PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Next Stone

BOOK THREE



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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Story by Mary Deuhs

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CHAPTER 1

A Name on the List

The list was pinned to the noticeboard between a missing mitten and a picture of a very old curling team.

Piper found her team's name immediately.

TOO-COLD CLUB.

It was written in ordinary black letters. No lightning bolts. No golden border. Just three words on a sheet of paper.

She read them again anyway.

"That's us," she said.

Maisie leaned past her. "They've spelled cold correctly. An important start."

Wren ran a finger down the dates without touching the paper. Nora stood beside her, reading the other team names.

There were four beginner teams in the little junior league. They would play one another on different Saturdays. Some mornings would be for practice. Others would be for games.

Piper could see several weeks into the future, all in one place.

It looked busy and excellent.

Granite joined them at the board. His red handle nearly brushed the missing mitten.

"Your name on an official piece of paper," he said. "Try not to become unbearable."

"Too late," Maisie said. "I've been like this for years."

Several Saturdays had passed since the girls' first short practice game. They had played again. They had

practiced between games. Some shots were beginning to go where they wanted more often.

Others still seemed to have appointments elsewhere.

They used the little junior stones and a shorter lane, just as before. They still wore helmets and checked their grippers. But now each girl could deliver twice in an end, the way players did in the usual team game.

Two chances instead of one, with an opponent's stone between them. The teams always took turns.

Piper liked having a second chance very much.

Granite brought them to the warm-room table.

"Our beginner league games will be four ends," he explained. "Two stones per player in each end. We'll keep our shorter setup and our coaching help. If the score is tied after four ends, the game is a tie. Those are our league's rules."

"No extra end?" Wren asked.

"Not in this league. Other competitions may play one to decide a winner."

Maisie counted on her fingers. "Eight stones each. In one morning."

"With the other things you do between them," Granite said.

"I'd better tell my arms."

They had been trying different delivery positions in practice. Today Maisie would lead, Nora would go second, Piper third, and Wren fourth.

Wren would also be skip. Piper would take over at the house when Wren delivered.

Granite had helped them choose. He had asked each girl what she wanted to try, which was a slower way of making a list than Piper used to prefer.

It had produced a better list.

"You can ask for help," he reminded them. "Being skip doesn't mean you suddenly know every answer."

Wren nodded. "Good."

"Being coach doesn't mean that either. Don't spread it around."

Piper looked through the window. Jo was setting out equipment near the practice hack. Ben was checking a brush. Pebble stood farther away, finishing his work before the girls went onto the ice.

Everything looked familiar.

Except for the board beside the window.

Jo had brought out a simple scoreboard for their beginner games. Two team names at the top. A large total underneath each one.

At the moment both totals were zero.

Piper imagined a big number beneath TOO-COLD CLUB.

She imagined writing W beside their name on the game list afterward.

She imagined telling someone, quite casually, that her team had won its first league game.

"Piper?"

Nora was holding out her helmet.

"You left this on the table."

"Oh. Thanks."

Piper took it.

Apparently, before she could become a league winner, she had to remember her own head.

CHAPTER 2

The Number That Grew

Their first opponents were Evie's team.

Evie still had purple laces. She had learned a new way to tie them so the loops stayed shorter. Maisie wanted to know whether that made her feet faster.

"I hope not," Evie said. "They're supposed to stay with me."

The girls wished one another good curling.

After warming up and checking their equipment, they stepped onto the ice. Jo would help the players near the hack. Ben would watch the sweepers. Granite would help at the house and answer questions for both teams.

There was room to learn, even with a score.

Piper knew that because Granite said it.

She wasn't quite sure she believed it yet.

A coin toss gave the Too-Cold Club the last stone in the first end. Granite called it the hammer.

Maisie looked at the row of stones.

"Nothing here looks like a hammer."

"A useful name," Granite said. "A less useful picture."

Piper had heard the word before. Last stone. One more chance after the other team had finished.

She liked having it.

The first end began. Maisie's first stone stopped short. Her second reached the house.

"Hello, house," she said under her breath.

Nora's deliveries went a little farther than she wanted. One stayed in the rings near the back.

Then it was Piper's turn.

