PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Longer Ice

BOOK TWENTY ONE



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

The Last Saturday

Piper found a mitten behind the changing bench on the last Saturday of her third curling season.

It was not hers.

It was not Maisie's, Nora's or Wren's either. They all inspected it while Piper held it by one damp-looking thumb.

"Perhaps it lives here," Maisie said.

"It will have a quiet summer," Nora told her.

Piper put it in the lost-property box. Then she went back for her own things. Both gloves. Both shoes. Helmet. Broom. The folded drawing that had been in her bag since she planned the practice exchange with Wren.

She opened the paper.

The rings were rather crooked. One of Maisie's biscuit crumbs had made a mark near the middle.

They had done the promised second practice exchange that morning. Piper had called while Wren took the house for Piper's deliveries and tried more sweeping with Maisie and Nora. There had been pauses, a proper break and an opening draw Piper wished she could have back.

There had also been a moment when she had known exactly what she wanted to ask Wren to play.

She had liked that moment very much.

"Keeping it?" Wren asked.

Piper folded the paper along its old lines. "Yes."

The season had contained six harder league games, a roll that sometimes moved across and sometimes didn't,

and two Saturdays on which the empty house had been hers to think about. Now the adults were putting the junior stones away.

Piper had expected finishing to feel louder.

Instead, she could hear the zip on Nora's bag refusing to go around a corner.

Jo came over with the little notebook in which she kept their practice requests.

"What would you like to carry into next season?"

"My bag," Maisie said. "But someone could help."

Jo smiled and waited.

Maisie wanted more choices for her two opening stones. Nora wanted to understand what a draw was doing before it reached the rings. Wren wanted more reliable hits and more sweeping practice.

Piper wanted the roll. She wanted another calling turn too.

Then she looked through the glass at the long sheet beyond their familiar starting place.

"When do we get to play all of that?"

Jo looked with her.

"We'll work toward it. A bit at a time, when each of you is ready."

"Next season?"

"We'll see how the work goes next season."

Piper would have preferred a date. A date could go on paper, with a ring around it.

Jo asked about their summers instead. Nora was looking forward to swimming. Wren wanted to keep seeing everybody. Maisie had plans involving a tent, although she was not yet certain whose tent it was.

“We can meet when there isn’t ice,” Piper said.

“We know,” Maisie told her. “We’ve seen grass.”

Piper laughed. The finished-season feeling loosened a little.

Before they left, the four girls stood together by the doorway. Wren held out her glove, then remembered she had packed it. She offered her bare hand instead.

Piper put hers on top. Nora added hers. Maisie rested the last hand over all three.

“Too-Cold Club,” Wren said.

“Temporarily warm,” Nora added.

They lifted their hands together. Then Maisie had to put hers straight back down to catch her slipping bag.

Outside, the air smelled of wet pavement. Piper walked beside Ben with the old drawing safely in her pocket.

She had something to keep and a long piece of ice still ahead.

CHAPTER 2

A Season Between

Summer came before the longer ice did.

Piper saw her friends in the park and at one another's homes. Maisie's borrowed tent had a window that would not stay open. Nora invented a way of propping it with an empty cup, and Wren knocked the cup over by sitting down.

They ate their picnic outside the tent.

When autumn returned, their fourth curling season began.

Jo did not move the starting place all the way back on the first morning. She watched familiar deliveries, checked equipment and talked with each girl. Piper discovered that remembering a good draw from spring was different from making one after a whole summer away.

"My arm remembers a very good version," she told Ben afterward.

"Does it?"

"It left out some things."

Through that winter, they worked in steps. They tried longer distances when Jo thought it suited them. They learned to handle the full-size stones in supervised sessions, first from a distance at which each girl could stay balanced and make a comfortable delivery. Their regular games used the setup agreed for that group.

There were many Saturdays between trying something and being ready to keep doing it.

Piper did not like every one of them.

One morning she made a full-length draw that reached the house. The next two stopped much earlier. She wanted to push harder with her arm.

Jo had her stop and talk through the delivery instead. They returned to an easier distance and worked on the movement.

Piper was cross about it in the car.

“The first one got there.”

“I saw,” Ben said.

“I wanted another.”

“I saw that too.”

