PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Practice Call

BOOK TWENTY



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

Contents

1 The Empty House 1

2 Four Names on Paper 5

3 From This End 9

4 Wren Had a Turn Too 13

5 The Question She Could Ask 17

6 The Stone in Front of Her 21

7 One More Pocket 25

8 The Familiar Places 28

9 The Reply They Wanted 32

10 Next Time She Asked 36

Story by Mary Deuhs

AI-generated draft and illustrations

Free digital edition · HouseCall

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

CHAPTER 1

The Empty House

There were no stones in the house, and Piper could not stop looking at it.

Usually, when she took Wren's place, the rings were full of things that had already happened. A guard stood outside. A yellow waited near the middle. A red that someone had liked was missing.

Today the ice was empty.

"We're going this way first," Jo said.

"I know."

Piper knew perfectly well. Maisie was ready at the familiar farther starting place. Nora waited with her brush. Wren was coming down the safe side to hold the target.

Piper was supposed to join Nora.

Instead, she looked once more at the empty rings. She could put Maisie's first red on the left. Or in front. Or on the right, with room for another stone later.

"Piper?" Nora said.

"Coming."

She went to her sweeping place.

It was the Saturday after the last game of their harder league block. Six games were finished: three wins, two losses and one tie. Piper had said those numbers to Ben twice on the way home. She had said them once more while taking off her coat.

"I've still got them," he had told her.

Now they were back at ordinary practice. Their third season had only a few club Saturdays left. There would

be no seventh league result to add, however well today went.

They had warmed up, checked their gear and made familiar deliveries while Jo watched. Piper's helmet strap was fastened comfortably under her chin. The adults had checked the portable hack and the junior stones. Everything felt ready.

Maisie sent her red.

"Enough to get in," Nora called.

Piper watched beside her. "I think so."

Wren called them up. The stone slowed in the front rings on the right.

Maisie came down smiling.

"That is the amount of in I meant."

"A useful amount," Nora said.

They were taking familiar turns before their chosen practice work. Piper helped with Maisie's next draw, swept for Nora and made her own deliveries. One of hers went a little wide. The other reached the area Wren had shown her.

Then Piper went to the house for Wren.

This was her usual job. Maisie led, Nora played second, Piper played third and vice, and Wren delivered fourth and skipped. Piper could choose a target with Wren, hold it and watch a stone come toward her. She had done that in plenty of games.

Wren's first draw stopped short.

"More than that," Wren said when she reached Piper.

"Same place?"

Wren looked. "Yes."

Piper checked the target with her again. The next red came farther. Maisie and Nora lifted their brushes, and it settled inside the area they wanted.

Piper liked being there to see it arrive.

After the adults closed the lane for clearing, she went to Jo.

“Could I have another turn calling the beginning?”

Jo turned toward her. “Which beginning?”

“Maisie’s stones. Then Nora’s. A whole end again, from the empty house.”

Saying it made Piper want it more. She remembered the friendly against the Blue Comets, when she had skipped and thrown fourth, with Wren third and vice. She had liked choosing from the start. After the harder league, she wanted another chance to practice that work.

Wren came over with her broom in both hands.

“I’d like to sweep more,” she said.

Piper looked at her.

“With Maisie,” Wren added. “While Nora throws. I don’t get much of that.”

Jo listened to both of them. Then she called Maisie and Nora over, safely away from the stones being gathered.

“We can plan a practice exchange for next Saturday,” she said. “We’ll work out everybody’s jobs first. Today we still have the work you each asked for.”

Piper nodded. Her roll was among that work. So were Maisie’s two different draw weights and Nora’s early weight calls.

Wren looked at her.

“Would you want me to choose your shots when you deliver?”

“Yes.”

“And I could work on my calls from beside a moving stone.”

“You could.”

Piper glanced back at the empty house. A helper was putting the last stone away at the side.

Next Saturday, she would choose the opening shot again.

CHAPTER 2

Four Names on Paper



“This is where the house is too large,” Nora said.

Piper stopped drawing.

Her outer ring had reached the edge of the paper. There was hardly any space left for a guard.

“It could be a very small guard,” Maisie said.

