PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Red That Rolled

BOOK EIGHTEEN



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

The Red Kept Going

Piper's red hit the yellow and went somewhere else.

Not very far. Just a little to Piper's right, and farther back into the house. The yellow traveled away to the left and went out over the back line.

The red slowed. Piper watched until it stopped.

"I liked that bit," she said.

Tess, the new coach, stood beside the delivery place. "Which bit?"

"After the hit. Mine moved across."

"Was that where you meant it to finish?"

Piper looked at the red again.

"No. But I liked it."

Tess smiled. A few short dark curls showed beneath her fastened helmet. She wore a pale-gray zip jacket and dark trousers. When she asked a question, she waited for the answer, even when Piper was still looking down the ice.

"Come and show me," she said.

Both stones were still. Piper got steady, covered her sliding sole and walked with Tess along the clear side. Maisie, Nora and Wren were waiting out of the delivery route. Their brushes had stayed up for this hit; everyone had been watching.

The yellow had begun on the left, a little behind the middle of the house. Ben had put it there on its own. Now the yellow was gone, and Piper's red sat a little nearer the middle than before the collision.

Piper knew that stones could roll after hits. She had seen Juno's yellow roll out after a hit. Her own stones did not always stay where they first made contact either.

Still, this little move had caught her.

"Could I choose that?" she asked. "Take the yellow out, but choose where mine goes afterward?"

"That's something we can look at," Tess said.

Piper glanced at the empty rings beside her red. There was plenty of room.

Several Saturdays had passed since the club challenge. Piper and her friends still talked about the Otters sometimes, but they had played and practiced lots of other curling since then. Now, in their third season, all four had chosen this block of three Sunday clinics. Their families had arranged the dates, about two weeks apart.

Tess was leading them. Jo and Ben were helping, and the stones were the familiar junior ones. The portable hack stood at the farther starting place the girls already used. Before they came on, the adults had checked it, and everyone had warmed up on the dry side.

Then Tess had watched.

She had watched their draws, how they moved between jobs, and how they got steady after delivering. She had watched Piper's earlier hit send the yellow straight out while the red stayed near the front of its old place.

This red had done something a little different.

Tess looked from Piper to the stone.

"You've been balanced, and those hits have had controlled weight," she said. "After our break, if you still want to, we can try a small roll into an open area. We'll keep it simple."

“I do want to.”

“Let’s choose the area together when we come back.”

Ben waited until Tess had closed the lane before gathering the stopped stones. Piper watched her red leave its place. She would have liked another look at it, but Maisie was ready for her draw work.

They were changing jobs during the clinic, taking turns to deliver, sweep and hold the target. For Maisie’s turn, Wren came to the house, while Piper and Nora stood ready to sweep with Ben nearby.

Maisie walked down first to talk about the place she wanted.

“Here,” she said, pointing into the front rings. “I keep going farther than this.”

Wren pointed with her broom, then moved it to the delivery target.

Maisie frowned. “Do you mean there now?”

“That’s where I want you to aim. The first place is where we want it to stop.”

“Oh. I was still looking at the first place.”

Wren glanced at Tess.

“That’s the thing I want to work on,” she said. “Making those two places clear.”

“Then check with Maisie before she goes back,” Tess said.

They looked again. This time Wren showed the finishing area, said what it was, then set the aiming target. Maisie pointed to each one herself.

“All right. Those are different.”

Piper liked the way Maisie said it. She sounded ready to do something about both of them.

The red needed some help. Piper and Nora brushed ahead of it until Wren called them up. It kept moving into the front rings and settled in the area Maisie had chosen.

Maisie came down wearing an enormous smile.

“That’s more like it.”

“You said it felt slower before it got here,” Nora told her.

“It did.”

“I want to notice mine that soon.”

Nora’s own question was about weight. Sometimes she knew a stone had left her hand with too much speed. Sometimes she only decided that after she saw it go too far. She wanted to get better at telling the difference.

