then they help you fly it in the field.”

Piper leaned closer. The picture showed a row of little diamond-shaped kites.

“Do you get to keep it?”

“Yes.”

“Can you put your own face on it?”

“Whose face were you thinking of borrowing?” Wren asked.

Piper nudged her shoulder.

“I mean draw one.”

Ben read the leaflet. He said he would check the details when the booking opened.

“I want to go,” Maisie said. “I’ve never made the kite part.”

Piper looked at Stanley lying beside the bag. One of its painted eyes was hidden by its own tail.

“I want to make one that looks sideways,” she said. “As if it knows something.”

“What?” Nora asked.

“I haven’t decided what it knows.”

On the way home, Piper kept thinking about the tug in her hands.

She wanted another turn. A long one, with a kite whose face she had drawn herself.

CHAPTER 2

# The Extra Afternoon



By the third Saturday of the new curling season, Piper's bag was back beside the door.

A small piece of summer grass had come out of it on the first morning. Piper had no idea how it had got in there.

Dad said grass was very good at visiting.

Before the season started, the grown-ups had checked that everyone's helmet and shoes still fitted. They had inspected the grippers and the rest of the equipment too. Now Jo checked straps while Ben made sure the grippers were clean and secure.

Piper finished her warm-up with the others. Through the glass, she could see Pebble at the side of the ice.

His gray hair stuck up a little at the back. He looked over when Maisie waved.

“Good morning,” he said. “Your lane’s ready.”

“So are most of my feet,” Maisie told him.

Pebble looked down at them.

“Bring both.”

They went out to the familiar shortened setup. The junior stones waited in their places. Jo reminded them of the clear routes and the release cue for this practice, then watched them take turns.

Piper had not forgotten how to curl during the summer.

She had also not become somebody who put every stone exactly where she wanted it.

Her first draw stopped toward the back of the house. Her next finished nearer the middle, with Maisie and Nora sweeping and Wren calling from the rings.

Piper liked the moment when her hand let go and the stone carried on by itself.

She liked watching her friends go with it too.

When Nora delivered, Piper swept beside Maisie. When Maisie delivered, Piper and Nora worked together. Later, Piper went to the house for Wren’s turn, holding the target broom where they had agreed.

Wren’s stone came toward the front of the rings.

“Sweep,” Piper called.

Maisie and Nora bent over their brushes. Ben watched nearby.

“Up!”

The stone slowed into the house. It was farther to one side than Wren had wanted, but the distance was good.

“Again from there?” Piper asked when everyone was clear.

“Please.”

They had time for another try.

After practice, Jo brought a notice into the warm room. Granite came beside her, his white eyebrows nearly meeting as he inspected it.

“Two Saturdays from today,” Jo said. “An extra afternoon for anyone who wants more time on draws and guards.”

Piper stopped pulling off her glove.

“Guards like the one in front of Nora’s stone?”

“Exactly. Putting a stone in front of the house on purpose, instead of finding it there by surprise.”

Granite raised an eyebrow.

“Surprise is already very popular.”

Piper remembered her good guard from last season’s six-end game. She could picture it sitting in front of the rings, helping even though it couldn’t score a point there.

She wanted to make another when she meant to.

Jo explained the afternoon. There would be two blocks on the ice with a proper rest between, and some time off the ice looking at simple shot choices. Extra rests were fine too. Other club coaches would help. Everyone would use the suitable junior setup and stones they knew.

“It’s an individual workshop,” she said. “You sign up for yourself. Our normal team practice stays in the morning.”

Nora moved closer to the notice.

“I want more tries at stopping in front. Mine keep coming into the rings.”

“I’d like the choosing part,” Wren said. “Sometimes I know where I want a guard. Sometimes I’m not sure why I want one.”

Granite nodded. “We can look at a few plain examples.”

Maisie read the date.

“Oh.”

Piper followed her finger.

It was the kite Saturday.

She checked the number again, in case she had read the line above it. She hadn’t.

“One until half past three,” Wren read.

“That’s when the kites are,” Maisie said.

Piper looked from the date to the words DRAWS AND GUARDS.

For several weeks she had been waiting for the kite afternoon to get closer.

Now it had arrived on top of something else.

CHAPTER 3

# A Saturday in Two Pieces

At home, Piper put the kite leaflet beside the curling notice on the kitchen table.

They were different sizes. That seemed unhelpful. If they were the same size, perhaps she could stack them and work something out.

Dad sat beside her with his phone.

“Neither booking is made yet,” he said. “Let’s look.”