“The stone is still the same size,” Wren told her.

“A guard standing very politely.”

Piper turned the paper over and began again.

They were in the warm room after practice, with their ordinary shoes on and their helmets in their bags. Jo had

given them time to talk through next Saturday's exchange while their grown-ups finished nearby.

Piper made a smaller house. Then she drew four little marks inside it.

"We might have reds here," she said. "And here."

"Will Jo agree?" Nora asked.

"She's playing the yellows."

"Exactly."

Piper smiled and put the pencil down. She had not meant to decide a whole end on paper. She just liked seeing places that could work.

Wren pointed to one of the marks.

"I'd like to judge that kind of draw from beside it."

"You know what draws look like," Maisie said.

"Coming toward me. I want to do more from your place."

Maisie nodded. "Then you can tell me what you think before I say mine."

"Will you still say yours?"

"Certainly."

Nora pulled the spare sheet toward them. Jo had written their names in delivery order: Maisie, Nora, Piper, Wren.

The order would stay the same for the practice ends. Against the Blue Comets, Piper had delivered last. This time she would call the shots while still throwing third. Wren would take the house for Piper's two deliveries. When the others delivered, Wren would join whichever girl was available to sweep.

Piper traced the names with one finger.

"For Maisie, you and Nora. For Nora, you and Maisie."

"For yours, Maisie and Nora," Wren said. "For mine too."

"And I come back to the house after my two."

Nora nodded. "We've still got enough of everybody."

They went over it with Jo before they left. There would be two unscored practice ends, one on each side of their proper seated break. Jo would deliver the opposing stones, with a helper holding her target. The girls could ask to pause between shots. They would have familiar warm-up deliveries first and ordinary practice time afterward if they still felt comfortable.

"Next week's friendly stays in your usual positions," Jo said. "This is a chance to practice different parts of the job."

Piper liked knowing exactly what she was asking for. Two practice ends, with all four of them taking their usual delivery turns.

"I want to try it," she said.

So did Wren. Maisie and Nora wanted to help them, and they each had something of their own to work on too.

On the way to the door, Piper passed a photograph of some older junior girls. They were laughing together, one girl bent almost double beside her broom.

Under the photograph were the words UNDER 18.

Piper had seen the picture before. Today she stopped.

Ben waited beside her.

"I'd like to play in that," she said.

"An under-eighteen competition?"

Piper nodded. "A big one."

She looked at the girls again. She wondered what had made them laugh. She wondered whether they had been nervous before their first game.

“I’d like to win it too,” she added.

Ben smiled. “I thought that part might follow.”

Piper grinned at him. It was a very large thing to want. She was still allowed to want it.

Then Maisie called from the doorway because her bag strap had caught on the empty coat hook.

“I’ve been kept,” she announced.

Ben unhooked the strap. Maisie thanked him with a serious little nod.

“You may go,” Wren told her.

They went out together. Piper carried the folded page in the front pocket of her bag.

She had two practice ends to think about first.

CHAPTER 3

From This End

Piper's broom was in the wrong place.

She knew it before Maisie said anything. She had pointed to the finish she wanted, then left the broom there instead of setting the aiming target.

"That's the place to stop?" Maisie asked from beside her.

"Yes. Wait."

Piper moved her broom.

Now she had both places straight. She showed Maisie again, and Maisie went back to the delivery end.

The first practice end had begun.

Jo's opening yellow was in the right wing of the house. Piper had chosen the open left front for Maisie's first red. She had reasons. There was room. Maisie had practiced that weight. A red there would give them somewhere else to play.

Having reasons felt good.

Nora and Wren waited ready to sweep. Wren looked different down there, although she wore the same helmet and held the same broom.

Maisie released the stone.

"Enough," Nora called.

From the house, the red seemed to be coming very slowly.

"Sweep," Piper called.

"It has plenty," Wren said.

Piper kept looking. The stone was still a long way away. She wanted it inside the rings, and she did not want her opening call to leave Maisie short.

“A little,” she called.

The brushes worked briefly.

Then the red came closer, and Piper saw how much speed it still had.

“Up!”

Both brushes lifted. The stone traveled beyond the front area, past the middle and into the back rings on the left.