Piper had four people’s plans in her head now. She was glad they had more than one Sunday.

When the first ice block ended, they went in for their seated break. Helmets came off. Gloves went beside water bottles. Piper’s hands felt warm around her cup.

Maisie was humming.

“What is that?” Wren asked.

“I don’t know. It’s been in my head since breakfast.”

She hummed it again, longer this time.

Nora listened carefully. “You changed the end.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“Perhaps that’s why you can’t find the beginning,” Wren said.

Piper tried humming the part she remembered. Maisie joined in, but they arrived at quite different places.

“Mine has a faster bit,” Maisie said.

“Mine has no more bits,” Piper told her.

They laughed. Then Maisie took a drink, and for a while nobody tried to find the tune.

Piper sat with her legs still and looked through the glass. The house was empty again. She thought about the red that had moved across it, then turned back because Nora was explaining that she had once kept humming the noise a washing machine made at the end.

“That has hardly any bits either,” Piper said.

“Enough to get stuck.”

Their break lasted until it was time to change and warm up again. Piper was comfortable, rested, and very ready to show Tess the place she wanted.

CHAPTER 2

The Part Afterward



From beside the stopped lane, Piper pointed into the house.

“Somewhere in that open bit. More toward the middle than the yellow.”

Ben had set the yellow back on the left, where it had been before. The patch Piper wanted was to its right as she looked from the delivery end, and a little farther back. Tess showed a broad area with her empty hand.

“This much room?”

“Yes.”

It was farther across than her accidental roll had gone. There was nothing to hide behind and no stone to squeeze between. Piper wanted the yellow out and her own red resting in that empty space.

Tess checked that they meant the same place, then helped Piper look along the approach.

“We want to meet this side of the yellow,” she said, pointing to the side Piper could see on her right. “That gives your red room to move toward your patch.”

Piper followed the line with her eyes.

Tess walked back with her. Jo was by the delivery place; Ben and the other girls waited clear. For this short try there would be no sweeping. Once Piper had checked the target, the broom moved away too.

Piper settled at the hack.

She knew how she wanted the end of the shot to look. Yellow gone. Red over there.

She sent the stone.

It met the front of the yellow squarely. The yellow went straight through the back. The red stayed near the contact place, a little in front of where the yellow had begun.

Piper stared at it.

Her ordinary hit had worked.

Her roll had not.

Once everything stopped, she came down with Jo. Tess was looking at the red from the clear side.

“It got too much of the nose,” Piper said.

“Yes.”

“I need to keep my hand quieter.”

The words came easily. Dad had used them before. So had Piper. A quiet hand was something she knew how to think about.

Tess looked at her. “Did you feel it turn across as you let go?”

Piper tried to remember the very last bit of the delivery. She could remember looking toward the yellow. She could remember wanting to help the red across. She could not find a clear picture of her hand doing anything at all.

“Maybe.”

“Then don’t try to fix lots of things together,” Tess said. “Keep your familiar smooth release toward the target.”

Piper nodded.

It was useful advice. It also left the question she had wanted to ask floating somewhere behind the words she had actually said.

The red had felt much like the earlier one. That was the odd part. Her hand had not announced, This one will stay here.

She looked toward Ben.

He was waiting with the stones well out of the way. He met her glance but did not start talking.

Piper almost called him over. Dad knew what she meant by a quiet hand. Perhaps he could explain the part about the two reds feeling alike.

Then Maisie was coming along the side for her turn, and Piper moved to the waiting place.

“Did yours roll?” Maisie asked.

“No. It stayed.”

“I’m trying to make mine stay nearer the front again.”

Maisie sounded hopeful. Piper found she wanted to see whether the draw would do it.

It went too far this time. Maisie watched from the delivery end, her lips pressed together. When she reached them, she looked at the front rings, then at her red farther back.

“I’d like the first one back.”

“So would I,” Piper said.

Maisie looked at her.