She had been watching the stones. She had also been watching the scoreboard, although there was nothing on it to watch yet.

Zero and zero.

By the end of this shot, she thought, there could be something good to count.

She settled with the support beside her. Wren held the broom where Granite had helped her choose.

Piper pushed.

Her hand gave an extra little jab at the end.

The stone went too far.

Piper watched it leave the back of the house.

That was one chance gone.

Jo helped her stand and cover her slider. Piper went to the waiting place, where Nora had moved over to make room.

"Next one," Nora said.

Piper nodded.

She wanted the next one immediately.

When it came, she worried about going too far. Her push grew smaller just before she finished. The stone stopped short.

Two chances gone.

At the house, Piper took over for Wren. Granite helped her give the target. Wren's first stone stayed near the side of the rings. Her last came closer, but Evie already had a yellow stone nearer the button.

When the end was finished, the girls agreed on the score with Granite.

One yellow.

Jo changed the other team's total to one.

The Too-Cold Club still had zero.

It wasn't a very large difference. Piper knew how small one was. She could count it without using all the fingers on one hand.

On the board, it looked larger.

"We keep the hammer because they scored," Wren said as they prepared for the next end.

Piper nodded. She was glad Wren remembered.

The second end went worse.

Not all of it. Maisie made another steady delivery. Nora's brush calls were clear. One of Piper's stones stayed in the house.

But the yellow stones finished in better places.

Two of them were closer than any red.

Jo changed the total from one to three.

Piper stared at the new number.

It looked as if it had been waiting inside the scoreboard all morning, ready to jump out.

"How are we supposed to get past that?" she asked.

Wren glanced at the board. "With our next stones."

Piper knew that was the answer.

She didn't understand how such a small answer was meant to deal with such a large three.

CHAPTER 3

The Game Inside the Game



They took a short break after the second end.

Maisie sat down and peeled off one glove. “My thumb has worked extremely hard.”

“Your thumb?” Nora asked.

“It holds important things.”

She demonstrated with her cup.

Piper drank water without smiling. She could still see the scoreboard through the window.

Three to nothing.

“If we get two,” she said, “then we only need—”

“Your hands need warming first,” Ben said.

Piper put her other hand around the cup.

Her thoughts stayed on the ice.

In the third end, something changed.

Nora sent a red stone that curled into the front of the house. Piper's first missed, but her second stopped farther in. She had remembered the quieter hand she'd been trying to use.

Wren added another good stone.

At the end, two red stones were closer to the button than the nearest yellow.

Two points.

Jo put a two under TOO-COLD CLUB.

Piper's whole morning leaped upward.

They were nearly level. They could catch up. They could win.

She looked at Maisie.

"Did you see?"

"I swept it," Maisie said.

Piper grinned. Of course she had.

They began the fourth and final end. Because red had scored, yellow had the hammer now.

Piper tried not to think about that.

She thought about it immediately.

While Nora prepared to deliver, Piper stood ready to sweep with Maisie. She could see the scoreboard out of the corner of her eye.

Three and two.

If they scored one, they would tie. If they scored two, they would win.

If they scored three—

"Piper," Ben said quietly.

She looked back. Nora was waiting to start until the sweepers were ready.

“Oh. Ready.”

Piper brought her attention to the stone.

For a little while, it stayed there.

Then her own turn came. She thought of the quiet hand again, but another thought crowded beside it.

This one has to be good.

Her shoulders tightened.

The stone slipped away from the line she wanted.

Piper watched it finish outside the house. Her second stone, after yellow’s turn, went through the rings.

Now Wren would have to fix things.

That thought felt horrible as soon as Piper had it. Wren was trying to play her own stones, not carry everybody else’s mistakes like extra equipment.

Piper walked down to the house to help her. She chose the target with Granite and held her broom steady.

Wren sent one red stone into the rings. Her last went through.

Evie still had the last yellow stone.

It traveled toward the house, slowed, and stopped closer than the red.

One point for yellow.

The final score was four to two.

Piper had lost the game several times in her head, won it once in her head, and nearly forgotten to be ready for Nora in the middle.

The real game had only finished now.

She shook hands. She said good curling. Both things were harder than they had been before the game.