“The kites start at one. Curling starts at one.”

“And both finish at half past three.”

Piper put a finger on each sheet.

“We could do the first half of one and the second half of the other.”

“That’s worth checking.”

Dad opened the full programmes. The kite afternoon began with getting the kits, decorating them, putting them together with the helpers, and having them checked. They would go out to fly at quarter past two. Flying finished at quarter past three, leaving time to put everything away.

Piper tapped the first part.

“We make the kite. Then we go to curling.”

Dad looked at the journey between the hall and the club. He counted getting packed, driving, and changing back into curling things too.

“About forty minutes from leaving the kite table to being ready at the rink. We shouldn’t plan on less.”

Piper waited while he checked the workshop.

Its first ice block ran from twenty past one until five past two. After a rest, the second ran from twenty-five past two until ten past three. The last twenty minutes were for putting equipment away and talking through what they had tried.

"If we left the kite table at quarter past two," Dad said, "you'd be ready for about the final fifteen minutes on the ice."

Piper looked at the leaflet.

"And I wouldn't fly the kite."

"Not in their flying session."

"But I'd have made it."

"Yes."

She imagined carrying a finished kite past everyone who was about to use theirs.

"What if we did curling first?"

"Then we'd miss making the kite with the group. They need everyone there at the start for the kits and safety talk."

Piper rubbed a thumb along the fold in the leaflet.

"Could we drive faster?"

"We'll drive at the proper speed."

She had known that answer before asking.

Dad set his phone down. "The bits we can fit aren't the bits you wanted."

Piper pictured her friends on the ice. Then she pictured Stanley's tail twitching against the sky.

"Do they do the kite one the next day?"

"No. That group is visiting for this afternoon only."

There was no second draw-and-guard afternoon on the club notice either.

Piper leaned back in her chair.

"Saturday needs to be longer."

"On that we agree."

"Or I need another me."

"Would the other one put her shoes away?"

"Probably not."

Dad nodded gravely. "Then we should think carefully before ordering one."

Piper smiled, but only a little.

On the curling sheet, she could see the words EXTRA PRACTICE. She wanted the extra practice. She wanted to find out whether her next guard would stop where she asked it to.

On the kite leaflet, the little diamonds seemed to be leaving the page.

"Which one do you think?" she asked.

"I can take you to either. You've got a few days to decide before we book."

Piper left both papers on the table. She went to put her shoes away before Dad could ask the other Piper.

When she came back, neither afternoon had moved.

CHAPTER 4

# Four Names

The next Saturday, Nora found a tiny pebble in the bottom of her outdoor shoe.

“Summer,” she said, tipping it into her hand.

“Mine was grass,” Piper told her.

“My shoe’s empty,” said Wren.

Maisie looked inside hers.

“I’ve got a sock.”

“That’s supposed to be there.”

“So I’m doing very well.”

They changed, warmed up, and went to practice. There were ordinary things to do. Maisie wanted another turn from her in-between starting place during the individual block. Nora asked Jo to watch her farther start. The coaches arranged and checked the practice positions while everybody waited clear.

Piper worked on keeping her beginning smooth. One stone went farther than she meant. Another did what she had hoped.

During team practice they returned to their common short setup. Wren asked Piper to move the target broom a little for her next delivery. Piper moved it and looked back for her nod.

All through practice, next Saturday waited at the edge of Piper’s thoughts.

Afterward, the girls sat on the warm-room bench with their bags.

“I’m doing kites,” Maisie said. “My grown-up’s booking today.”

"Even if I do the workshop?" Piper asked.

"Yes. I want to make the face with the enormous mouth."

Maisie opened her own mouth to demonstrate.

Nora looked inside it.

"You've already got one."

Maisie shut it again.

"A spare."

Wren was choosing the curling workshop. So was Nora.

"I asked Jo about the pictures," Wren said. "We get to move little stones around and say which shot we'd try."

"I want my guards to stay guards," Nora said. "At least some of them."

Piper pulled her bag closer with her foot.

Neither of them sounded as if she was waiting to see what Piper would do.

Maisie took a drink. Wren folded her gloves. Nora was trying to make the knot in her bag's cord lie flat.

Piper could have the ice afternoon. She could picture arriving with Nora and Wren after lunch, putting her helmet on again, and having extra turns while Jo watched.

She could also picture holding her own kite.

The wanting had not sorted itself into one neat pile.

Jo came over with Dad while the other grown-ups were gathering their things.