“Your first one. My first one.”

“Both.”

They grinned.

The rest of the clinic had other work in it. Nora spoke about her weight before a draw had finished traveling, then changed her mind as she watched it slow. Wren had a turn delivering while Maisie held the target. Piper swept, waited, and took her own familiar draws.

At the end they returned to their usual team jobs for a short draw block: Maisie leading, Nora second, Piper third and vice, Wren fourth and skip. When Wren went to deliver, Piper took the house. She showed the finishing area first, then checked the aiming target with Wren.

She could do that work without knowing how to make her red roll.

Afterward, on the dry side, Piper sat beside Ben on the changing bench. Her helmet rested between her feet. He was putting away his gloves.

“I wanted you to tell Tess what I meant,” she said.

Ben waited.

“But I didn’t tell you either.”

“What did you mean?”

“The two hits felt almost the same. The one that rolled and the one that stayed. I thought she’d say I should just hit the side. I knew we wanted the side.”

“You wanted to talk about what happened before the stones touched?”

“Yes. I think. I didn’t know whether I’d sent them differently.”

Ben nodded. “I could tell her what I saw. I couldn’t tell her what they felt like to you.”

Piper rubbed her thumb over the edge of her glove.

“I said the quiet-hand thing.”

“Did that describe it?”

“I’m not sure.”

“You can tell her that.”

Piper looked through the doorway. Tess was listening to Nora, who had both hands open as if she were holding two different thoughts.

“Next time, I want to start,” Piper said. “But if I ask what you saw, will you say?”

“Of course.”

Maisie arrived carrying one shoe in each hand.

“I remembered the tune.”

Piper sat up. “What was it?”

“I’ve forgotten again.”

Ben moved his bag to make room on the bench.

“You can sit down while you remember.”

Maisie sat. Piper made room for her second shoe, which seemed to need nearly as much bench as Maisie did.

CHAPTER 3

A Sunday in Between

On the Sunday without a clinic, Piper stayed in her pajamas until after breakfast.

She had thought about the red while she was cleaning her teeth. Then she had thought about whether there was any toast left. Later, she helped Ben sort the clean washing, which turned out to contain a very large number of his socks.

“How many feet have you got?” she asked.

“Still two.”

Piper held up another pair.

“You’re very well prepared.”

By afternoon Maisie had come over. They sat on the floor with a comic between them, taking turns with the voices. Maisie gave the smallest character the deepest voice, which made Piper laugh so much that she missed her next speech.

“You’re supposed to be asking where he went,” Maisie said.

“I can’t. You sound as if you ate him.”

They had to begin that page again.

Piper did not spend all the days between clinics thinking about one curling stone. There were ordinary mornings, bags to find, stories to finish and a wet coat that seemed to take forever to dry. Sometimes the little red came back into her mind anyway, traveling sideways after the yellow left.

She still wanted that part.

At their regular Saturday practice, she asked Jo to watch a familiar draw.

“Does it start toward the broom? I can see where it ends, but not that first bit very well.”

“I’ll watch from here,” Jo said.

The question was easy with Jo. They had watched so many stones together. Piper did not have to explain the other Saturdays before she explained this one.

Her draw stopped farther out than she wanted. Jo told her what she had seen at the start, and Piper listened. Then it was time to help with Wren’s turn.

They were in their usual order. Maisie had led, Nora had delivered second, and Piper’s own turns were finished. Now she was the vice in the house while Wren came to check a finishing place with her.

Wren pointed into the front rings.

“Around here.”

“Nearer the front edge, or farther in?” Piper asked.

“Farther in than Maisie wanted.”

Maisie, waiting beside Nora, heard her.

“I still want mine near the front.”

“I know,” Wren said. “This is mine.”

“Just checking.”

Piper smiled and checked the target with Wren. It felt like an ordinary Saturday because it was one.

Wren’s draw did not stop exactly where she had pictured. After the sweepers lifted, it continued farther into the house.