In the warm room, Maisie sat beside her on the bench.

"My second stone in the first end was good," she said.

Piper nodded. "Yes."

"Do you remember it?"

Piper opened her mouth.

She remembered zero. Then one. Then three.

She couldn't quite picture Maisie's stone.

"I'm sorry," she said.

Maisie looked down at her gloves. "I wanted you to see it."

Piper moved her helmet off the space between them.

"Tell me."

Maisie described the gentle push and the way it had stopped just inside the blue. Piper listened until she could see it.

Then Nora and Wren came over, and the four girls talked about their shots.

The scoreboard was still there.

For once, Piper wasn't looking at it.

CHAPTER 4

The Things in Piper’s Bag

On Tuesday, Piper emptied her curling bag onto the floor.

Out came two gloves, one helmet, a fleece, a water bottle, and her clean shoes.

Also a pencil with no point.

Also a folded piece of paper she had been looking for since Saturday.

Also three crumbs that Maisie would probably consider team property.

Dad appeared in the doorway.

“Moving out?”

“Sorting things.”

“Ah. A dangerous activity. You sometimes find things.”

Piper smoothed the folded paper on her knee. It was the league schedule she had copied from the noticeboard.

Beside their first game she had written 4–2.

She had put the four first because that was the other team’s score. Then she had worried that someone might think the four belonged to them. She had added LOST in small letters.

Now LOST looked bigger than the numbers.

Dad sat on the floor beside her.

“Was the game all terrible?” he asked.

“No.”

Piper moved one glove into the bag.

“The third end was good. We got two.”

“What else?”

“Maisie’s stone. I didn’t see it properly.”

She put the other glove beside the first.

“And Nora waited for me. Because I was watching the score.”

Dad picked up the blunt pencil.

“When I played juniors, I once spent most of a game working out what we needed in the last end.”

“Did you get it?”

“I don’t remember.”

Piper looked at him.

“You don’t remember the score?”

“I remember my teammate asking whether I planned to join them for the end we were actually playing.”

She could imagine that very clearly.

Dad set the pencil down.

“I’m good at planning things before they happen,” Piper said.

“You are.”

“Sometimes I’m not in the place where my shoes are.”

Dad looked at her clean shoes on the floor.

“Those seem to be here.”

Piper nudged one with her sock.

“What do I do when my head goes ahead?”

“We can ask Granite. He’s helped quite a few wandering heads.”

“Including yours.”

“Mine required a map.”

Piper smiled, then looked at the schedule again.

Their next Saturday was a practice morning. She had been annoyed when she first saw the gap between games. Now she was a little glad.

There would be no scoreboard to beat.

She put her shoes in the bag. Then her helmet. The fleece needed folding before it would fit.

Dad watched without doing it for her.

Piper tried to put everything in at once. The helmet rolled against the water bottle, and one sleeve stuck out like a small flag of surrender.

She took the fleece out again.

Fold. Put it in. Then the bottle.

There.

The zip closed.

Piper stared at the bag.

“What?” Dad asked.

“Nothing.”

But it wasn’t nothing.

She had been trying to pack the next three Saturdays into one shot. No wonder things kept falling out.

She found a pencil sharpener in the kitchen drawer. After sharpening the pencil, she turned the schedule over.

On the blank side, she drew one curling stone.

It wasn’t a particularly good drawing. The handle looked like a sleeping worm.

She didn’t add a scoreboard.

When Dad came past, he pointed at it.

“Is that a stone?”

“Mostly.”

“Good worm.”

Piper wrote NEXT beneath the drawing.

She wasn’t certain what it meant yet.

She wanted to find out on Saturday.

CHAPTER 5

A Smaller Job



On practice morning, Pebble was working beside the ice entrance.

He had set a small cleaning brush on the dry deck. Next to it lay a rubber gripper with a pale bit of dirt caught in the sole.

Piper stopped a few steps away.

“Is that yours?”

Pebble nodded.

“I thought ice makers never got dirty shoes.”

“Would be convenient.”

He picked up the gripper and inspected it.

Piper sat on the bench to check her own. She had kept her indoor shoes clean, but a small patch of grit had caught along one rubber edge.

“There’s a thing.”

