PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Other Team

BOOK SIXTEEN



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

Someone Else’s Sunday



Juno wanted to borrow Piper.

That was how Maisie put it, anyway.

“For the whole day?” she asked.

“One game,” Juno said. “On Sunday.”

Piper had been trying to pull her outdoor shoe on without undoing the lace. She stopped with her heel halfway in.

“On your team?”

“Yes.”

The Silver Mittens. Juno's team. The girls Piper had played against at bonspiels, the girls who had beaten the Too-Cold Club in their rematch last season.

For a moment, Piper imagined standing beside them for the first handshakes and then forgetting which way to go.

"Lena can't come," Juno explained. "Her family's going away for her cousin's birthday. Our coach asked if there was somebody we'd like to ask."

"And you thought of me?"

"I know you can be vice."

Piper pushed her heel down. The shoe folded under it.

"Ow."

"You may have to manage the shoe first," Wren said.

Piper sat down and undid the lace.

Curling had started again after the summer. The four friends were several practices into their third season together. Nora had a new water bottle with a lid that stayed attached. Maisie had grown out of one pair of trousers and was extremely pleased with the pockets in the new ones. Wren still knew where everybody's gloves had ended up.

Piper had missed the sound of stones meeting. At their first practice back, she had smiled at a perfectly ordinary click on the next lane.

They had been getting used to their familiar deliveries again. The coaches had checked their equipment and the adapted starting places. Piper still sent some stones too far. She had also made a draw that stopped almost exactly where Wren had wanted it, and they had both looked at it for a long time.

Today the Silver Mittens had joined their practice. Now everyone was in the warm room, doing the noisy work of putting shoes and jackets in the right places.

Juno waited while Piper finished tying her lace.

“We’re playing the Blue Comets at our club. Four ends. You’d throw third, like you do here.”

“And be vice?”

Juno nodded. “Ellie leads. Kit’s second. You know them.”

Piper knew their faces. She knew Kit had once laughed so hard during a handshake that she had had to start saying “Good game” again. She knew Ellie sometimes tucked her gloves under her chin while she opened her bag.

Knowing what it would be like to curl with them was a different matter.

“I’d like to,” Piper said.

The words arrived before she had finished imagining it.

Juno smiled. “I’ll tell our coach.”

The adults would settle the arrangements. Ben was by the window with Jo, and Juno’s parent had come over to collect her bag. Nobody needed to solve Sunday with one shoe still untied.

When Juno had gone, Maisie leaned toward Piper.

“Will you have to be a Mitten?”

“Only on Sunday.”

“One mitten,” Nora said. “The rest of you can stay the same.”

Wren put a glove into her own bag. “You’ve played against Juno lots. Now you can see what it’s like on her side.”

Piper looked through the window. The coaches were finishing on the ice. A group of stones waited together at the far end, their handles bright under the lights.

Juno's side.

She had spent whole games trying to leave stones where Juno wouldn't want them. On Sunday, Juno would hold the broom for her.

"That will be strange," she said.

"Tell us afterward," Nora said.

Maisie wanted to know if Juno talked to her stones. Wren said talking to a stone was perfectly sensible as long as nobody expected an answer.

"Granite answers," Maisie pointed out.

"Granite is a coach."

Across the room, Granite looked up from his clipboard.

"And available for difficult questions until my lunch is ready."

"Does Juno talk to her stones?"

"That," Granite said, "is a difficult question for Juno."

Piper laughed. Then Ben came over, and they talked about Sunday properly.

Juno's coach and the Comets' coach had agreed to Piper filling Lena's place for this friendly. Her own group had no game that day. Dad could take her and stay. She would play the whole game in the jobs they had just discussed, with the same junior stones and a starting setup she already knew.

It was all quite ordinary when Dad said it.

Piper was still thinking about whose stones she would be hoping for.

That evening, she found her helmet in the bottom of her bag and put it where it belonged. She set her clean shoes together. There was no different jacket to find and no new name to learn for herself.

Dad passed the doorway.

“Everything there?”

“I think so.”

He paused.

Piper lifted her head. “They have lots of things they do together.”

“Juno’s team?”

She nodded. “Things from when I wasn’t there.”

Dad rested a hand on the doorframe.

“Yes. They will.”

He didn’t tell her she already knew everything about them. Piper was glad of that.

“Still want to go?”

“Yes.”

