PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Saturday Cup

BOOK FIFTEEN



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

Next Saturday



Piper wanted the Saturday Cup.

At the moment, she wanted Maisie's red stone to keep moving.

"Still a little short," Nora called beside her.

"Sweep!" Wren answered from the house.

Piper and Nora brushed ahead of Maisie's red until Wren called them up. They finished their strokes to the sides and lifted before the tee line. The stone slid on into the left side of the house.

Maisie came down the clear side route with a smile.

"Inside."

“Inside,” Piper agreed.

It was only the first stone of their semifinal. Still, Piper liked beginning with something useful on the ice.

The Saturday Cup was a small junior event at their own club. Four teams were playing today. Two would reach the final next Saturday, and one of those teams would win the cup.

Piper wanted that team to be theirs: Maisie, Nora, Wren and herself. The Too-Cold Club.

The little cup was on a table in the warm room. Piper had seen it on her way in. It had two handles, a wide foot and a shiny bowl that made her face look rounder when she leaned near it.

Then she had left it there and come to curl.

Evie’s team wanted it too. Evie had won the toss and chosen the hammer, the last delivery of the first end. Going first, the Too-Cold Club had chosen red. Evie was now setting a target for her lead’s first yellow.

Piper waited with Nora at the side. Her helmet strap felt snug under her chin. The yellow came through on the other side of the house and stopped farther from the middle than Maisie’s red.

The girls were in their usual order: Maisie first, Nora second, Piper third and vice, Wren fourth and skip. They had settled back into those jobs long before the cup, through more ordinary practices, some good shots and quite a few that had needed more work.

They were using their same junior stones from the farther common start they had practiced. All four teams knew this setup now. Their coaches had checked every child’s delivery and comfort with it, including the longer game next Saturday.

Ben and Jo were helping on their lane with two other coaches. Another group of adults supervised the Pinecones and Blue Comets on the next lane. Granite stood near the receiving house, his white-gloved hands resting on his broom.

The adults had set the portable hack before warm-up. The painted lines had stayed where they belonged, and the girls still released before the familiar cue between the sideboard marks. None of that was new today.

What was new was what a win would mean.

Next Saturday.

Maisie's second red went wider than she wanted. Nora put her first behind the middle, but Evie's team answered. Their second player knocked Nora's red out and left a yellow in its place.

"They liked my place," Nora said when the stones had stopped.

Maisie looked at her own first red, still nearer in on the left. "I'm keeping mine so far."

Now it was Piper's turn.

Wren called a hit on the middle yellow. Maisie and Nora took the sweeping jobs, and Piper went to the hack. From here she could see the yellow's open front. She wanted to knock it out and leave her red in the house.

Her delivery felt firm, but the red traveled wide of the yellow and went out without touching it.

Piper got steady, covered her slider and came down by the side.

"I missed the whole thing."

Wren looked at the yellow, then at Maisie's red. "Maisie's is still closest."

Piper could see that. She still wished she had hit the yellow.

Her second draw went wide too. Evie put a yellow in front of the middle, but it was farther from the center than Maisie's red.

When Wren went for her last two deliveries, Piper took charge of the house. Wren added reds in the rings. Neither was close enough for a second point, but Evie's last yellow stayed outside Maisie's too.

Piper and the other vice checked before anyone moved a stone.

"One red."

"One," the other girl agreed.

Piper turned toward her friends and held up one finger. Maisie held up one back.

"My very first one."

She was still looking at it when the adults came to clear.

In the second end, Evie's team made two yellows count. Their second player drew one right into the middle. Their vice took out a red on the right and left a yellow close enough to join it. Wren's first red came into the front rings, but not close enough to separate the two.

Piper checked the score with Evie's vice. Two yellow. Evie's team led two to one.

There were still two ends to play, after their proper rest.

As Piper followed her teammates off the ice, she glanced at the other lane. Ada, the Pinecones' skip, was holding her broom for a teammate. A Blue Comets player watched from the side.

Everyone was busy trying to get to next Saturday.