Pebble leaned close enough to see.

“Found it.”

“Do I need a different gripper?”

“No. Just get that bit off.”

He showed her the small brush. Piper worked carefully on the little patch, with the gripper off her shoe and both feet on the dry floor.

The grit came free.

She held up the gripper.

Pebble checked it and nodded.

That was all.

Piper looked at the clean rubber.

She had asked whether she needed to change the whole thing. Pebble had looked at the part that needed work.

“Do you ever get tired of checking everything?” she asked.

“Yes.”

That answer surprised her.

Pebble put his own gripper beside the brush.

“Still needs checking.”

Then he smiled, just a little.

Piper liked that he didn’t pretend work stopped being work because it mattered.

Inside, she showed Granite her drawing of the next stone.

He studied the handle.

“A thoughtful worm.”

“Everybody says that.”

“What are you trying to remember?”

Piper explained the scoreboard. The numbers that felt enormous. The game she kept finishing in her head while the real one was still happening.

Granite listened without writing anything down.

When she finished, he pointed to her drawing.

“What happened to that quiet hand you’ve been practicing?”

“I remembered it. Then I remembered we were losing.”

“And then?”

“I gave the stone an extra shove. As if it would be more helpful if I hurried it.”

Granite looked through the window. Piper followed his gaze to the empty rings.

She already knew what a soft finish felt like. She had used one the day number seven first reached the house. She still used it in practice.

The score hadn’t taken the skill away. It had made her rush past it.

“I don’t need a whole new way to deliver,” she said.

“What would help you get ready for the way you know?” Granite asked.

Piper looked at the stone on her paper.

“A moment before I start.”

He waited.

“One breath. Look at the broom. Remember the quiet hand.”

“Try it.”

“It might still miss.”

“It might.”

Piper folded the drawing. She would have liked a guarantee, preferably written down and signed by someone important.

What she had was a small thing to try.

After the warm-up, Jo helped at the practice hack while Ben watched the sweepers. Piper waited until her feet were ready. She took a comfortable breath, chose quiet hand, and looked at Wren’s broom.

The stone stopped short of the house.

Piper made a face.

Then she checked what she could remember. Her fingers had opened softly. No extra jab. She hadn't changed the push at the last moment because she was afraid of losing another point.

There wasn't a point to lose. It was practice.

Still, she had remembered something she wanted to bring into a game.

When her next turn came, she tried a little more push with the same quiet finish. This stone reached the outer ring.

Piper looked toward the empty scoreboard.

She caught herself looking.

"Well?" Granite asked.

"My head was checking the score of a game that isn't happening."

"Busy fellow."

Piper laughed.

Then she turned back to watch Nora settle for her shot.

There was something happening right in front of her. She wanted to see it.

CHAPTER 6

One Useful Thought

By the middle of practice, Maisie had invented a new job.

“I’m the Head of Useful Thoughts,” she announced.

Wren looked at her. “What is your useful thought?”

“Don’t become a windmill.”

It was a good thought for Maisie. When she got excited before a shot, her free arm sometimes wandered off as if it had somewhere else to be.

Nora’s thought was “Look at the broom.”

Wren chose “Take my time.”

Piper kept “Quiet hand.”

Granite made sure they understood that nobody had to use the same words. They were choosing reminders for their own deliveries.

“Can mine be about toast?” Maisie asked.

“Would it help your delivery?”

“Probably not.”

“Save it for the warm room.”

The girls practiced their shots. They missed some. They made some. Their useful thoughts wandered away and came back.

Piper began to notice the space just before she pushed. Usually she hurried through it because she wanted to know where the stone would stop.

Now she let that small space exist.

Feet ready. One breath. Quiet hand. Look at the broom.

She didn't say the words aloud every time. Sometimes thinking them was enough.

Sometimes she needed to begin again.

When Wren took a turn, Piper went to the house. Nora and Maisie got ready to sweep. Granite stood beside Piper.

Wren's first stone came toward them slowly.

Piper's own last delivery had gone too far. She could still feel the little jab in her hand.

Quiet hand, she reminded herself.

"Short," Nora called.

Piper tightened her fingers around her broom. Quiet hand. That was the thing she was meant to remember.