“Then we’ll go.”

Piper folded her jacket over the bag. On the front, the pale panels made their familiar shape.

She wondered what Kit would say when a stone was going too fast.

CHAPTER 2

Yellow Handles



On Sunday, Ellie was sitting on the bench with one glove under her chin.

Piper recognized her immediately.

“Hello,” Ellie said carefully, keeping the glove in place.

“Hello.”

Ellie found the zip she had been looking for, opened her bag and let the glove fall into her lap.

“Much easier,” she said.

Kit sat on her other side. She had short curls and a round face that seemed ready to smile. Her jacket was zipped almost to her nose.

“I got cold in the car,” she explained. “Before we even found the ice.”

Piper knew about being cold before the ice. She sat down beside them.

Juno arrived carrying her own brush and a bottle. Her hair was in its low bun with the little clip beside it. Piper had seen her walk toward the house so many times that it felt peculiar to watch her sit on the same bench.

“Lena says hello,” Juno told them. “And she says she’s going to have birthday cake before lunch.”

“Strong planning,” Kit said.

“Her cousin’s party is in the morning.”

“Still strong.”

Piper laughed while she changed her shoes.

They were at Juno’s home club. Piper had curled here before, but she usually arrived in a busy group with Maisie trying to finish a story. Today she could hear somebody opening a cupboard in the next room. A brush handle tapped the floor. Kit’s zip finally came down from her nose.

Ben stayed to talk with the coaches. Piper could see him through the open doorway while she fastened her helmet.

The Blue Comets came in together. Tali stopped when she saw Piper.

“Oh. You’re with the Mittens today.”

“For this game.”

Tali looked at Juno, then back at Piper.

“Good curling, then.”

“Good curling.”

There was nothing awkward in the way Tali said it. Piper had expected she might need a longer answer.

Their coach gathered them for the warm-up. Everyone knew the junior stones and the farther adapted start from previous sessions; the adults had checked that the eight players were comfortable with it again this season. Four coaches, including Ben, would help on their lane. They would have their seated break after two ends.

The friendly could finish in a tie. The coaches made that clear before the opening toss, along with Piper's place in the lineup.

Tali won the toss and chose the last stone of the first end.

"Yellow," Juno said when it was their turn to choose handles.

Piper looked at the yellow stones.

Yellow had often been the colour she wanted to stop somewhere inconvenient.

Now Ellie was going to send one for them.

They shook hands with the Comets, then went to their places. Juno took the house. Ellie went to deliver, and Piper stood with Kit, ready to sweep.

For a second, Piper waited for Nora to come beside her.

Kit was already there.

"Which side do you like?" Kit asked.

Piper told her. They settled where the coach could see their feet and brushes clearly, with room to move.

At the far end, Juno held her target. Her jacket had two pale stripes along each sleeve. Piper was used to looking for Wren's bob when she glanced toward the house. The stripes were easy to find instead.

Ellie released the first yellow.

"Looks short," Kit called.

Piper thought so too. Juno called them to sweep. They brushed ahead of it, lifted when asked and watched it finish in the front of the rings.

Ellie came down the side.

“In,” she said, pleased.

Piper nearly said, “They’ve got one in.”

She stopped in time.

“We’ve got one in.”

Kit glanced at her and grinned.

“Useful change.”

The Comets sent their first red. It stopped on the other side, farther out. Piper watched it settle, then turned back to Ellie.

She knew what to do next. That helped.

Ellie’s second yellow stopped short of the house. Kit left her first in the back rings. Her next went wider than she wanted, and she made a small face at it once it had stopped.

“That one had a separate plan.”

Now Piper was going to deliver to Juno.

She went to the hack and looked along the ice. The Comets’ second player had made a useful draw nearer the middle. Juno pointed to the red, then showed a target for a draw on the open side.

Piper wanted to get inside it.

She looked once more at the broom. Juno lifted her free hand to check that Piper was ready.

Piper nodded.

Then she sent a yellow stone toward her.

CHAPTER 3

A Different Sort of Familiar

Piper's first yellow reached the house on the left, but it went farther back than she had wanted.

It was in. It wasn't nearer than the best red.

She came down the side with the coach after getting steady and covering her slider. Juno was looking at the stones.

"I thought it would stop sooner," Piper said.

"So did I."

That was reassuring, although Piper still wanted it back.

The Comets' third player added another red. Juno and Piper looked at the nearer one, open in the middle.