She looked out of the window for a while. At the next practice she asked Jo what she had noticed about the first delivery and the next two. They worked on that answer for more than one week.

Her friends had different work.

Maisie needed to find two useful draw weights again when the distance changed. Wren’s hits came more comfortably before her gentler draws did. Nora wanted more time on balance before adding distance.

“I’m working on mine,” Nora said when Piper asked whether she wanted another long try.

Piper looked at the shorter starting place.

Then she looked at Nora.

“Do you want me at the house?”

“Yes, please.”

Later that winter, Nora sent three comfortable draws along the longer route. Piper held the target and watched each one arrive in a different part of the broad area they had chosen. Nora came down smiling at her own work.

By the end of the fourth season, all four had spent supervised practice time on the full sheet with full-size stones. Jo checked more than whether a stone reached the rings. She watched balance, control, sweeping and how they managed as the session went on. There were rests and shorter sessions when they needed them.

During that fourth season, Piper had kept her extra calling turns in practice. Wren was still their skip in games. Nobody's job had changed because the hack was farther away.

Then the ice closed again.

Another summer passed.

Piper's old trousers became too short. Maisie learned to whistle when people were listening, although she sometimes looked as surprised as her audience. Nora got a different pair of glasses. Wren kept the same bob, trimmed neatly beneath her ears.

At the start of their fifth season, Piper put the crooked drawing into a new notebook.

Two summers had passed since that practice exchange near the end of their third season.

She had a whole fourth season behind her now, as well as the three before it. In the first weeks of this fifth one, Jo checked the girls again. They practiced, rested and played full-length games at home.

Then Jo brought them an invitation.

Another club was hosting a junior development day. There would be practice in the morning and one six-end game after lunch, with a full seated break halfway through. The game would be on the full sheet.

“Would you like to go together?” Jo asked.

Piper looked at her three friends.

Maisie was already smiling.

CHAPTER 3

The Away Bag



On the night before the trip, Piper packed two left gloves.

She found the mistake only because her brother tried one on.

“This is wrong.”

“You’ve got it on the wrong hand.”

He held up the other glove. “So has this one.”

Piper went back upstairs.

The invitation lay on the kitchen table beside her notebook. It was not their first visit to another club. It

would be the Too-Cold Club's first away game using the full-length setup they had earned at home.

That difference seemed large enough to require a particularly well-packed bag.

Jo had already checked the plan with their families and the host coach. She had talked to the girls separately about the day, watched their recent sessions and made sure the travel and rest times worked. The morning practice would not be a second whole game.

Still, Piper checked her water bottle twice.

"Does it have more water now?" Ben asked.

"No."

"Ah."

She set it down.

At the last home practice, they had chosen one thing apiece to notice while they were away. Maisie wanted to learn a new opponent's opening choices. Nora wanted to compare draw paths. Wren wanted to make decisions before walking back to throw.

Piper had said she wanted to play well on the longer ice somewhere else.

"What will you look for?" Jo had asked.

Piper had thought about that afterward. Now she wrote at the top of a clean page: AWAY GAME.

Beneath it she wrote: Win.

That was clear, at least.

Then she remembered Jo's question. She added: Useful draws. Roll when there is a place for it.

Ben came to look when she showed him.

"You've left plenty of room."

"For the score."

“And anything else you find.”

Piper closed the book. She knew what she wanted to find.

The next morning, Maisie rode with them. She brought a bag, a bottle, lunch and a small cushion shaped like a square. Piper had expected a more interesting shape when Maisie announced that she was bringing a cushion.

“It’s very good at being square,” Maisie said.

They had left plenty of time. The sky brightened as they drove, and Ben followed the route without asking either girl to help.

Maisie helped anyway.

“There was a sign for food.”

“We’ve had breakfast,” Ben said.

“I was reporting.”

She reported a second sign, a field with no animals in it and a very large van. Piper began reporting things too, until Ben said that the driver had received enough reports for the moment.

For a while they watched quietly.

“Do you think their ice will feel the same?” Piper asked.

“I hope their warm room is warm,” Maisie said.

Piper smiled, but the question stayed with her. At home she knew how a good draw felt leaving her hand. She knew the long walk back from the house. She knew where the clock was without turning her head very far.