"Piper?" Maisie called.

Granite gave the sweep call while Piper looked up. The brushes moved, then lifted when he called them off. The stone stopped short of the house.

Piper's face grew warm.

"I was remembering my hand," she said.

Nora waited until the lane was clear before coming closer.

"We needed your voice."

Piper looked at the broom she was holding. She wasn't delivering anything now. She could keep her hand as quiet as a sleeping mouse, and it wouldn't tell Maisie when to sweep.

"Different job," she said.

Maisie nodded. "The Head of Useful Thoughts has several departments."

Piper laughed. Then she glanced at Wren.

"I missed your stone. Sorry."

“You can watch the next one,” Wren said.

Before that turn, Piper put her own last delivery away in her head. It could wait. Nora and Maisie needed her to listen, and Wren needed a steady target.

When Wren’s next stone came toward them, Piper watched it travel.

“Short,” Nora called.

Piper looked at the line. This time, the word reached her properly.

“Sweep!”

The brushes went down. The stone traveled farther, then stopped at the front of the rings.

Piper smiled.

She had watched the whole thing.

She could have described it to Maisie afterward, every little bit.

Later, another shot went long. Piper remembered to keep the brushes up when extra distance wouldn’t help.

“That one had a train to catch,” Maisie said.

Piper laughed.

She wasn’t thinking about who should be winning a practice that didn’t have a winner.

At the break, Nora took out a little notebook. She had drawn three small houses on one page, each with a stone in a different place.

“Are those today’s?” Piper asked.

Nora nodded. “The ones I wanted to remember.”

“Do you draw all of them?”

“No. I’d run out of paper.”

Maisie leaned over the page.

“And hands.”

Piper took out her worm-shaped stone. She had folded the paper small enough to fit in the pocket of her bag.

She wrote QUIET HAND under NEXT.

“My dad and I talked about where my shoes are,” she told Nora. “Sometimes my head is three Saturdays ahead of them.”

Nora glanced under the table.

“They seem to be keeping up now.”

“For the moment.”

Piper considered the space beneath her words.

She could add DON’T LOSE. She knew how to spell it. It would fit.

She put the pencil away instead.

Their next few Saturdays brought more practice and another league game. Piper remembered her useful thought on some shots and forgot it on others. The Too-Cold Club still had plenty to learn.

She began to hear her teammates sooner.

She began to notice Maisie's good stones while they were happening.

She still looked at the score.

Of course she looked. It was part of the game, and she cared about it.

But sometimes she could look, know what it said, and return to the ice in front of her.

One Friday evening, Dad asked whether she had packed her bag.

Piper checked it.

Both gloves. Clean shoes. Helmet. Fleece. Water bottle.

The folded drawing waited in the little pocket.

Tomorrow they would play Evie's team again.

Piper took the paper out, looked at her one stone, and put it back.

She hoped they would win.

She also knew which part of tomorrow she would have to play first.

CHAPTER 7

Behind Again

Piper found their game on the noticeboard.

Too-Cold Club and Evie's team. The same short sheet. The same four-end format. A later date than the one she had stared at so eagerly the first time.

The missing mitten was still there.

"Very patient mitten," Maisie said.

Piper touched the little pocket of her bag, where her drawing was folded.

She didn't need to take it onto the ice.

She knew what it said.

After their warm-up, they greeted Evie's team. Jo, Ben, and Granite took their familiar helping places: delivery, sweepers, and house.

The Too-Cold Club won the opening coin toss and chose the hammer again.

In the first end, things went well.

Not perfectly. Nora's first stone stopped short. Maisie sent one too far. Piper's first missed the rings, and for a moment she wanted to glare at it until it moved.

Then she let her shoulders settle.

The stone remained completely unimpressed by her glare.

Her next turn would need something else.

Quiet hand.

Piper's second stone stayed near the front of the house. Later, Wren made a red stone closer than the yellow ones.

One red point.

Jo put a one on their side of the board.

Piper grinned.

“You’re allowed,” Granite said as she passed him.

“What?”

“To be pleased.”

“I was going to be.”

“Excellent. I’ll cancel the paperwork.”

Yellow had the hammer for the second end. Evie’s team made good use of it.