“I gave it too much,” Wren said when she arrived.

Piper looked from the stone to Wren. “Did it feel like too much when you let go?”

Wren considered.

“I thought it might be. I didn’t think it would go that far.”

“Oh.”

Piper had hoped for a simpler answer. She was also interested in the one Wren had given.

When the second clinic Sunday came, Tess was waiting on the dry side. Without her helmet, her short curls stood up a little at the back. She greeted all four by name.

“Did you find your tune?” she asked Maisie.

Maisie looked surprised. “Yes. But now I’ve got a different one.”

“We don’t know that one either,” Nora said.

Piper put her bag down beside Ben’s.

She knew what she wanted to say before they started, but Maisie was speaking and Tess was listening. Piper waited until they were finished.

“I’d like to try the roll again,” she said. “There was something I didn’t explain last time.”

“All right.” Tess turned toward her.

“The one that stayed felt nearly the same as the one that moved across. I couldn’t tell if I’d sent it differently.”

“That helps,” Tess said. “I’ll watch your start when we get to it. First, let’s see how everyone’s moving today.”

Piper had more she might want to say when there was a stone in front of her. For now, she had begun.

Their warm-up and familiar practice filled the first part of the hour. Nora called a draw “quite quick” soon after releasing it. This one slowed sooner than she expected, and she watched it with a little frown.

“I thought it had more than that,” she told Tess.

Maisie chose the front rings again. Wren practiced showing the destination before setting the target. They swapped the clinic jobs when the lane was stopped, so Wren had deliveries of her own too.

By their seated break, Piper's shoulders were ready to relax.

She set her helmet beside her and took a long drink. Ben sat at the end of the bench, listening while Nora described the copy of the comic she had found at the library.

"That little man has a very deep voice," Maisie said.

"He hasn't got a voice," Nora said. "It's a comic."

Piper and Maisie looked at each other.

"He has now," Piper told her.

CHAPTER 4

My Red, After the Hit



The yellow was back in its place when Piper's exploration turn came.

Only that yellow waited in the house. The broad empty patch was still where she and Tess had chosen it.

Piper checked both the patch and the target. She was using the same junior red, the same familiar start, the same release cue.

And she hit the nose again.

Yellow went out through the back. Red stayed near the contact place, outside the patch.

Piper let her breath out through her nose.

She had explained more clearly. The stone had not listened to the explanation.

When it was safe to come down, she stood beside Tess and looked at the red.

“That’s the part,” she said. “I thought I’d sent it toward the new target. But it got all of the yellow again.”

“More nearly straight onto it,” Tess agreed.

Piper looked toward Ben. He was waiting clear of the house.

“Dad, did you see the start?”

“I saw it leave closer to the yellow’s middle than the target you’d checked,” he said. “Tess had a better view of your hand.”

Tess nodded. “Your release went a little toward the yellow’s middle.”

Piper looked back along the approach.

“It felt straight to me.”

“That’s useful to know.”

Tess did not ask Piper to change her answer. She stood beside her so they could both look from the same direction.

“For the next try, keep your finish along the target you’ve checked. Just that.”

Piper nodded slowly. This was nearer the thing she had wanted to ask about. What she felt and what someone could see were not always the same picture.

She could ask about both pictures.

It was Nora’s turn for her own weight work before Piper tried again. Piper and Wren took the sweeping jobs. Nora’s red came toward them with enough speed that both held their brushes clear.

“More than I wanted,” Nora called from behind them.

The red went deep. Both girls kept their brushes clear.

Nora arrived after it stopped.

“I knew that one sooner,” she said.

She looked pleased about knowing, and displeased about the stone. Piper recognized both expressions at once.

Later, back at the hack, Piper checked the target Tess showed her. She tried to keep her delivery going toward it. The release felt brisk.

Her red reached the yellow on its right-hand side.

The yellow went away to the left and back. The red moved to Piper’s right, across the open ice.

For a moment Piper thought it was coming.