She had worked hard to make those things familiar.

Now they were driving away from them.

Maisie tucked the cushion behind her back.

“We’ll still be us,” she said.

Piper glanced at her.

“I was thinking about the ice.”

“So was I.”

Ben turned into the club’s car park. Nora was getting out of another car with Wren. Jo stood near the entrance, waving them toward the right door.

Piper took her bag and notebook.

Through the glass, she could see the far house.

It looked a very long way away.

CHAPTER 4

Two Ways Down

The warm room was warm.

Maisie approved it at once.

“Good start,” she told Nora.

The benches and photographs were unfamiliar. One coat hook was so high that Piper wondered who used it.

They put their bags away, changed and joined the morning welcome. A host coach explained the safe routes and the day’s plan. Helmets stayed part of this junior group’s on-ice equipment. Jo checked straps, shoes and how everyone was feeling.

Their afternoon opponents called themselves the Owls.

Lila, their skip, had a long braid and a blue jacket. Her vice was called Ruth. The Owls looked ordinary. Piper had somehow expected away opponents to look particularly good.

Of course, this was home for them.

After the warm-up, the teams had separate practice turns on their assigned sheet. Jo watched while the Too-Cold Club tried the full-size stones and got used to the space. Their practice included deliveries from both hacks, so they could look at the paths in each direction.

Wren asked Maisie for a draw on the left.

Piper and Nora followed it with their brushes ready. It kept more speed than Piper expected. They left it alone, and it stopped deep in the rings.

Maisie came down after it stopped.

“That felt like my front one.”

“It looked quicker all the way,” Nora said.

“It arrived quicker,” Wren agreed.

They tried again with less weight. This red finished nearer the front.

Piper liked having an answer. Use less than at home.

Nora pointed toward the right side.

“Could we try over there too?”

Wren looked along it. “Same finish?”

“About the same depth. I want to see.”

Nora delivered. Maisie and Piper watched beside the stone. This one slowed sooner. They helped when Wren called, but it stopped short of the intended area.

“Mine might have been lighter,” Nora said when she joined them.

Piper nodded. That could explain it.

“I want another look,” Nora added.

Their remaining practice turns gave them one. Piper sent a right-side draw with the delivery she thought would suit the left. It also needed more help than she expected. Then Wren’s right-side draw came with more weight and reached the area she wanted.

Piper took the house for Wren’s last practice stone. She watched it turn toward her, later and more sharply than the left-side draws had seemed to turn.

She checked the finish with Wren afterward.

“It came across near the end.”

“Yes. We’ll need room for that.”

They came off, changed and sat down. Nora opened the little sheet she had brought for notes. She drew two long lines.

“Left,” she said, pointing. “And right.”

Piper opened her notebook beside it.

“I was going to put faster.”

“The left felt faster,” Nora said. “We haven’t tried every path.”

Piper looked at the two lines. One word would have been easier to remember.

It would also have missed what she had just watched.

She wrote left beside faster. On the next line she wrote more weight on the right than I expected.

After their drinks, Jo joined them.

“What do you know so far?”

They described the deliveries, including differences in how they had felt. Jo listened.

“Keep checking as you play,” she said. “You’ll learn from the Owls’ stones too.”

Piper looked through the glass. Ruth was sweeping a draw on the right, working hard beside her teammate.

Nora turned to watch it as well.

Neither girl could hear the call from here.

They waited to see where it stopped.

CHAPTER 5

The First Two Ends

Piper put her notebook away before the game.

There was no useful way to carry it and sweep.

The coaches had explained the format to both teams: six ends, their proper seated break after three, and a tie left as a tie. Short coaching conversations were allowed between ends at the teams' request. Jo would watch from the permitted place.

The Too-Cold Club won the toss and chose last stone. The Owls chose yellow.

Maisie led, Nora played second, Piper played third and vice, and Wren skipped and delivered fourth. They shook hands in those familiar places. Then the Owls sent the first yellow down the full sheet.

Piper felt ready as Maisie went to deliver. By Piper's first turn, she felt rather less ready.

Maisie's two draws had both finished deeper than intended. Nora had removed an exposed yellow, but the Owls had taken her shooter out. Nora's next draw was short.