Piper watched it stop.

There was nothing wrong with the ice it occupied. It simply was not the place she had asked for.

Maisie came down the side.

“Mine felt quick,” she said.

“It looked slow from here.”

“We said it had enough,” Nora said.

“I heard.”

Piper wished she had not answered so quickly. Nora’s face changed a little, and Piper knew how the words sounded.

She had heard. She had swept it anyway.

Jo joined them after closing the lane for their pause.

“What did each of you notice?” she asked.

Maisie described her release. Nora said the stone had kept its speed beside them. Wren agreed.

Piper looked along the route from her end.

“I thought it was going to stop sooner,” she said.

“That view takes practice too,” Jo told her. “Your sweepers have another view to give you.”

Piper nodded. She knew that. She was usually one of the people giving it.

They continued. Jo drew a yellow into the front-middle area. Piper chose an open draw on the right for Maisie's next red. This time she listened when Nora said it had enough.

The red stopped a little behind the place Piper wanted, but she had not called for extra sweeping.

Jo's next yellow ran through the back without touching anything.

Then it was Nora's turn.

Piper liked her choice here: a draw to the open left-middle area, nearer than either yellow. She showed the finish clearly, checked Nora's understanding and set the target.

Nora's stone came toward her.

"Needs us," Wren called.

Maisie agreed. Piper asked them to sweep, then watched the line while they worked. She called them up before the middle.

The red reached the chosen area.

Piper felt a smile arrive before she could help it.

Nora smiled back from the other end.

Jo's next yellow took that red out.

Piper had expected a reply. She could still feel annoyed about this particular one.

Nora came down to look. “Hit?”

“Yes,” Piper said.

Then she thought of a draw on the other side. Then she thought of the hit again.

She pointed with her broom toward the yellow. “Take that one out.”

Nora checked the target and made the hit. Her red stayed.

Piper was pleased. She was also trying to remember what she had wanted for her own stones and where Wren would stand when she delivered and whether the next yellow might change both things.

Wren joined her after Jo’s next stone stopped farther out in the right wing.

“Your turn,” she said.

Piper stared at the house.

Of course it was.

CHAPTER 4

Wren Had a Turn Too

Piper went to deliver with three different shots still in her head.

Wren had chosen an open draw on the right. They had checked it together. It was a familiar shot, and there was plenty of room.

Piper settled, looked at the broom and thought about Nora's red.

Then she began.

Her stone left her hand along a line farther outside than she wanted. It stayed wide of the chosen area.

She knew before it stopped that she had hardly looked at Wren's target at all.

Piper got steady and covered her slider before taking the clear side route. Wren waited beside the house.

"I was still thinking about the last turn," Piper said.

"Would you like another look at this one?"

Piper did.

After Jo's next yellow stopped in the left front rings, they chose a draw on the right again. This time Piper went back knowing which place belonged to the stone she was about to deliver.

The line was better. Maisie and Nora judged the weight together, and the red came into the front-middle area.

Piper smiled at it before returning to the house.

"Mine," she said quietly.

She had almost forgotten how much she enjoyed that part.

Jo took out the new red. Then Wren came to discuss her first stone.

Piper wanted to remove the yellow that had replaced it. Wren liked the choice too. Maisie and Nora swept while Piper watched the line, and Wren's hit left a red nearer than the others.

Jo drew a close yellow on the open left side.

"We could hit that," Piper said when Wren joined her. "Or draw. But if we hit it, yours might stay and we'd have the other one too. Unless it rolled out. We could draw on the right. There's a place near—"

Wren lifted one glove.

Piper stopped.

"Which one are we playing?" Wren asked.

Piper looked at both choices. She wanted Wren to know she had seen them. She also wanted Wren to believe she knew what to do.

"The open hit," she said at last. "That yellow out. Yours staying."

"All right."

Wren checked the target and went back. Her red caught the yellow thinly. The yellow went out, and Wren's red followed it through the back.

Her earlier red was still nearest. They looked at the finished practice end without putting a score on the board.

Piper had called from Maisie's first stone to Wren's last, with her own deliveries in between. She wanted to feel nothing but pleased about that.