There was the move she wanted. There was the patch.

Then the red traveled beyond it.

It kept going toward the back of the house. The yellow had gone completely over the back line on the left. Piper’s red went completely over it too, farther to the right.

Both stones were out.

Piper waited beside Jo until they stopped. The empty house looked larger without either of them in it.

“Too much,” she said.

Then she stopped herself.

Too much what?

By the time she reached Tess, she had part of an answer.

“That felt faster when I let go.”

“I saw more speed too,” Tess said. “It also caught less of the yellow. A thinner contact.”

Piper looked at the path the red had taken.

“So it wasn’t only faster.”

“Both things mattered.”

Piper wished she could keep the sideways bit and give back all the extra traveling. She wished it quite strongly.

Tess waited while she looked.

“I liked it moving across,” Piper said. “Until it kept moving.”

“Would you like another try, or go back to draws?”

Piper considered her arms and legs. She was comfortable. She still wanted the roll.

“Another try.”

“After Maisie’s turn. We’ll use your familiar controlled hit weight again.”

Ben gathered the stopped stones when everyone was clear. Maisie came to the house to choose her draw area, and Wren met her there.

“Finish here,” Maisie said, pointing.

“Aim here,” Wren answered, setting her broom after they had agreed the first place.

Maisie looked carefully at both.

“I know which one you mean this time.”

“Good. I’d like you to know before you’re halfway back.”

Piper grinned from the waiting place. Nora was listening too, her brush tucked close beside her.

Maisie’s draw gave her something she liked in the front rings. She came down watching it as though it might secretly travel farther if she took her eyes off it.

“Stayed,” she said.

“It has stopped,” Wren told her.

“I know. I’m enjoying it.”

Piper enjoyed it with her. Then the adults cleared the stopped lane and put out the yellow for Piper again.

This time the red passed on the yellow's right without touching it at all.

No click. No sideways move from a hit.

The red ran out through the back. The yellow stayed exactly where Ben had put it.

Piper looked at it for a long moment.

She had wanted two things. On this try she had done neither.

When Tess joined her, Piper was still thinking about the release.

"I don't know what that one felt like," she said. "I was thinking about not sending it too fast. Then I saw it missing."

"All right," Tess said. "We'll leave that one there for now."

She did not make Piper find a better answer.

Their short exploration was finished. Jo and Ben changed the stopped setup for the last familiar draw block. Piper went to sweep with her friends, then had her usual turns. Her arms had other work to do, and she was glad of it.

On the dry side afterward, Tess asked what she wanted to return to at their last session.

"The same patch," Piper said.

"All right."

"And could you watch my start again?"

"Yes."

Piper went to find her shoes. She would rather have had a red in the patch. She was glad Tess knew which part she wanted to look at next time.

CHAPTER 5

The Place She Chose



Two more weeks brought them to the last Sunday.

Piper had been curling in between. She swept, held targets, delivered draws and talked with Wren about where they wanted stones to finish. She also finished the comic before Maisie, which meant remembering not to tell her what happened to the little man with the deep voice.

It took some effort.

On the way into the club, Maisie caught up with her.

“I finished it.”

“The cupboard!” Piper said.

"I know!"

Nora turned around. "I haven't finished it."

Piper shut her mouth.

Wren looked from one to the other. "I'm going to know a lot about this cupboard before I meet it."

Inside, Tess was talking with Jo. She turned when they came over, her pale jacket zipped up and her helmet in her hand.

Piper wanted to get on the ice. There was a whole hour for all their work, but she knew how quickly the pieces of it could go.

They began with their warm-up. Then Tess watched the familiar deliveries again, and the girls took their practice jobs. Ben helped them change places between turns.

She liked the work at the beginning. It gave her time to feel how she was sending the red today before she tried to make it do something less familiar.

At the break, all four sat down with their water. Wren leaned back. Maisie had stopped humming at last, although now Piper kept remembering part of the tune.