Wren wanted Piper to draw on the left, nearer than the yellows.

Piper gave it less than her usual home weight. She remembered the practice stones. She remembered Maisie's deep ones.

Her red stopped short of the rings.

She watched it without moving for a moment.

Then she got steady, covered her slider and walked down the clear side.

“Too much less,” she told Wren.

Wren nodded. “We’ve got your next one.”

That red came farther. It was useful until Lila took it out.

The later stones left Wren an open hit with her last turn. Lila had drawn a yellow nearer than the others. Wren removed it and kept her red in the house.

One red counted.

Piper agreed it with Ruth, then looked up at Wren.

“One.”

Wren grinned. Maisie lifted a glove. The first away end was theirs.

Piper joined the glove taps, gladder than one point usually made her.

In the second end, the Owls had last stone. They put their draws in separate places, and kept asking the Too-Cold Club to make another answer.

Piper’s first hit removed a yellow on the right. Her next draw went too deep on the left.

She knew the feeling before the red reached the house. She had given back more weight than she had meant to.

The Owls removed her hit. Later Wren removed Lila’s first draw, but Lila hit Wren’s red out with her last yellow. That shooter and an earlier yellow both counted.

One to two.

Piper looked at the two yellows. They had played two ends on the same sheet, and she still did not have one simple answer for a draw.

Wren asked Jo for a short conversation before the third. “We’re getting nearer on the left,” she said. “But there are stones in our way more often.”

Nora pointed toward the other approach. “We’ve seen the Owls use the right. Their second gave that one plenty, and it stopped near the middle.”

“I’d rather use the left when it’s open,” Piper said.

“So would I sometimes,” Wren answered.

Nora looked at both of them. “I still want us to have the other one.”

Piper glanced down the ice. The right-side practice draw had asked for more than she expected. If they tried it in the game and missed, there would be no chance to set the stones back.

There hadn’t been a chance after her left-side misses either.

Jo asked which particular shots they had watched. Nora named them. Piper added what she had seen while holding the house for Wren.

“We can use it when there’s room,” Wren said. “We’ll choose from what’s there.”

The conversation ended. Maisie went to get ready for her first red. Piper went with Nora to sweep. She wanted their next red to tell them something useful.

CHAPTER 6

An Empty Sandwich Box



The third end gave them a right-side draw to try.

It came on Nora’s second turn. The Owls had a guard left of the middle, with a yellow behind it. Their earlier play had left the other side open.

Wren showed Nora the finish they wanted. Then she set a target with room for the curl they had watched in practice.

Piper stood with Maisie, ready to sweep.

Nora sent the red.

“Feels enough,” she called after the release.

It was more than Piper had given her own right-side practice draw. She could see that as it passed.

“Enough from here,” she answered.

The brushes stayed up at first. Then the stone began to slow. Wren called them to help, and they worked ahead of it until she called them clear.

The red curled into the right-middle area.

It stopped nearer than the yellows.

Nora walked down with a smile she was not trying to hide.

“That one.”

Piper met her glove. “I saw it.”

Ruth tried to remove it. Her yellow passed wide and went through the back.

Nora’s red stayed.

Piper drew too far with her next turn. Later she made a useful hit on the other side, and Lila took that red out. Wren removed the new yellow with her first stone. Lila’s last draw slipped nearer than Nora’s red.

Wren had the last red of the end.

Piper held the agreed target for an open hit on Lila’s close yellow. The red came down the left approach, met the yellow and sent it out. Wren’s shooter stayed.

Piper checked the count with Ruth. Wren’s last red and Nora’s earlier draw were closer than any yellow. A farther yellow kept Wren’s first shooter from adding another point.

Two red.

Three to two for the Too-Cold Club at halfway.

Piper was smiling as they went off for their break. Then she sat down and discovered how ready she was for lunch.

Maisie opened her sandwich box.

It was empty.

All four stared at it.

“That’s unfortunate,” Wren said.

Maisie looked under the lid, as if a sandwich might have stuck there.

Then she began laughing.

“I ate them earlier.”

They had already had lunch before the game. Their halfway food was in a different container, which Maisie found underneath the empty one.

“I’ve brought the memory of lunch,” she said.

“Very carefully packed,” Nora told her.