Instead, she wanted a chair.

They changed on the dry side and sat down for their full break. For a while, everyone drank and ate. Piper

watched a drop of water move down the side of her bottle.

"How was sweeping?" she asked Wren.

Wren brightened.

"Nora's first draw. I thought it needed us, and it did."

"We agreed early," Maisie said.

"I liked that."

Piper had been so busy feeling relieved about her own call that she had hardly noticed Wren enjoying hers.

"You told me before I asked," Piper said.

"You were looking down the line."

Wren rubbed her palms together, then reached for her snack. "I want to do it again in the next end."

Piper nodded. They both had work they wanted to practice today.

Across the table, Nora looked at her.

"When I say enough, I don't mean I'm finished watching."

Piper waited.

“I can tell you if I change my mind. But I need to know you heard the first thing.”

“I did hear it.”

Nora’s eyebrows rose a little.

Piper tried again.

“I heard the words. Then I decided the stone looked slow. I should have told you what I was seeing.”

“Then we could have answered,” Wren said.

Piper turned her bottle slowly on the table.

“I wanted to sound as if I knew.”

Maisie considered this while opening her snack box.

“I mostly wanted you to tell me when to sweep.”

Piper laughed. So did Nora.

Wren leaned back in her chair. “For my last shot, I wanted the short version before I went away.”

“The hit,” Piper said.

“That was a good length.”

CHAPTER 5

The Question She Could Ask

Jo came to the table near the end of their break.

“How are you feeling?”

Piper looked at her friends before answering. Maisie was comfortable. Nora wanted to keep working. Wren wanted another sweeping turn.

Piper wanted another end. She also wanted to know one thing first.

“Can I ask them which shot they like?”

Jo pulled up an empty chair.

“Yes.”

“Before I’ve chosen.”

“Yes.”

Piper pressed her finger against the bottle lid.

“Even if I’m the one calling?”

“You can use what they know,” Jo said. “Then make the choice clear.”

Wren looked at Piper. “I ask you.”

“I know.”

Piper did know. Wren had asked whether she liked a roll, whether a draw looked open and whether a target gave the stone enough room. Those questions had never made Piper think Wren had stopped being their skip.

Wren had helped her check shots in the Blue Comets game. Today she had wanted to need less of it. The question still felt awkward waiting in her own mouth.

“I thought I should have the answer first,” she said.

Jo nodded toward the folded paper beside her bag.

“What could you decide before a stone starts?”

Piper thought about the first end. She had kept discovering something else to say just as someone was ready to leave.

“The shot. Where we want it to finish. The target.”

“And while it’s moving?”

“Listen. Watch.”

Nora added, “Tell us which of those things you need help with.”

Piper liked that better than pretending she could see everything from the house.

When they had finished resting, they changed and warmed up again. Jo checked how everyone felt before reopening the practice lane.

The second end began with a yellow in the left wing.

Piper asked Maisie where she liked the open room.

“Front right,” Maisie said. “I want that weight again.”

Piper looked. It was a place she liked too.

“Front right,” she agreed.

She showed the finish. Then she set the target and waited while Maisie checked it.

There was no need to tell her about Nora’s possible next stone. Nora did not have one to play yet.

Maisie delivered.

“Enough,” Nora called.

“Looks short from here,” Piper answered. “What have you got?”

“Still enough,” Wren said.

The brushes stayed up. Piper kept watching the line.

As the red came closer, she could see the speed Nora and Wren meant. It slowed in the front rings on the right.

Maisie lifted a glove from the delivery end.

Piper lifted hers back.

“That much in,” Maisie said when she reached them.

“That much,” Piper agreed.

Jo’s next yellow reached the left-middle area. Maisie’s second red finished too deep on the right, beyond the place they had chosen. Piper did not have to make the next call instantly.

Jo’s next yellow went through the back.

Piper looked with Nora.

They could remove the nearer yellow. They could also draw into the open middle.

“I’d like the draw,” Nora said.

Piper preferred the hit. The yellow was closer than Maisie’s two reds, and getting it out would change the count.

She said so.

Nora looked again. “I can play that.”