"Could you hit this one?" Juno asked.

Piper crouched to see the route.

"Yes. I'll try."

She had taken out stones before. The red did not know she was curling for somebody else.

Ellie and Kit got ready to sweep. Piper went back to the hack and looked toward Juno's target.

This time the yellow met the red squarely.

Click.

The red went out. Piper's yellow stayed.

She watched until everything was still, then smiled so suddenly that Ellie began smiling back before she reached them.

"Nice," Kit said.

Piper came down to look.

“That’s nearer.”

“It is,” Juno said.

The Comets promptly took it out.

“Oh,” Piper said.

Kit nodded gravely. “They’re allowed.”

“I had noticed.”

“You sounded surprised.”

Piper laughed. She had been pleased with her shot for such a short time.

Now Juno went to deliver, and Piper took her place in the house.

This part should have felt familiar. Piper did it for Wren in every ordinary game. She watched the path, held the broom where they had agreed, and called the sweepers while Wren’s stones came toward her.

But Juno was walking away with two pale stripes on each sleeve, and Kit and Ellie were waiting with their brushes. Piper found herself thinking about where Wren would put the next red.

Yellow.

Their yellow.

Juno stopped before going back to the hack.

“First one on this side,” she said, showing Piper the open space. “Then we’ll see.”

Piper checked the target with her.

“Here?”

“A little more that way.”

Piper moved her broom. Juno looked again and nodded.

There. They had agreed it.

She didn't have to guess Juno's whole plan before Juno had made it.

The first yellow came into the left side of the house. It didn't beat the nearest red, but it stayed in a useful place. The Comets put another red farther out.

For her last stone, Juno chose the open hit in the middle.

Piper held the target. Ellie and Kit watched the yellow coming. It met the nearest red and sent it out, staying where the red had been.

One yellow was closest now.

Tali tried to get inside it. Her last red came into the open right side and stopped short of being nearer.

Piper and the Comets' vice looked carefully before the adults cleared anything.

"One yellow," Piper said.

The other girl agreed.

Piper turned and held up one finger.

Juno lifted her glove toward her. Their hands met.

Piper had congratulated Juno after games before. This felt different. She had been standing in the house, watching the yellow that gave them that point.

Their point.

At the start of the second end, Kit came to stand beside her.

"Your hit was good."

"It went out afterward."

"The hit was still good."

Piper looked at her. Kit was already watching the Comets' first delivery, her brush resting lightly in her hands.

Piper decided she liked standing beside her.

In this end, the Comets' second player left a red in the front-left part of the rings. It stayed there while other stones arrived around it.

Ellie got one yellow in. Kit put another on the right, nearer the center. The Comets took that one out and stayed. Piper's first draw came into the front of the house, but the red on the right was closer.

Juno asked for a hit.

Piper got the red this time too. Both stones went out.

She came down the side, looking at the empty place.

"Not quite what I meant."

"The red's gone," Juno said. Then she pointed to the other one. "That one's nearest now."

It was the Comets' earlier red on the left. Piper's draw was just farther from the middle.

The end kept changing. The Comets' vice made a red draw closer in. Juno took it out, but her yellow went too. The earlier red stayed where it had been all along.

For Juno's last draw, Piper held the target and listened to Kit.

"Past the middle," Kit called as it traveled.

Piper could see the line. She wanted to answer quickly, but she was still putting Kit's words beside the picture in her head.

“Up,” she called. “Both up.”

Ellie and Kit lifted. The yellow kept going and finished farther back than the red they needed to beat. Tali’s last red went wide.

One for the Comets. One point each after two ends.

Juno came down to the house after Piper and the other vice had agreed the score.

“Mine was too much,” she said.

“I was a bit slow answering Kit.”

“I’d already sent it too hard.”

Piper looked at the yellow. She had wanted to get everything right in Juno’s house. Now the stone was simply there, behind the place they had wanted.

Juno turned toward the warm room.

“I need my water.”

Piper did too.

CHAPTER 4

At Their Table



Kit unzipped her jacket and immediately looked smaller.

Piper had been looking at the high collar all morning. Now she could see Kit's whole chin.

"There you are," Ellie said.

"I was always here."

"Mostly."

Kit folded the collar down with great care, as though it might rise again if she stopped watching.

They sat together during their break. Ben brought Piper's bottle over from her bag, then went to the nearby table with the coaches.