"Have you decided about next week?" Dad asked.

Piper looked at Maisie, then at the notice.

"I want the kite afternoon."

"Right," Dad said. "I'll book your place."

Jo made a note beside Nora's and Wren's names after their grown-ups confirmed.

"I'll see all four of you at normal practice that morning," she said. "Then these two again after lunch."

Nora gave a small pleased nod.

"Tell me if you get a really good guard," Piper said.

"I will."

Maisie leaned closer to Piper.

"Have you decided what your kite knows?"

"No."

"Mine will ask it very loudly."

Dad finished Piper's booking before they left the club. Maisie's place was booked too. The two girls stood by the window while the adults checked transport and meeting times.

Outside, a leaf skittered along the pavement.

Piper watched it until it stopped.

She hoped some of that wind would turn up next Saturday.

CHAPTER 5

# One Enormous Mouth



The following Saturday, Piper went curling in the morning and made a kite in the afternoon.

Between them came lunch, a change of shoes, and Dad asking whether the thing in her pocket was food.

“It’s my drawing,” she said.

“Oh. It’s very folded.”

The recreation hall smelled of paper and the warm rubber feet on its folding tables. Families were taking seats beside bags of kite parts. Through the far windows, Piper could see the open field.

Maisie waved from a table.

“I saved you the side without a wobble.”

Piper put down her bag and tried the chair.

It wobbled.

“Oh,” Maisie said. “I may have saved you the wobble.”

Dad found a steady chair, then sat at the end of their table. He was staying with both girls for the afternoon, as the grown-ups had arranged.

An organiser named Sal welcomed everyone. She and the other helpers had prepared the small kits. Each would make a single-line diamond kite, with its own winder and ribbon tail.

They would decorate the flat sails first. Paint pots, brushes, and crayons stood between the kits. Then the helpers would assist with the frames, tails, and lines and check everything before anyone went outside.

“Small drawings or large drawings?” Maisie asked.

“Either.”

Maisie looked delighted.

Piper unfolded her pocket drawing. The face had survived, although one eye was in a crease.

She wanted two big round eyes looking toward one side. Above one eye she had drawn a high eyebrow.

Underneath was a little crooked mouth.

Maisie studied it.

“It knows who ate the biscuits.”

“Does it?”

“It’s looking at your dad.”

Dad looked up from the kit instructions.

“Biscuit inspection. Very important work.”

Piper drew the eyes on her pale kite sail. She made them bigger than the ones on the folded paper. There was room.

Beside her, Maisie was drawing an enormous oval mouth.

It took most of the lower half of her kite.

“Where will its chin go?” Piper asked.

“It won’t need one.”

Maisie added two little dot eyes above the mouth. Then she began coloring the oval dark, leaving one white square tooth at the bottom.

Piper tried to make her own mouth look crooked in the same way as her drawing.

The first line came out nearly straight.

She paused with the brush in the air.

“More at that end,” Maisie suggested.

Piper added a tiny bit.

Now it looked as though the kite was keeping a secret from its own eyebrow.

“There.”

Sal stopped by to check their work and help with the next stage. Dad held a piece steady while Piper pressed it into place. The frame was already cut to the right size; there was no need for Piper to wrestle with long sticks or scissors.

Maisie lifted a finger.

A little square of tape lifted with it.

She touched it with her other hand. It moved to that finger.

“My kite has given me a job.”

“What job?”

“Tape.”

Dad held out a scrap for her to stick it on. Maisie looked at her freed fingers with relief.

They chose ribbon tails with three plain bows apiece. Sal helped attach them and checked the little kites, including the single lines on their handled winders.

Piper set hers flat on the table. From this direction, the sideways eyes looked directly at Maisie’s open mouth.

“Yours is asking the question now,” Piper said.

“WHO ATE THE BISCUITS?” Maisie whispered as loudly as a whisper could go.

Dad turned a page of the instructions.

“I inspected them very thoroughly.”

Piper glanced up at the hall clock. It was after half past one.

Nora and Wren would be on the ice now. Piper could imagine Nora taking her time at the hack and Wren looking carefully at the place she meant to stop.

For a moment, she wished she could see them.

“Can you hold this corner?” Maisie asked.

Piper put her fingers on the clear edge of Maisie’s sail while Sal checked its frame.

The mouth was enormous up close.

Piper opened her own mouth beside it.

“Mine’s bigger,” Maisie said.

“Only because I need a chin.”

CHAPTER 6

# The Wind Sits Down

At quarter past two, Sal led the group out to the field.