Piper set the target. She had asked a question, heard an answer and still chosen the shot she thought would help.

Nora’s red missed the yellow.

It went through the back along a clear route.

Piper felt the disappointment land in her stomach. Asking had not made the stone certain.

Nora came down the side, looking at the yellow.

“I sent it wider,” she said.

“I saw.”

Nora looked at Piper. “I still thought the hit could work.”

Piper nodded. Then they stepped into the waiting place to watch Jo’s reply.

There would be another choice when it was their turn.

CHAPTER 6

The Stone in Front of Her



Jo’s next yellow stopped short of the house on the right.

It left the left-side hit open. Piper showed Nora the same finish and checked the target again.

This red met the yellow.

Click.

Yellow went out. Red stayed near the middle on the left.

Nora grinned when she reached them.

“I wanted that one.”

“So did I,” Piper said.

Wren and Maisie came along the clear side together.

“There wasn’t much for our brushes,” Maisie said.

“There was something to watch,” Wren answered.

She sounded pleased anyway.

Jo drew into the open middle with her next yellow. Wren joined Piper to take the house for Piper’s deliveries.

“What would you like?” Wren asked.

Piper looked at the close yellow. It was exposed, with room to its right. She could imagine her red moving across after the hit.

“Take that out and roll a little toward the middle?”

Wren checked the patch. “Yes. If yours stays at the nose, we still get the yellow.”

Piper had practiced this shot. She had made a roll she liked at Tess’s clinic and missed the move plenty of times since. Today the space gave her a reason to try it.

They checked the finishing area and the aiming target. Then Piper went back.

At the hack, she took another look at Wren’s broom.

This was the stone she had to deliver. The next decision could wait until it stopped.

The red met the yellow squarely.

Yellow went through the back. Red stayed near the contact place.

Piper let out a breath. She had wanted the move across.

When she came down, Wren looked at it with her.

“More of the nose,” Piper said.

“Yes.”

Piper took one more look at the empty patch. Then Jo's next yellow stopped wide in the left wing, and Wren asked for an ordinary draw on the right.

Piper made that one. It stopped in the right-middle area, nearer than Jo's wing stones.

She returned to the house after it was still. Jo removed Piper's new draw, leaving a yellow in its place. Now Wren had two stones to deliver.

Piper asked which open hit Wren liked. They agreed on the yellow Jo had just made.

"Out, and yours staying," Piper said.

Wren's hit did both.

Then Jo drew a yellow nearer than Wren's red, this time on the left. There was an open route to it.

Piper studied the house. She did not want to fill Wren's head with every thought she had.

"The left yellow," she said. "Open hit. Keep your red."

Wren checked the target and went back to deliver.

Maisie and Nora watched its weight together. Piper watched the line. The brushes stayed clear as the red came into the house.

It met the yellow on the nose.

Yellow went out through the back. Red stopped near the place of contact.

Wren's two reds were both close. Nora's earlier red and Piper's first hit were still there, farther away.

Piper liked how many different turns she could remember when she looked at the finished end.

Wren came down smiling.

"That was the short version."

"Did you like it?"

“I liked making it.”

The adults closed the lane. The four girls stood at the clear side while Jo asked them about their work.

Wren wanted more chances to judge draws with Maisie. Nora wanted to keep calling her own weight early. Maisie liked knowing the finish before she went away.

“And I want another calling turn sometime,” Piper said.

Jo wrote it down with the other requests.

Wren was still their skip for next Saturday’s friendly.

Piper had called two more whole ends, this time fitting her own third-player turns between the early choices and Wren’s last stones.

She glanced once more at the stopped stones before they went to change.

CHAPTER 7

One More Pocket

On Sunday, Piper's younger brother put seven acorns into Ben's coat pocket.

Piper saw him do the seventh. She had missed the first six.

"What are those for?" she asked.

"Later."

"Later what?"

He thought about it.

"Looking at."

They were walking in the park, taking the longer route around the grass. The path was dry, but the ground beneath the trees was soft. Piper had already stepped in one patch and left with more earth on her shoe than she wanted.

Ben checked his pocket.

"Will I need all seven?"

"There might be a best one."