By the end, two yellow stones were closer than any red.

Yellow two. Red one.

Piper looked at the numbers. Her stomach did its familiar small drop.

There it was again. Behind.

She stood in the waiting place, holding her brush. Wren was talking to Granite about the next end. Maisie bent one knee, then the other, keeping herself warm. Nora watched Piper.

“Where are your shoes?” Nora asked quietly.

Piper looked down before she realized what Nora meant.

“Here.”

Nora nodded.

Piper pressed her lips together to stop a smile.

Then she let the smile happen.

They began the third end with the hammer back on their side. Piper remembered the rule now without Wren telling her: the team that had just scored would deliver first.

This end, Maisie's second stone finished near the back of the house.

Piper watched it all the way.

"That was a quieter arm," she told Maisie afterward.

Maisie beamed. "No windmills."

Piper's own first stone went long. Her second stayed in the rings, but yellow had a better one. Wren's last red was short.

One more point for yellow.

The score was three to one.

Only one end remained.

Piper could do the arithmetic. They needed two to tie and three to win.

She said it to Wren while they drank water during a brief pause.

Wren nodded. "I know."

"What should I think about?"

"Your shot," Wren said. Then she looked at her cup. "That's what I'm trying to do."

Piper had been imagining Wren's head as a very quiet room, full of neatly arranged answers.

Apparently, things wandered around in there too.

"Take your time," Piper said.

Wren looked up.

"That's mine."

"I remembered."

"Quiet hand," Wren said.

They smiled at each other.

The score had not become smaller.

The next job had.

CHAPTER 8

The Last Stone

They kept the hammer for the final end because yellow had scored.

“You know what the score is,” Granite said. “Choose each shot together, then give it your attention.”

Piper looked down the lane. The last stone was still several turns away. There were useful things to do before it arrived.

Maisie delivered her two stones. One stopped just short of the rings. The other went through.

She made a face, then came to sweep for Nora.

“Useful thought?” Piper asked as Maisie passed.

“Still no windmills. I managed that bit.”

Nora’s stones wandered to the side. One stayed in the house, well out from the button.

The yellow team had a stone closer in.

Then Piper had her first turn.

She settled. Breathed. Looked at Wren’s broom.

Quiet hand.

Her delivery felt steady.

The stone stopped short.

Piper watched it until it was still.

A miss.

She had done the reminder properly, and it was still a miss.

For a moment, she wanted to crumple the little drawing in her bag without even going back to fetch it.

Jo waited beside her.

“Ready to stand?”

Piper nodded. Jo helped her up and made sure her slider was covered.

As she walked to the waiting place, Piper remembered Pebble and the little patch on the gripper.

Find the bit that needed work.

Her hand had been quiet. Her line had been close. The stone needed a little more push.

That was something she could try.

While yellow delivered, Piper watched. The stone came into the house but finished farther out than their nearest yellow.

When her next turn arrived, Wren gave her a roomy target with Granite’s help. They wanted a draw nearer the button than that yellow stone.

Piper looked at the space.

She wanted very badly to make it.

Wanting was allowed to come with her. It didn’t have to hold the handle.

She settled again. A little more push. Quiet hand.

The stone left her fingers.

Nora and Maisie moved beside it with Ben close by. Wren watched from the house and listened to their call about distance.

“Sweep!”

Piper stayed where Jo could help her stand. She watched the brushes move.

“Up!”

The stone slowed into the open part of the rings.

It stopped nearer the button than the yellow.

Piper let out her breath.

She had made it.

She wanted to look straight at the scoreboard.

Instead, she looked at Nora and Maisie. Both were smiling toward her.

Piper smiled back.

There were still stones to play.

She went to the house when it was time for Wren's deliveries. Granite stood beside her. Nora and Maisie would sweep.

Wren's first stone went through the rings. Piper's red still lay closest, but they needed another red nearer than the yellow to score two.

Yellow's last stone came close. It slowed in the house, farther from the button than the yellow stone already there.

The order had not changed.

One red closest. Then yellow.

Wren had the final stone of the game.

Piper looked at her friend at the other end of their short lane. Wren took time setting her feet. She looked up once, then down again.