It was much wider than it had looked through the hall windows. The flying area lay well away from the building, roads, power lines, and trees. There was space between each family, with a separate place for bags and watching.

Sal showed everyone where to stand and wait. The helpers would assist with launches and bringing the kites down. Nobody needed to run. Lines stayed on their winders when the kites were packed, and never around hands or bodies.

Piper held her kite by the place Sal showed her. Dad carried the winder until they reached their clear patch.

A little breeze moved Piper's ponytail against her neck.

It was nearly time.

With Sal helping, the sideways face rose above the grass.

Piper felt the tug.

"There you are," she said.

The kite climbed a little farther. Its three bows shook beneath it.

Then the tug softened.

The tail drooped. The kite came gently down toward the grass, as if somebody had lowered the whole sky by a piece of string.

Sal helped Piper bring it in.

"Wind's dropped," she said.

Maisie's kite had hardly left the ground before the same thing happened. Its open mouth stared upward from the grass.

"It's still shouting," Maisie said. "But very quietly."

Across the field, other kites were coming down too. A helper's striped kite stayed up a little longer, then sank gently toward the grass.

Sal checked the breeze and suggested a rest while they waited to see whether it would return.

Once the kites were down and the lines safely wound away, Piper and Maisie took them to the bag area with Dad. They laid the kites flat where nobody would tread on them.

Piper sat down.

She had been holding her shoulders up without noticing. She let them drop.

"Mine flew a bit," she said.

"I saw."

"I wanted a longer bit."

"Me too."

Maisie opened her snack box. Two crackers had broken into pieces.

She chose a whole one and gave the broken pieces a serious look.

"Some assembly required."

Piper laughed. She had heard Sal use those words inside the hall.

Dad passed the water bottles. They sat with the kites beside them, waiting.

A small bird landed well beyond the empty flying patch. It pecked at something, hopped twice, and flew away.

"Show-off," Maisie said softly.

"It brought its own wings," Piper said.

"Prepared."

They tried to think of things that would look surprising in the sky.

"A wardrobe," Maisie said.

"With its doors open?"

"Definitely."

"All the socks would fall out."

"Flying socks."

Piper looked at the two kite faces.

"Mine would suspect every sock."

"Mine would shout at them."

Dad leaned back on his hands.

"I would go indoors."

For a while the grass stayed still. Piper ate another piece of cracker. The sky had no wardrobes in it.

Then the loose end of Maisie's jacket lifted away from her knee.

Piper felt cool air move across her cheek.

Out on the field, Sal looked up.

CHAPTER 7

# The Bit in the Sky



They waited while the helpers checked the wind again.

This time it kept moving.

Sal brought one of the little kites up and watched it for a while. Then she called the families back to their places.

Piper stood beside Dad with her winder. Maisie helped Sal hold the kite ready, standing where Sal showed her. When they let it go, they stepped clear.

The diamond rose.

Its tail lifted, bow after bow.

Piper felt the small pull settle into her hands. Dad stayed beside her, helping her manage the winder while Sal watched the kite.

It climbed a little. Then it stayed in the breeze.

Piper looked up at the eyes she had drawn.

They were looking away from her.

“Rude,” she told it.

Maisie laughed from beside Sal.

The high eyebrow tilted toward a scrap of cloud. The crooked mouth was harder to see now, but Piper knew exactly where it was.

She had drawn that mouth at the hall table. She had held the edge while Dad helped with the frame. Now the whole thing was up there, moving against the pale sky.

A stronger puff made the winder pull a little more. Piper looked at Dad, and he helped her steady it. The puff passed.

The kite leaned. It settled again.

“Is it going to stay?” she asked.

“For a bit, by the look of it,” Dad said.

It did.

Nothing very enormous happened. The kite didn’t loop over the hall or climb higher than every other kite. It bobbed, leaned, and showed them its ridiculous face.

Piper watched all of it.

After a while, she noticed that she was smiling with her mouth open.

She shut it.

Maisie’s kite had that job.

When Piper was ready for a rest, Dad helped her bring the kite down. They wound its line away and took it back to their things before getting Maisie's ready.

Now Piper helped Sal at the launch. Maisie stood with Dad and the winder.

"Ready?" Sal called.

"Ready!"

The enormous mouth went up.

Its white tooth flashed above them.

"It's shouting at the cloud," Piper said when she had stepped clear and rejoined Dad.

"What's it saying?"

"THAT'S MY PLACE."

Maisie looked up.