Piper looked into the open pocket. Two acorns had caps. One had a little hole. Another was much smaller than the rest.

"You'll have to take them out to choose," she said.

Her brother looked around. There was no bench nearby.

"You could use your other pocket for the best ones."

"That's where my keys are," Ben said.

Her brother considered the problem, then walked ahead to inspect something under the next tree.

Piper stayed beside Ben.

"How did calling from third feel?" he asked.

She knew which job.

"Busy."

"I thought it looked busy."

"In the first practice end, I had too many things ready to say. Then my own turn came sooner than it had against the Blue Comets, and I wasn't ready."

Ben nodded, waiting.

"Wren liked sweeping. She wanted another turn at it."

"Did you like calling?"

Piper took a few more steps before answering.

She had liked the empty house. She had liked Maisie's first red in the second end. She had not liked knowing she had ignored Nora, or trying to make her own delivery while thinking about everything else.

"Yes," she said. "I did."

Ben smiled.

"I want to do it again. But I want to sweep with Nora next Saturday too."

"That sounds possible."

It was. Their usual jobs would give her that chance. Wren had already asked Jo for another practice exchange on a later day, so Piper had not needed to ask for both of them.

Her brother came back holding a piece of bark.

He looked at Ben's pockets. Then he looked at Piper's.

"No," Piper said.

"I didn't ask yet."

"You were getting ready."

He offered her the bark. "This has a tunnel."

It did have a little curving groove. Piper took it to look more closely.

Her brother walked on at once, carrying nothing.

“Wait,” Piper called.

Ben laughed. Piper tried not to, which was difficult while holding somebody else’s bark.

At the next bench, they inspected all seven acorns. Her brother chose the smallest as his favorite. Then he wanted the one with the largest cap as well.

“Two best ones,” he said.

“They’ll be pleased,” Piper told him.

He put those two in his own pocket. Ben set the others back beneath the tree where they had stopped, and Piper added the bark.

They walked the rest of the way with much lighter coats.

For a while, Piper thought about nothing to do with curling. There was a dog carrying a very short stick, and her brother wanted to know if it had chosen the smallest one on purpose.

CHAPTER 8

The Familiar Places

Nora was beside Piper again.

“A little light,” she called.

Piper watched Maisie’s first red. “Yes.”

Wren called them to sweep, and their brushes worked ahead of the stone. Piper could hear Nora’s feet and feel her own arms moving. There was no need to imagine what the red looked like from the house. Wren was there to tell them about the line.

“Up!”

The brushes lifted. Maisie’s red stopped in the left front rings.

“Hello again,” Maisie said when she came down.

“We were here last week,” Nora told her.

“In different places.”

It was their four-end friendly against the Lanterns. Inez had shaken their hands before the practice deliveries. The adults had checked the familiar junior-stone setup, and everyone had warmed up.

The teams had agreed the format before starting: four ends, a full seated break after two, and a tie left as a tie. The Too-Cold Club had won the opening toss and chosen last stone. The Lanterns had chosen yellow.

Jo and the helpers watched from their permitted places. This was a game, with Wren skipping and everyone in the usual delivery order from beginning to end.

Piper liked her familiar work. That did not make last Saturday disappear.

The Lanterns' opening yellow was deep in the right wing. Maisie's second draw went too far on the left. The Lanterns' second player put a closer yellow in front of the middle, and Nora took it out.

Her red stayed.

The Lanterns answered with a draw on the right. Nora's next hit missed it.

When Piper's first turn came, Wren asked her to draw into the open left-middle area. She made it. Maisie and Nora brought their brushes clear before it reached the middle, and the red stopped closer than the yellows.

The Lanterns' vice removed it.

Piper answered with an open hit. Her shooter stayed on the left, a little nearer than Nora's earlier red.

By Wren's turns, Inez had taken Nora's stone out and left a yellow in its place. Piper's red was still nearest.

Wren's first draw went wide. Inez's last yellow reached the front-middle area, close enough to sit second in the count.

Piper joined Wren beside the stopped house.

"That one out?" she asked.

Wren nodded. "And mine staying."

They checked the target together. Piper held it while Wren went to deliver.