Juno took a long drink. Ellie stretched her fingers open on the table and closed them again. Nobody wanted to talk about every stone at once.

Piper let herself sit quietly.

The room was familiar from earlier visits. She knew which window looked onto their lane. She knew the radiator made a faint ticking sound. At her usual table, Maisie might have been telling Nora something while Wren listened with one eyebrow raised.

Here, Ellie was looking at a small damp patch beside Kit's bottle.

"Your bottle's making a lake."

Kit lifted it. A drop hung from the bottom.

"Not a very ambitious one."

She wiped the table with a cloth from her bag.

Juno turned to Piper.

"What does Wren usually want you to say when you're at the house?"

Piper thought about it.

"If I think we should sweep. Or stop. And if something looks different from what we wanted."

"Same, then."

"I'm used to hearing Maisie and Nora."

Kit leaned forward. "Was I too quiet?"

"No. I heard you. I was just thinking about who said it."

Kit considered that. "I don't sound like Nora."

"No."

"I don't sound like Ellie either."

Ellie turned toward her. "Please don't try."

"I wasn't going to."

Piper laughed into her bottle before she took a drink.

Juno rested her elbows on the table.

“I sometimes still answer the person on the next lane. If they sound like Kit.”

“That’s because people enjoy being like me,” Kit said.

“Or because they’re loud.”

“Both could happen.”

They were all laughing now. Piper didn’t need to know what had happened last Sunday or all the Sundays before. This was happening here, while she was sitting with them.

After a little while, Ellie asked about the Too-Cold Club’s cup.

“Did you all lift it at once?”

“Yes,” Piper said. “There were a lot of hands.”

“Did anyone let go?”

“Not until Dad had taken the picture.”

Kit looked at her own two hands. “That’s a sensible time to keep holding.”

Piper smiled. She liked telling them about her friends. It didn’t make this table feel less like the right place to sit today.

She asked Ellie how long she had been playing with the Mittens. Ellie told her about meeting Juno at a practice and spending the first session thinking Juno’s name was June.

“You answered,” Ellie reminded her.

“You were looking at me.”

“Very useful of you.”

Piper wondered what things Ellie knew about Juno that she would never have noticed from the other side of a game. There must be lots.

She was pleased to have found one.

The coaches checked on them before it was time to return. They finished their drinks and warmed up again. Kit brought her collar halfway up and left it there.

On the ice, the adults had the lane ready. Juno and Piper looked at the clear house before the Comets' first stone of the third end.

"One each," Juno said.

Piper nodded.

"What would you like from mine?" she asked.

"We'll see what's there when you get to them."

Piper looked down the lane toward Ellie and Kit.

Of course they would.

There were other shots to help first.

CHAPTER 5

Our Yellow

The Comets' first red came into the right side of the house.

Piper watched it stop. Then Ellie was ready, and Kit came beside her.

"Same sides?" Kit asked.

"Yes."

This time Piper moved into place without looking for anyone else.

Juno called an open draw. Ellie's yellow started a little slowly.

"Short," Piper called.

"Short," Kit agreed.

They swept. Juno kept them going, then called them up. The yellow reached the front rings on the left.

Ellie came down with her glove out.

Piper met it. Kit met it too.

"Thank you," Ellie said.

"We were busy," Kit told her.

Piper was still smiling when the Comets got ready again.

The third end gave them something to build on. Kit drew a yellow into the left part of the inner rings. Tali's second player tried an open hit and missed it. Ellie's early stone was farther out, but it made Piper keep looking at the left side as well as the middle.

For Piper's first delivery, Juno asked her to draw into the open space on the right.

Piper looked at the broom from the hack. She could see the space. She could see the nearest red too, outside Kit's yellow.

She let the stone go.

It traveled toward the house while Ellie and Kit watched its speed. They swept for part of the way, then stopped at Juno's call.

Piper got steady and watched the yellow finish.

It stopped in the right part of the house, closer to the middle than the red.

Two yellows counted for the moment.

Piper came down to them. Kit pointed at her stone with the end of her brush held well clear.

"That one."

Piper nodded. She didn't need a longer explanation.

The Comets answered with a draw that went too deep. Piper's next yellow went wide and out. She wanted to look annoyed with it for longer, but Juno was ready to talk about her own last two turns.

Piper took the house.