Piper laughed until she had to put her bottle down. She had forgotten the score for several whole seconds.

They ate their snacks and rested. Wren leaned back with her legs relaxed. Maisie explained that the second container was smaller because it contained an actual amount of food.

After a while, Nora looked at Piper’s closed notebook.

“Are you putting my draw in?”

“Yes.”

“Put where it went.”

Piper took out her pencil. She wrote third end, Nora, right side. Then she drew a little house and a red just right of the middle.

“We gave it room to turn,” Wren said.

Piper added that.

There was still space around the words she had written at home. Win. Useful draws. Roll when there is a place for it.

She could not fill in the first one yet.

Nora’s red had helped them take the lead. That was something real to put on the page now.

When the full break was over, they changed, checked how they felt and warmed up again.

There were three ends still to play.

CHAPTER 7

What the Next Stone Did

Piper's first draw in the fourth end reached the middle on the right.

She knew the weight had felt different from home. Maisie and Nora had watched it with her, and Wren had left room for the finish.

When it stopped, Piper wanted to point back toward the warm room.

That one could go in the notebook too.

Ruth removed it with her next yellow.

Piper let her pointing hand fall.

"Still a good draw," Nora said.

"I know."

She did know. She was simply fond of seeing a good draw remain where she had put it.

Wren asked for the yellow out with Piper's other stone. Piper made the hit, and this red survived until Lila's last yellow removed it. The Owls had one counting stone when the end finished.

Three each.

Piper agreed the point with Ruth. No coaching conversation was needed this time. Wren came over, looked at the emptying house and asked Maisie where she liked the next beginning.

"Two different places," Maisie said. "And I want the first one inside."

The Owls delivered first in the fifth end because the Too-Cold Club now had last stone.

Their opening yellow finished deep on the left. Wren chose the right-front area for Maisie. Nora and Piper helped her red reach it.

Maisie came down smiling.

“That’s inside.”

“It is,” Wren said.

After the Owls’ next yellow finished wide, Maisie put her second red farther into the left wing. The Owls’ second player chose to take that one out. Nora removed the new yellow in turn.

Piper watched Maisie’s right-front red remain while the next stones came and went.

Nora’s other draw reached a useful place on the right, nearer the middle. Ruth removed it with her first yellow.

Then Piper saw an opportunity.

The yellow was exposed, and there was an open patch toward the middle on its left. Wren came to look with her.

“Hit and move across?” Piper asked.

Wren studied the space. “There’s room. Keep the hit useful if you don’t get all the roll.”

Piper nodded.

She had made more rolls since Tess’s clinics, over the season between and in their new full-length practice. Some went too far. Some still sat at the nose. She knew what this one was for: get the yellow out and leave her red nearer the middle.

She checked the target and went back to deliver.

The red touched the side of the yellow.

Yellow traveled out toward the back-right. Red moved left across the ice.

Piper watched it slow in the broad patch they had chosen.

It stayed.

She made a small sound before she remembered to breathe properly.

Maisie turned toward her with both eyebrows raised.

“There!”

Piper came down grinning. Wren met her glove.

Ruth took the new red out with her next yellow. Her shooter rolled farther from the middle, leaving Maisie’s front red closer.

For a moment, Piper felt as if the end had played a joke on her.

Then Wren was beside her again.

“Open draw on the other side?”

Piper looked. She could still remember the roll in her fingers, but she had another delivery to make.

“Yes.”

This draw stopped too deep. Lila’s first yellow reached the front-middle area, and Wren removed it. Lila took out Wren’s red in reply.

Now the new yellow was nearer than Maisie's first red. Maisie's red was nearer than all the other yellows, including the one Ruth had left after removing the roll.

Wren had one stone left.

"Out and stay," she said.

Piper checked the target with her. Maisie and Nora went to sweep, and Piper took the house.

Wren's red met the nose.

The yellow went out. Her shooter stayed close.

"Two," Piper said after checking with Ruth.

Five to three.

Maisie looked at her first red, still in the front rings on the right.

"I brought that ages ago."

"We kept it," Nora said.

Piper laughed. Her roll had gone. Maisie's draw had stayed. They had one end left, and a two-point lead.

CHAPTER 8

Two Points Ahead



Piper wanted to fill the middle with reds.