The kite leaned toward the empty sky beside the cloud.

"It's moving house."

Piper watched Maisie's fingers tighten on the winder, then relax when Dad spoke to her. Maisie was usually full of things to say. For a little while, she was quiet.

Piper was glad she had seen that part too.

There was time for another turn with each kite. A helper came to assist while Sal checked the other families. The breeze weakened once, and Piper's kite dipped lower, but it kept flying when the air steadied.

Piper's neck began to feel tired from looking up. She took a break and drank some water. When she returned, Maisie was bringing her own kite down with Dad.

"Mine saw a fly," Maisie reported.

"Did it eat it?"

“No. The mouth doesn’t actually open. Design mistake.”

At quarter past three, the helpers began bringing the last kites down. Piper helped collect their things once both lines were safely away.

A little patch of grass had stuck to the back of her kite. She brushed it off carefully.

The face looked sideways at her.

“Don’t start,” she said.

At the hall, they thanked Sal and checked under the table for anything they had left behind. Dad carried the kites to the car and put them safely where they wouldn’t be crushed.

Piper climbed in beside Maisie.

Her curling bag was still in the back from the morning. The workshop would be finishing now. Nora and Wren would have things to tell her.

Maisie leaned forward to look at the kite faces.

“Do you think they’ll talk all the way home?”

“Yours will.”

“What will yours do?”

Piper raised one eyebrow as high as she could.

Dad caught sight of her in the mirror.

“The biscuit inspector is going home.”

CHAPTER 8

# Next Saturday

Nora was already on the warm-room bench when Piper arrived at the club the following Saturday.

“I got three where I wanted,” she said.

Piper put down her bag.

“Guards?”

“Yes. In the second ice bit. We kept trying for the same broad space in front of the house. Jo helped me notice when I was starting too hard.”

“All in a row?”

“No. There was a very long one in between.”

Nora held her hands apart, although the space between them was far too small for the stone she meant.

“That one had other plans.”

Wren came over with her helmet.

“We did the pictures too. Then we tried the choices on the ice. I liked seeing what the guard actually left open.”

She described a red near the middle and a wide space beside it. She had first wanted a guard in one place, then seen that it wouldn’t cover the way she meant.

“Granite let us look from the other end before we tried it,” she said. “I want more practice at that.”

Piper could imagine them walking along the safe side, seeing the stones from the new direction, then going back to try.

“I wish I’d seen your three,” she told Nora.

“I was pleased with the last one.”

Nora’s smile made Piper wish it a little more.

Then Maisie arrived and sat down heavily beside them.

“Our kites had faces,” she announced.

“We know,” Wren said. “You had faces planned for weeks.”

“Yes, but these ones went into the sky.”

Nora turned toward Piper.

“Did yours look sideways?”

Piper showed her with her own eyes and eyebrows.

“Exactly like that,” Maisie said.

Nora laughed. Wren tried the expression too, but both her eyebrows went up together.

“Yours has heard two things,” Piper told her.

They told them about the big mouth, the sticky tape, and the wind going away just after they had started.

“Did it come back?” Nora asked.

“Yes,” Piper said. “We had proper turns after that. I liked feeling it pull while it was up there.”

“I liked my tooth,” said Maisie.

Jo called them to warm up. The girls put their bags aside and joined the others.

There was the usual equipment check. Helmets fastened, clean grippers secure, sliders covered for walking. Then they went onto the familiar junior lane.

Today’s team practice was about listening to the call and getting their brushes working together. Ben had told them the plan before they went out.

Maisie delivered first. Wren held the target at the house, and Piper and Nora waited to sweep with Ben nearby.

The stone came toward them. Piper matched its pace.

“Sweep!”

Her brush and Nora’s moved in quick, close sounds. When Wren called them up, they lifted together.

The stone finished toward the front of the rings.

Maisie came along the safe route after Jo had helped her up and her sliding foot was covered.

“Again?” she asked.

“Again,” Wren said.

They worked through their usual jobs. Nora had a draw that went a little wide. Piper sent one too far and a second that needed the sweeping she got. Wren asked for the target broom a little farther to one side when it was her turn.

Piper stood at the house and checked the place with her.

“Here?”

Wren nodded.

Maisie and Nora readied their brushes. Granite watched from the side while Jo checked that Wren was settled at the hack.

Piper looked down the ice.

Wren was raising one eyebrow at her.

This time she had managed it.

Piper laughed, lowered her own eyebrows, and put the broom exactly where Wren had asked.

Wren sent the next stone.