She could have described every yellow in the house. Wren did not need that now. They had chosen the shot.

The red came down. Maisie and Nora watched its weight, then kept their brushes clear for contact.

Click.

Yellow went through the back. Wren's red stayed.

Piper checked the count with the Lanterns' vice. Her own earlier red and Wren's last one were closer than any yellow.

"Two red."

"Two."

Piper turned with two fingers raised. Wren came down smiling, and all four met gloves before beginning the next end.

The Lanterns made the second end difficult.

They drew into separate places. When the Too-Cold Club removed one yellow, another good yellow arrived somewhere else. Piper's first draw stopped short. Her next hit removed its target and rolled out, leaving no red from that turn.

Before Wren's final stone, three yellows were closer than their nearest red. Two had stayed from earlier in the end; Inez's first draw had joined them.

Wren chose an open hit on the nearest one. Piper checked the target and held it.

The red went past without touching.

Inez's last draw finished farther away and did not add another point. Three yellows still counted.

Two to three for the Lanterns at halfway.

Piper shook out her fingers once before they went off. She had enjoyed the first end. Now she wanted the second one back.

On the dry side, Wren sat with her helmet in her lap.

“I missed that,” she said.

Piper sat beside her.

“I saw.”

Wren turned toward her, and Piper nearly added three things they might do next.

Instead, she waited.

“I still liked the call,” Wren said.

“So did I.”

Maisie arrived carrying her water bottle. “I’d like the drink part now.”

They made room for her and Nora. For the next little while, there was time to sit.

CHAPTER 9

The Reply They Wanted

After their full break and warm-up, Nora put a red in a place she liked.

It was near the middle on the right. Maisie and Piper had helped it reach the house, and now it was closer than the yellows.

“Please keep that,” Nora said when she joined them.

“We’ll ask politely,” Maisie told her.

The Lanterns’ vice tried to remove it. Her yellow passed wide and left the red alone.

“Thank you,” Maisie said under her breath.

Piper smiled, then went to deliver.

In the third end, every new stone seemed to give them a different piece of work. Piper removed an exposed yellow on the left. Her second draw came up short. Inez took out Piper’s hit, and Wren removed Inez’s new yellow in return.

Nora’s red remained nearest.

Inez’s last draw stopped just behind Nora’s red in the count. A farther yellow still kept Wren’s first shooter from counting. Wren could get two by removing Inez’s new yellow and leaving her last red in its place.

Piper held the checked target.

Wren’s red caught the yellow on the side. Yellow went out. Red kept moving and went out too.

Nora’s earlier red was the only counting stone.

“One red,” Piper agreed with the Lanterns’ vice.

Three each.

Nora looked at the stone once more before the adults cleared the lane.

“Mine got a whole end.”

“And a point,” Piper said.

Wren joined them. “I wanted the second.”

Piper nodded. They all had. They could still be pleased with Nora’s point.

The Lanterns had the last stone in the fourth end.

Maisie began with a guard on the right, outside the house. The Lanterns’ lead drew to the open left. Maisie’s second red reached the front rings on the right, separate from the guard.

Nora made a useful hit on the left. The Lanterns’ second took her red out. Nora’s next draw stopped wide.

When Piper’s first turn came, there was an exposed yellow nearer the middle on the left. Wren chose the hit. Piper made it, and her red stayed.

The Lanterns removed it with their next stone.

Piper’s second draw reached the right-middle area. Maisie and Nora had told her early that it had enough weight. They left their brushes up, and it arrived close to the place she wanted.

The Lanterns’ vice removed that red with her second yellow.

Now Wren had two turns. Piper went to the house.

“There’s an open draw on the left,” Wren said.

Piper checked it with her. They chose the finish and the target. Wren went back to deliver.

The stone came down the left approach.

“Enough,” Nora called.

It looked short to Piper.

The old urge arrived immediately. Sweep. Help it now. Do something before it stopped in the wrong place.

“Looks short from here,” she called. “Still enough?”

“Yes,” Maisie answered.

Nora agreed. Their brushes stayed clear.

Piper watched the line. As the stone came into the rings, she could see it was going to reach the middle. It went a little farther than Wren had wanted, but it was nearest.