She could picture them very clearly. One close. Another beside it. A third somewhere helpful.

Wren looked at the clear ice and chose an open draw.

“We’re two ahead,” she said. “Make them work for their two.”

Piper nodded. The Owls had last stone. Two yellow points would tie the game; three would win it for them. One would leave the Too-Cold Club ahead.

She knew those numbers.

She still liked the picture with all the reds.

Maisie began on the left. Her draw went deeper than intended, finishing in the back rings. The Owls drew near the front on the other side.

Maisie's second red stopped wide, outside the rings.

"I had a better beginning last time," she said as she joined them.

The Owls' lead put her other yellow nearer the middle. Nora removed it with a clean hit. The Owls' second took Nora's shooter out.

Nora tried another open hit. It missed, and her red went through the back.

"Too wide," she said.

Piper watched her return. Nora had made the useful right-side draw and given them something important to notice. She could still miss this hit. Piper could see Nora wanting it back without needing to ask.

The Owls' second drew another yellow, this one closer to the center on the left.

Two yellows were now near enough to worry about. The newest was first in the count. The yellow that had replaced Nora's hit was second.

Wren chose the second one for Piper.

"Take that out. Bring yours toward the middle if you can."

Piper looked at the open patch to its left. It was a broad roll, like the useful one she had made in the fifth. Getting across would leave a red nearer than the Owls' opening front stone.

She went back knowing both parts of the shot.

The red met the yellow off the nose.

Yellow went out. Red moved left and stopped in the patch.

Piper covered her slider and came down after the stones were still.

The Owls' close yellow was nearest. Her red was next. The front yellow was farther away.

"Second," she said to Wren.

Wren nodded. "That helps."

Ruth tried to take Piper's red out. Her yellow passed wide and went through the back.

For Piper's other turn, Wren chose the open hit on the nearest yellow. Piper caught it thinly. Yellow went out, but her shooter went out too.

Her first red was now nearest.

Ruth drew a yellow into an open place just left of the middle, closer than that red.

Piper went to the house for Wren. They looked at the count together.

"One yellow, then mine," Piper said.

Wren wanted Ruth's close yellow out. Her first hit missed it and ran through the back.

Lila drew another close yellow on the right.

Now two yellows were nearer than Piper's red.

Wren had one stone left. Lila would have one after it.

Piper felt the game get very small around those three stones.

"We could draw nearer both," she said.

Wren studied the open routes.

Piper looked again too. A draw had to beat both yellows. A hit on Lila's new stone could remove one of the two they needed for a tie.

“If we get the right yellow,” Piper said slowly, “mine is second again.”

“Even if my shooter goes out,” Wren said.

They checked that it was true. Piper’s earlier red was nearer than the Owls’ front stone and the deep red Maisie had delivered.

The open hit gave them a useful result without needing to make the closest stone.

Wren chose it.

Piper held the agreed target. Maisie and Nora watched from their sweeping places.

The red came down, caught Lila’s yellow on the side and sent it out. Wren’s shooter kept moving and went out too.

One yellow remained nearest. Piper’s red was second.

Lila still had her last draw.

CHAPTER 9

The Red in Second Place

Piper stood in the waiting place beside Wren.

She could not improve the house by staring at it. She stared anyway.

Lila and Ruth looked at the available draw. If Lila could put her last yellow nearer the center than Piper's red, the Owls would count two and tie the game.

There was room to do it. Piper had seen Lila make good draws already.

"I want ours to stay second," she said quietly.

"Me too," Wren answered.

Maisie and Nora joined them in their proper waiting places, leaving the Owls clear access to the sheet. Nobody from the Too-Cold Club would touch this shot.

Ruth set the target on the right. Piper remembered their morning practice. The right-side draws they had watched from this end had needed more weight than she expected. Lila knew that side much better than Piper did, and she had chosen it anyway.

The yellow began its journey. The Owls' sweepers moved beside it. Ruth watched from the house.

Then the brushes began to work.

Piper could hear the call now. She could see how hard the sweepers were trying. The yellow crossed the hog line, kept curling and slowed toward the front rings.

It needed to come farther.

Piper held her own broom a little tighter.