CHAPTER 2

Through

During the break, Piper sat with her water and let her feet be still.

Maisie had taken off her helmet. Her curls stuck out more on one side than the other. She tried to flatten them, felt them spring back and left them alone.

“I’d like two for us this time,” she said.

Wren nodded. “Me too.”

Nora was watching the adults through the glass as they reset the lane.

“We’ve got last stone now.”

They did. Yellow had scored, so yellow would begin the next end. Red had the hammer.

Piper took another drink. Across the room, Evie was talking to her lead. Piper could not hear the words. Then Evie laughed, and her teammate laughed too.

After the full break, the children had time to change and warm up again. When Piper returned to the ice, Maisie’s curls were tucked beneath her fastened helmet. Nora was ready beside Piper for the first sweeping job.

This time, Maisie put a red in a useful place on the right. Nora took out a yellow nearer the middle. For a little while, Piper could see how an end with two reds might grow.

Evie’s team could see it too.

Their second player removed Maisie’s nearer stone. Their vice hit Nora’s central red and stayed. Both girls had made the shots Evie wanted.

Piper stood with Wren while the yellow stopped moving.

“That one first?” Piper asked.

“Yes. Then we’ll look again.”

Piper went to deliver. Maisie and Nora followed the red, keeping their brushes clear as it approached the target.

The yellow slid out. Red stayed in the middle.

Piper was smiling when she came back. She had put a red where Nora’s had been, and where a yellow had been since. The place had been busy.

The other vice’s next yellow stopped farther out on the left. Wren called Piper’s second shot on the right-hand yellow, the one that had replaced Maisie’s stone.

Piper looked at it from beside the house before going back.

“That yellow’s between ours.”

“Let’s get it out,” Wren said.

Piper had missed open hits before. She could remember one that had slid past without making even a little clack. At the hack, she looked toward Wren’s target and settled her hand on the handle.

This red missed. It slid past the yellow and out the back.

Piper stayed at the hack for a moment, looking at the stone she had wanted to move. Then she got up and came down with her slider covered.

“One’s there,” she said, looking at her first red.

Wren nodded. After Evie’s next draw stopped, she checked the same right-hand yellow with Piper.

“I’ll try that hit.”

Piper took the house. She watched Wren's red arrive, watched Maisie and Nora clear before contact, then heard the clack. Yellow went out. Wren's red stayed.

Two reds were closest now.

Maisie made a small, pleased noise beside Nora.

Evie's final yellow finished outside the pair, and Wren's last draw stayed wide. Piper's central red and Wren's on the right would count together.

"Two red," Piper and the other vice agreed.

Three to two. The Too-Cold Club was ahead.

In the fourth end, Nora put another red in the middle. Evie's second player took it out, and Piper made the return hit. Her red stayed close while the teams filled other parts of the house.

Wren tried to add another near one. Her first went wide and her second finished well out on the left. Piper watched them both from the house, then moved to the waiting place for Evie's last turn.

Evie needed a yellow closer than Piper's red to tie the game. A tie would mean extra ends today; somebody had to advance.

The yellow came toward the middle. Its sweepers brushed when the vice called, then lifted clear.

It reached the house.

It slowed.

It stopped in front of Piper's red, but farther from the center.

Piper waited until it was completely still. She and Evie's vice looked together.

"One red," the other girl said.

Piper nodded. "One."

Four to two.

They were in the final.

At the clear side of the stopped lane, the teams shook gloved hands. Evie said, “Good game,” and Piper said it back. Then Piper turned and saw Nora looking at her with a smile that kept getting wider.

“Next Saturday,” Nora said.

“Six ends,” Wren said.

“Against who?” Maisie asked.

They found out after changing. The Pinecones had won the other semifinal.

Piper looked through the glass. Ada was coming off the ice with her own team. They had beaten the Too-Cold Club before, at the away bonspiel and again on their overnight trip. They had won their short game at the three-game day too.

Now both teams had earned another game together.

Ada saw Piper and raised a hand. Piper raised hers.