Piper smiled at her friends. She had needed their view and used it.

Inez chose the open hit for her first yellow.

Piper stood in the waiting place beside Wren. The yellow came toward the red they had just made.

It met the nose.

Wren’s red went through the back. Inez’s yellow stayed.

Piper’s smile disappeared.

Wren still had her last red to deliver. She came beside Piper and looked at the new yellow.

“Take it out,” Wren said. “Keep ours.”

Piper checked the open route. They agreed the target.

She wanted this red to do both parts. She wanted the neat sound, the yellow leaving and her friends smiling afterward.

Wren delivered.

The red passed the yellow’s outside edge.

It traveled through the house without touching anything.

Inez’s last draw stayed wide, outside the rings. Her earlier yellow remained nearest.

Maisie’s front-rings red was next, nearer than the yellows left from Piper’s turns.

Piper looked at the other vice. They checked the count together.

“One yellow,” Piper said.

“One.”

The Lanterns had won four to three.

CHAPTER 10

Next Time She Asked



For a moment, Piper stayed beside the house after the count was agreed.

She could remember the red they had drawn into the fourth end. She could remember trusting Maisie and Nora and seeing it arrive.

It had been a good red.

Inez had taken it out.

Wren came down the safe side. Piper joined her, and they went to shake hands with the Lanterns.

“Good game,” Inez said.

“Good game.”

Piper meant it. She would have liked to mean it while winning.

The Lanterns' vice shook her hand next. Behind them, Maisie was talking to the Lanterns' lead about the right-side draw she had made in the last end.

Piper followed her friends off the ice. She was ready for her ordinary shoes and the warm room.

On the changing bench, Wren sat down without speaking. Piper put her bag beside her own feet and began undoing her helmet strap.

"I wanted the hit," Wren said at last.

"I know."

"Both of them. In the second and at the end."

Piper nodded. She could remember missing her roll at practice, then being asked about the next shot while she was still disappointed with the last one.

She took off her helmet and waited.

Nora sat on Wren's other side. Maisie was already hunting for a shoe beneath the bench.

"It was here," Maisie said.

"It's under your bag," Nora told her.

Maisie moved the bag. Her shoe appeared.

"Very patient of it."

Wren gave a small laugh. She still looked disappointed. Both things fitted on her face.

They changed and put their gear away. Ben brought Piper's coat from the peg, then stayed nearby while the girls talked.

"I liked our draw," Piper told Wren. "Before Inez's last hit."

"I did too."

“It looked short to me.”

“We heard you,” Nora said.

Piper looked at her. Nora was winding her helmet strap so it would not catch on her bag zip.

“You answered,” Piper said.

“That’s what we were there for.”

Piper smiled a little. Maisie sat down at last, wearing both shoes.

“I liked my first draw,” she said. “The first one of the whole game.”

“I liked sweeping it,” Piper told her.

“I could tell. You were very busy.”

Jo came over after the result had been recorded. She asked each girl what she wanted to bring to the next practice.

Maisie wanted her two draw weights. Nora wanted another open hit and more chances to judge draws with a partner. Wren wanted to work on the hits she had missed.

“And I still want another sweeping turn,” Wren added.

Jo wrote that down too.

Piper waited until the pencil stopped moving.

“I’d like another end to call.”

Wren turned toward her.

“From the beginning again?”

“Yes.”

“I’d do the other job.”

“I want my delivery turns as well,” Piper said.

“You’ll have them,” Jo told her. “We can plan another exchange at practice.”

Piper could feel how much she wanted it. She wanted another opening choice, and more practice making room in her head for her own delivery too.

She also wanted another game beside these three girls.

Maisie stood up and put on her bag. This time the strap caught nothing at all.

“I’m ready,” she announced.

“Both shoes?” Nora asked.

Maisie looked down to make certain.

Piper laughed. Wren did too.

On the way out, Piper passed the photograph of the older junior girls. She glanced at it, then at the broom in her hand.

Ben opened the door.

“Same time next Saturday?” he asked.

“Yes.”

She went through beside Wren, already wondering what the first stone would leave them to choose.