The yellow stopped in the front of the house, farther from the center than her red.

For a moment nobody on her team moved.

Ruth came to check with Piper. They looked at the close yellow first, then Piper's red, then the last yellow. The difference was clear. There was no need for a measure.

"One yellow," Ruth said.

"One."

Five to four.

The Too-Cold Club had won.

Piper turned toward her friends. Maisie's mouth was already open in a delighted grin. Nora lifted a glove. Wren let out a breath that made Piper realize she had been holding her own.

They met gloves together, then went to shake hands with the Owls.

"Good game," Lila said.

"Good game."

Piper wanted to talk about the last red immediately. She also saw Lila look back at her short yellow. So she let the handshake be a handshake, and thanked Ruth when they met.

The score was recorded. Adults supervised the clearing. Piper walked off beside her friends with her feet feeling both tired and wonderfully light.

On the changing bench, Maisie said, "We won in another building."

Nora laughed. "Yes."

"I wanted to say the whole thing."

Piper sat down, undid her helmet and looked at Wren.

"We didn't get nearest."

"We got what we needed," Wren said.

Piper could still see her red in second place. She had not delivered it hoping it would finish the game there. It had become useful in a different way after all the later stones.

Nora began loosening her shoes. “I wanted my hit in the sixth.”

“I know,” Piper said.

Nora looked up. “I still want to work on it.”

“And I still want the right-side draw in my notebook.”

Nora smiled. “Both can go in.”

Jo joined them when they were changed. She congratulated all four, then listened while each named a part of the game.

Maisie chose the fifth-end draw that had stayed. Nora chose finding the right-side weight. Wren chose the last hit, even with her shooter gone.

Piper chose her second-place red. Then she told Jo about the roll that had been taken out.

She was smiling anyway. She had a great deal to put on the page.

CHAPTER 10

The Page They Brought Home

Before they left, Lila came over with Ruth.

“Are you coming again?” she asked.

Piper looked toward Jo. There was another development visit planned later in the season, but their families still had to work out the date.

“We’d like to,” Wren said.

“We’d like another game,” Lila told her.

“So would we.”

Ruth asked Nora about the draw in the third end. They talked about the right-side path and how different it had felt that morning. Piper listened. The two girls were using their hands to show the stone coming across near the finish.

Then Maisie asked where the Owls had got their team name.

“We voted,” Lila said.

“We were cold,” Maisie told her.

Ruth laughed. “That sounds quicker.”

Piper laughed too. The building no longer felt quite so strange.

In the car, Maisie fell asleep against her square cushion before they had gone very far.

Piper watched a field pass. There were animals in this one, but the reporting service was closed.

“Do you want to tell me about it?” Ben asked.

“Yes.”

She began with the last end. Then she had to go back to Nora's third-end draw. Then Maisie's fifth-end red needed explaining, because it had been there for so long before it counted.

Ben listened while he drove.

"And my roll went across," Piper said. "Twice. The first one got taken out."

"I saw."

"The other one was second at the end."

"I saw that too."

She looked down at the notebook on her lap, closed while the car was moving. She had wanted to bring home a win. Now she had one, and there seemed to be far more around it than would fit in the little space she had left for the score.

When they reached home, she put her gear away to dry and opened the book at the kitchen table.

Under AWAY GAME, she wrote: Won 5–4.

Then she drew two long lines, like Nora's.

She added the left-side weight, the room for the right-side curl and a little house with her red in second place. She wrote Maisie beside the front-right draw in the fifth. She put Nora's name by the third-end picture and Wren's beside the final hit.

Her brother came to look.

"Did this one win?" he asked, pointing to the last red.

"It helped."

He considered the other little houses.

"Which one won, then?"

"We did."

"All of you?"

“All four.”

He nodded, apparently satisfied, and went to find his own paper.

Piper turned back to the crooked drawing tucked inside the cover. She remembered making it near the end of the third season, when calling an empty house had filled her whole head.

She still wanted more turns at that end. She still wanted the big under-eighteen competition she had once pointed to in a photograph. There were seasons of work between here and there.

Today she had played the full sheet with her friends, somewhere new, and won a game by keeping a red in second place.

She opened to the next blank page.

At the top, she wrote: Next practice.

Then she left room for everybody.