“The final,” Maisie said, as if she were trying the words for size.

Piper liked the fit.

CHAPTER 3

A Saturday in the Week



On Sunday, Saturday seemed a very long way away.

Piper said so while Ben was looking for his other shoe.

“It’s where it usually is,” he said.

“Your shoe?”

“Saturday.”

Piper looked under the chair. “Your shoe’s here.”

They were going for a walk with the other girls. Nobody needed a helmet or a broom. Maisie arrived with her jacket zipped almost to her nose, and Wren had brought a book she wanted to lend Nora. It was too large

for either of their pockets, so Ben carried it under one arm.

The wind made the bare little twigs at the edge of the path waggle. Maisie walked backward for three steps to watch her own hair blow over her face, then turned around when the path narrowed.

“I can’t see any better backward.”

“You can see us,” Nora said.

“That is better.”

At the fenced playing area, a ball rolled across the empty ground. It reached the wire and stayed there, held by the wind. Every so often it turned a little, showing a different patch of color.

The four girls stood beside the fence while the wind rolled the ball another inch.

“It’s trying to leave,” Maisie said.

“It keeps choosing the fence,” Wren said.

Piper watched it wobble. Then a stronger gust pushed it firmly into the corner, where it stopped.

Nora pulled her jacket collar up. “I’m choosing to keep walking.”

They went on with Ben. The ball stayed on its own side of the fence.

For a while, Piper forgot to wish it were Saturday. There was a long puddle with a strip of sky in it, and Maisie wanted to know whether a very tall person would see a different cloud. Wren said they could ask Ben, since he was the tallest person they had brought.

Ben looked down.

“I can see a cloud and four girls waiting for an answer.”

“Which cloud?” Piper asked.

“The wet one.”

“That’s no help,” Maisie told him.

They walked around the puddle and argued cheerfully about whether all clouds were already wet.

On Monday, Piper remembered the final while she was putting clean socks into a drawer. On Tuesday, she forgot about it for most of an entire afternoon. On Wednesday, she said “Saturday” when Ben asked what she wanted to do after supper.

“We’ll have to do something else first,” he said. “Saturday takes a while.”

She chose to read on the sofa beside him. The book was good enough that, when he said it was time to stop, she wanted another chapter.

At a short practice the coaches had arranged before the final, the girls tried draws and open hits. Piper made one red stay and sent the next past its target. Nora’s first draw was heavier than she intended; on her next turn she sent it more smoothly. Wren asked Piper to show the finishing place once more. Then Piper took the house for Wren’s delivery.

Nothing at practice told them who would win the cup.

But Piper liked having all four of them there, doing the work. She liked hearing Nora say, “That felt better,” and Maisie ask for another turn. When Wren’s red reached the rings, they all watched it until it stopped.

On Friday evening, Piper put her curling bag by the door. Ben checked that her water bottle was ready to fill in the morning.

“How long now?” she asked.

“Until tomorrow.”

That was a much better answer.

CHAPTER 4

The Pinecones

The cup was on the same table when Piper arrived.

She did not lean toward it this time. She looked at both handles, then went to find her friends.

Nora was already there, with her bag tucked close to her chair. Maisie was taking a small stone out of the sole of one ordinary shoe. Wren was looking through the glass toward their lane.

“Six ends with the Pinecones,” Nora said.

She sounded pleased about all of it, including the six.

After changing, warm-up and practice stones, they had a new toss. This time the Too-Cold Club won and chose the first hammer. The Pinecones, going first, chose yellow.

Evie’s team and the Blue Comets had their own game on the other lane. The room was full of familiar bags and bottles, but Piper’s game was here, with Ada standing in the house opposite Wren.

Piper had played six ends before. She had played from this farther start before too. Today the two belonged to the same game. The coaches had allowed time for a proper halfway break, and the girls knew where to rest and when to come back.

Now they needed to curl.

The Pinecones’ opening yellow went to the outer rings on the left. Maisie brought a red nearer on the left. Their second player put yellow nearer still, and Nora took it out.