She did not mention it.

Nora was looking at the last piece of her snack.

"If either of you tells me what's in the cupboard, I'll have to read the end now."

"We won't," Piper said.

Maisie opened her mouth.

Nora pointed at her.

"I was going to ask for my water."

Piper passed it over.

By the time they had changed and warmed up again, Piper knew she wanted the same try. The yellow went back into its familiar place after the lane was cleared. Tess came to stand beside her, both helmets fastened.

“Show me,” Tess said.

Piper pointed at the yellow, then across toward the broad patch.

“Yellow out. Mine over there afterward. When I sent the one right through, it felt faster. Today the ordinary hits have felt smoother.”

“They’ve looked controlled,” Tess said.

Piper looked back along the ice.

“I want that sort of delivery toward the target. But I still can’t always tell where it started.”

“I’ll watch.”

That was what Piper wanted from her.

Tess helped her check the aiming place and the side of the yellow they wanted to meet. The patch stayed broad and open. With everyone clear and the target broom lifted away, Piper settled at the familiar hack.

She sent the red.

Jo was beside her. Piper watched from the delivery end as the stone traveled toward the yellow.

It met the yellow on the front-right side.

Yellow moved left and back. Red moved to Piper’s right and a little farther into the house.

Piper kept watching her own stone while the yellow went out over the back line on the left.

The red slowed inside the patch.

Slower still.

Then it stopped.

Piper's mouth opened before any words came out.

"That one."

Jo smiled. They waited until both stones were still. Piper covered her slider and walked down the clear side.

She looked at the red from beside the house. There was space all around it. No yellow, no guard, just her own red where she had wanted it to go.

"I meant that," she said to Tess.

"You did."

Piper grinned. She was pleased with the empty place where the yellow had been. She was even more pleased with the place that was no longer empty.

Tess asked about the delivery.

"It didn't feel like the fast one," Piper said. "And I thought it started toward the broom. Did it?"

"Closer to the line you'd checked," Tess said. "It caught the side we wanted."

Maisie was ready for her own turn. She glanced at the red as Piper joined the waiting place.

"Your place?"

"My place."

Maisie bumped her glove lightly against Piper's.

"I want mine now."

Piper laughed. "Go on, then."

The adults cleared the stones after everyone was still. Maisie and Wren checked the draw together, first the finish, then the aim. Nora asked to call her own first thought about the weight before the others gave theirs.

Later, Tess asked whether Piper still felt comfortable and wanted another roll try. Piper did. Ben reset the single yellow on the stopped lane.

This red hit the nose.

Yellow went out. Red stopped near the contact place, a little in front of yellow's old position. The broad patch stayed empty.

Piper made a small disappointed sound.

When she came down, she looked first at the red, then at Tess.

"I got more of it again."

"Yes."

"Could we look at my start another time? I thought that one was going toward the target too."

"We can," Tess said. "Tell Jo which part you want to keep working on."

"I will."

Piper stayed looking for a moment. She would have liked a second red in the patch. She would have liked quite a few.

Then it was time for the last familiar draw work. She took her regular vice place for Wren, watching Maisie and Nora get ready to sweep.

At the end of the hour they came off together. Ben was by the dry-side bench. Piper undid her helmet and sat down beside her bag.

"One went where I chose," she told him. "Then one stayed at the hit again."

"I saw."

“On the first one, I could still see the target line after I let go. I want to look at that with Jo.”

Ben nodded. “Tell her.”

Jo was already coming through the doorway. Piper lifted her hand to catch her attention.

“Could we keep a little time for my roll at practice?”

“We can plan some,” Jo said. “You can show me with Tess before you go.”

“I want another target turn too,” Wren said, joining them.

“And I’ve got a weight thing,” Nora said.

Maisie sat down on Piper’s other side.

“Wait. I haven’t told you about my draw.”

Piper turned toward her.

“Which one?”

Maisie smiled.

“The one I liked.”