Tali's first red missed a hit on Kit's yellow and went through. There was still an open route on that side, with Kit's yellow nearest and Piper's on the other side of the middle.

Juno pointed to a space in front of the rings.

"A guard here?"

Piper looked from the target space to the two yellows. She crouched to see the route the Comets had just tried.

"More this way?" she asked, moving her free hand toward the left. "If it's over there, they can still see all of Kit's."

Juno came to look from beside her.

“Yes. There.”

Piper held the broom. Juno checked it once before going to the hack.

It was a small change. There had been no long talk and nobody had come to tell them what their team ought to do.

Piper watched Ellie and Kit getting ready.

Their yellow.

She didn’t have to remind herself which one that meant.

Juno’s stone came toward the front of the house. Piper listened to Kit’s early call, then looked back to the gap.

“Up,” she said. “That’s enough.”

The brushes lifted. The yellow moved on and stopped short of the house, close to the place they had chosen.

Juno had wanted it a little farther left. It still blocked part of the direct route to Kit’s stone.

Tali chose the open side for her final draw. She tried to get a red closer than Piper’s yellow. Piper watched from the waiting place beside Juno. The red came into the rings, but it stayed farther from the middle.

Juno had the last stone. Her yellow stopped short of the house, leaving the two that were already counting.

Piper and the other vice checked the two yellows, then the nearest red.

“Two yellow.”

“Two.”

Piper held up two fingers.

Kit looked at her own stone. Piper looked at hers. Ellie made a pleased little noise beside them, and Juno lifted both hands, one toward each of the girls.

Three to one for the Silver Mittens.

Piper had helped make an end with them. She could remember Ellie's first draw, Kit's yellow, her own delivery, the space she and Juno had looked at together.

There was one more end to play.

The Comets made it difficult. Their second player put a red in a useful place early. Ellie and Kit both got yellows into the house, but neither was nearer. Piper hit one red and rolled out with it. The Comets put another in.

Piper's second yellow went wider than she meant it to.

For Juno's last two turns, Piper was back at the house. She knew where Kit would stand and which voice would give her the first idea of the stone's speed. She still had to look. She still had to listen.

Juno's first yellow came close enough to keep the Comets to one counting red. Her second stayed farther out. Tali had a final draw that could bring a second point and tie the game, but it ran too far.

One red counted.

Three to two for the Silver Mittens.

Piper checked the score with the Comets' vice, then went to join the handshakes.

"Good game," Tali said.

"Good game."

Tali glanced toward the house. "We nearly got you."

"You did."

That sounded as though the Comets had won. Piper corrected herself, laughing.

"Nearly. You nearly did."

"That's the important word," Kit said behind her.

They all wished the rest of the Comets good curling. The adults began clearing the lane while the girls came off together.

Juno touched Piper's sleeve.

"Thanks for playing."

"I liked it."

"So did we."

Piper looked back at the ice. The yellows were being brought together again. Soon they would be ready for somebody else.

In the warm room, Ben was waiting near the bench with her bag. Piper sat down and started unfastening her shoes.

"They took out my yellow in the first end," she told him.

"I saw."

"And the one in the third stayed."

"I saw that too."

She looked up. "Kit says the good bit still happened even if your stone goes out afterward."

"That sounds like Kit."

"You know Kit?"

"A little better now. I've been helping you all morning."

Piper smiled. Of course Dad had been meeting them too.

She finished with her shoes. Juno and Ellie were nearby, talking about a red that had just missed. Kit was trying to fit her bottle into a side pocket without taking anything else out of her bag.

Piper could have told her the pocket was too full. Kit was already discovering it.

Next Saturday, Piper would curl with Maisie, Nora and Wren again. She had things to tell them. Wren would want to hear about the guard. Nora would want to know which yellow had stayed closest. Maisie would probably ask whether Kit talked to her stones.

Piper still didn't know the answer to that one.

"Kit?"

Kit looked up, holding the bottle halfway out of the pocket.

"Do you talk to your stones?"

"Sometimes."

"What do you say?"

Kit thought about the game they had just finished.

"Usually, 'Not there.'"

Piper laughed. Ellie nodded as though this was a perfectly accurate report.

Juno pulled on her jacket.

"I say that too."

Piper picked up her bag. There was nothing she needed to borrow before she went home. Her gloves were her gloves. Her shoes were her shoes.

The story about the yellow stones was hers now too.