Piper and Maisie had followed Nora's hit. They lifted their brushes and moved aside before the stones met. Piper watched the yellow travel out behind the house, then glanced at Nora, who was still at the delivery end.

Nora's smile was easy to see.

But the Pinecones kept answering. Their vice removed Nora's red. Piper tried a draw on the left; it stopped in the front rings, outside the nearer yellow. Her second went wide and out.

Wren chose the hit on the middle yellow for her first turn. Piper held the target and watched the red come toward her. Maisie and Nora cleared before the stones met. Yellow went out, and Wren's red stayed nearest.

It remained there through Ada's last draw and Wren's final red. Piper and the Pinecones' vice agreed on one.

The cup final had begun with a point for the Too-Cold Club.

In the next end, Wren made another good hit in the middle. This time Ada answered it. Her yellow removed Wren's red and stayed close. Wren drew into the front rings with her last turn, but Ada's yellow remained nearer.

One to one.

Ada touched gloves with her vice. Piper saw them both looking back at the yellow before the adults cleared it. They liked their good stone as much as she had liked hers.

The third end started with a wide yellow on the left. Wren showed Maisie a place much nearer the middle, also on the left.

Maisie looked toward it from the hack. Piper and Nora got ready together.

The red came away smoothly, but before it reached them, Maisie called, “I think it needs you.”

Piper was already watching the speed.

“A bit short,” she called to Wren.

“Sweep!”

She and Nora worked in quick strokes, side by side ahead of the stone. Piper heard Nora’s brush and her own, then Wren’s call to stop. They lifted clear before the tee.

Maisie’s red slid into the middle-left part of the house and settled.

“Yes,” Maisie said from the other end.

She came down with her slider covered. The smile was still there when she reached them.

“I wanted that one nearer.”

“It is,” Nora said.

Maisie’s second finished farther away. Nora’s first went long on the left. When she came back, she watched the last little movement of her red and frowned.

“More than I meant again.”

Piper had followed it with Maisie. Neither had needed to brush.

“It was coming quite fast.”

“I felt it when I let go,” Nora said.

The Pinecones now had two yellows they liked: one near the middle and one on the right. Wren asked Nora to hit the right-hand one. Nora made the shot. The Pinecones’ vice promptly took her red out and stayed.

“Quick answer,” Nora said.

Piper’s first turn was on the central yellow. She liked that Wren was asking for an ordinary shot she knew, in

a place she could see clearly. She did not have to make her red do something new because this was a final.

She still wanted very much to make it.

Maisie and Nora followed as she delivered. They cleared before the red met yellow.

Yellow went back and out. Piper's red stayed nearer the middle than Maisie's.

Piper came down to look. One red close, another red on the left, then the best yellow on the right. Two reds counting.

Wren looked at Piper and nodded once.

Piper's next stone went wide and out. So did Wren's first. Ada's last draw came into the front of the house, but not far enough to get inside the reds. Wren's final red stayed out toward the edge.

Piper checked with the other vice.

"Those two."

The girl looked from Piper's red to Maisie's, then to the yellow beyond them.

"Two red."

Three to one at halfway.

Maisie touched Piper's glove as they left the house.

"That's mine with yours."

"I know."

Piper had known it the instant her stone stopped. Hearing Maisie say it made her smile all over again.

CHAPTER 5

Three More Ends

In the warm room, Piper changed into ordinary shoes and sat down. Her legs were glad of the chair.

She ate from her packed lunch and drank her water. Around her, parents were opening bags, children were talking, and somebody was trying to find the end of a roll of tape at the far table.

Maisie had a piece of apple in one hand.

“I like being ahead,” she said.

“So do I,” Piper said.

Wren was sitting beside Nora. She had finished eating for the moment and was letting her hands rest in her lap.

“The Pinecones have three more ends too.”

Nora nodded. “Yes.”

Nobody needed to add anything to that. Three ends were enough for things to change. They were also three more ends the Too-Cold Club could play.