Granite helped Piper choose the target.

"Clear voice," he said quietly.

Piper held her broom where Wren could see it.

“Here,” she called. “There’s room.”

Wren nodded.

Piper could not give Wren the right push. She could not make the stone perfect by wanting it hard enough.

She could hold a steady target. She could listen to the sweepers. She could watch this stone.

Wren began.

The stone slid toward them. Nora called its distance. Maisie matched her careful steps. Piper listened, then gave the sweep call with Granite beside her.

The brushes moved.

The stone kept traveling.

“Up!”

The brushes lifted.

Piper watched it curl gently into the house. It slowed beside the open patch near her own red stone.

A little farther.

Then still.

Two red stones closer than the nearest yellow.

Evie came to look with Piper and Granite. They agreed before anyone moved a stone.

“Two red,” Evie said.

Piper turned toward Wren.

Her friend’s shoulders had dropped. Even from here, Piper could see the relief in her face.

The final score would be three to three.

A tie.

Piper hadn’t carried the whole game to this place.

She had played her stones and helped with the ones between them.

That had been plenty to do.



CHAPTER 9

Next Week on the List

Nobody had won.

Nobody was getting an extra end to change that.

Three and three stayed on the board while the teams shook hands.

Piper had imagined how winning would feel. She knew how losing felt. A tie was a new place to stand.

It felt a little unfinished.

It also felt good.

“Good curling,” Evie said.

“Good curling,” Piper answered. “That last yellow was close.”

Evie tipped her head. “I thought it would go a bit farther.”

“I know that thought,” Piper said.

They smiled at each other.

In the warm room, Maisie announced that her arms would be taking the rest of the day off.

“They’ll have to come back for lunch,” Nora said.

“Negotiations are continuing.”

Wren sat on the bench and took off her helmet. One piece of her bob stuck up over her ear.

Piper pointed to it.

“Last-stone hair.”

Wren tried to flatten it. It refused.

“I took my time,” she said. “It had time to grow.”

Piper laughed, and the laugh felt wonderfully ordinary after the last few minutes on the ice.

Granite came in with the game sheet. He showed both teams the recorded result before pinning it beside the schedule.

Three to three.

Their first league tie was official now.

Piper went to look. Beneath today's game were other dates. Other teams. More Saturdays.

She did not know what numbers would belong beside them.

That was still irritating.

It was also interesting.

Ben joined her at the board.

"Which shot are you thinking about?"

Piper smiled. He hadn't asked about the score.

"Wren's last one."

"A good one."

"And my second in the last end. And Maisie's arm. And Nora asking where my shoes were."

Ben looked down.

"Still here?"

"For most of the game."

"That's useful progress."

Piper pulled the folded drawing out of her bag. The corners had become soft. The handle still looked like a worm.

She showed it to him.

"It didn't make all my shots good."

"No."

"I wanted it to."

"I thought you might."

She looked through the window. Pebble was waiting while the coaches finished clearing their equipment. Soon he would work on the ice for the next group.

There would always be another part that needed attention.

Piper turned back to her drawing.

Under QUIET HAND, she added a tiny pair of shoes.

Ben inspected them.

“Those are quite good.”

“They know where they are.”

She folded the paper along its familiar creases.

At the table, her friends were discussing next Saturday’s practice. Maisie wanted another turn at calling from the house. Nora wanted to try remembering the distance without staring at the floor. Wren wanted everyone to stop looking at her hair.

Piper sat down with them.

“I’d like to practice the same draw again,” she said.

“The one you made?” Nora asked.

“And the one I missed.”

Granite glanced over from the doorway.

“A full appointment book.”

“Not all at once,” Piper said.

His moustache lifted.

“No,” he agreed. “Not all at once.”

When it was time to leave, Piper checked the bench before closing her bag. Both gloves. Helmet. Fleece. The little folded drawing.

Her shoes were on her feet until she changed them for the ride home.

She knew where everything was.

At the door, she looked back at the schedule one more time.

She still wanted a win beside the Too-Cold Club’s name.

There was nothing wrong with wanting that.

But next Saturday, before there could be a result, there would be a stone waiting at the hack.

Piper knew where she wanted to be when it was her turn.