Granite came past the table. The red handle above his glasses bobbed slightly as he walked. He stopped beside an empty chair and peered at its seat through his black glasses.

“Anyone using this?”

“My elbow was,” Maisie said, moving it.

“I’ll try not to disturb its rest.”

He sat down, navy jacket neatly zipped, and put his white-gloved hands on his knees.

Piper grinned, then went back to her lunch. Granite spoke quietly with Ben. Nora looked out through the

glass for a while. Wren closed her eyes briefly, then opened them when Maisie asked whether she was asleep.

"No."

"You looked asleep."

"I was looking at the inside of my eyelids."

"What did you see?"

"Nothing exciting."

Maisie tried it herself. For several comfortable seconds, nobody at their end of the table said anything.

When their full break was over, there was separate time to change and warm up again. Piper checked her fastened helmet strap and both grippers before returning to the ice. Ben and the other adults had the stopped lane ready.

Red went first in the fourth end. The Pinecones had the hammer.

Maisie's two reds settled toward the outside. Wren called Nora's first into the middle.

Nora looked at the target, then at Piper.

"Less than my first one before the break."

Piper nodded. She remembered how strongly that red had been traveling.

Nora settled at the hack. Piper and Maisie waited for the release.

This red came smoothly. Piper followed beside it, watching the turning handle. It had enough weight to reach the place Wren wanted without the extra push of Nora's earlier draw.

"Coming nicely," Maisie called.

Wren let it travel. The two sweepers kept their brushes clear.

The red reached the middle and stopped close.

Nora stood at the delivery end for a moment, looking. Then she covered her slider and came down.

“That was more like it.”

Piper liked the way Nora said it: pleased with the stone she had just delivered, ready to look at the next one.

The Pinecones drew to the right. Nora took the yellow out with her second red, and their second player took that red out. Piper drew a red into the left side of the house. Their vice removed it and stayed, then added another yellow on the right.

Both sides of the house kept changing. Nora’s first red stayed near the middle.

Ada tried to put yellow closer. Her first draw stopped in front, outside Nora’s. Wren’s last red went wide, leaving Ada one more chance. This yellow finished farther out on the left.

When Piper and the other vice agreed on one red, Nora came to look at her stone before the adults cleared.

“It stayed.”

Maisie leaned just enough to see past Piper. “It had a good place.”

The Too-Cold Club led four to one.

Piper took a drink while the lane was reset. Across the ice, Ada stood with her vice and second player, speaking quietly. Their lead joined them before going to the hack.

They were still trying to win the same cup.

CHAPTER 6

What They Had Left



The Pinecones earned a point in the fifth end.

They put yellows into useful places, took out reds when they could reach them and made the Too-Cold Club keep answering. Piper's first red replaced a yellow in the middle. Their vice immediately removed it and stayed closer than anything else.

Wren hit a different yellow on the right with her first turn. Her last draw stopped in the front rings. Neither could take the point away from the Pinecones' central stone.

Four to two.

One end left, with the hammer coming to the Too-Cold Club because yellow had scored.

Piper was glad to have it. She was glad of the four points they had already earned too. They had not arrived together. One belonged to the first end, two to the third, another to Nora's red after the break.

Now Wren was looking at the empty house, ready for the Pinecones to begin.

Their lead put a yellow on the right. Wren called Maisie's first shot on it.

"Take it out?" Maisie asked when she checked the target.

"Yes," Wren said. "Keep it open."

Maisie went back to deliver. Piper and Nora followed the red, then lifted and stepped clear before contact.

Yellow went out. Red stayed.

Maisie's face brightened.

"I like starting like that."

The Pinecones' next yellow came in on the left. Maisie tried to take that one out too, but her red passed wide and ran out behind the house.

She came down with her mouth pulled to one side.

"I liked the first one better."

"So did I," Piper said.

The Pinecones' second player removed Maisie's red on the right. Nora took out the yellow on the left, then used her second turn to remove the one on the right. Between Nora's shots, the Pinecones had sent a draw too wide.

Piper followed both of Nora's hits with Maisie. After the second, Maisie straightened with a pleased breath.

"That was a lot of yellow going out."

Piper could see it too. Nora had left reds on both sides. But there were still yellow stones to come.

The Pinecones' vice drew one behind the middle. Wren called Piper's first red on it.

Piper went to the hack. Maisie and Nora took their places to follow. At the far end, Wren's broom showed her the open yellow.

Piper delivered.

Her red met it cleanly after the sweepers moved aside. Yellow went out. Red stopped in front of where it had been.

When Piper came back, Wren was watching the Pinecones' vice prepare her second delivery. That yellow went wide and out.

For Piper's next turn, Wren chose a draw on the left. Maisie and Nora followed it, ready with their brushes, and the red came into the house. It finished farther from the middle than Piper's first, but it stayed in.

Piper had delivered both her stones. She returned by the side with her slider covered and joined Wren near the house.

Ada had two turns left. Wren had two as well.

Ada looked at Piper's nearer red. It was open from the front. Her vice took the house while Ada went to deliver.

The yellow hit Piper's red and sent it out. Yellow stayed, closer than the reds that remained.

Ada had made the shot she wanted. Her teammates looked pleased as she came down.

Piper looked carefully before Wren spoke. There was only one yellow left in play now: Ada's. The others had gone out, several because Maisie, Nora and Piper had hit them. Ada still had one yellow to deliver.

The Pinecones needed two points to tie.

Piper and Wren looked at the yellow together, then at the clear ice in front of it.

“If that goes out, there’s only her last one,” Piper said.

Wren nodded. “That’s the shot.”

Piper took charge of the house. Wren went to the hack, and Maisie and Nora got ready to follow her red.

Piper set the target. It was an open hit, the sort they had practiced, the sort several of them had already made today.

That did not stop her wanting this one very, very much.

Wren settled at the hack, her hand resting on the red stone’s handle.

She slid and released before the cue.

The red traveled toward Piper.

Maisie and Nora followed with their brushes ready. It had enough weight. Piper watched the space between red and yellow become smaller.

The sweepers lifted clear and stepped aside before contact.

Clack.

The yellow slid backward, crossed the back line completely and went out. Wren's red stayed in the house with the others.

Piper looked once at the place the yellow had left.

No yellows left in play. Only Ada's one unused stone, with two points needed.

The game was over.

Ada came to the clear side on her team's turn. She looked at Wren, then held out her gloved hand.

"Good game."

Wren took it. "Good game."

The coach confirmed the result. Both teams still had a stone unused, so the last end was marked with Xs. No extra points were added. Four to two was the final score.

Piper heard Maisie say, "We won," very softly.

Then Nora said it too.

They had won the Saturday Cup.

CHAPTER 7

Room for Four

Piper shook hands with the Pinecones' vice and the other players. Ada's team stood together while the coaches began clearing the stopped lane.

"Your first one after the break," the Pinecones' second player said to Nora. "We couldn't get nearer."

Nora smiled. "I liked that one."

Piper followed her friends off the ice. She wanted to talk to all three of them at once. By the time she had changed into ordinary shoes and taken off her helmet and gloves, she had told Maisie about the opening hit, Nora about her two removals and Wren that she had heard the final clack from right beside the house.

"I heard it too," Wren said.

"Mine sounded closer."

"It was closer."

Piper laughed. She knew that. It still felt like something she wanted to tell Wren.

The warm room was busy. The other game had finished, and families and players gathered near the table for the short presentation. The cup looked exactly the size it had been last Saturday.

Piper wanted to hold it just as much.

When the Too-Cold Club was called forward, Maisie got up so promptly that her chair made a loud scrape. She stopped it, gave the chair an offended look and joined the others.

Jo handed them the cup. People clapped. Ben was smiling behind them, and Granite's white gloves made small, brisk pats against each other.

Piper slid her hand beside Maisie's on the little cup. Nora held the other handle, and Wren found room beneath it.

The metal felt cool against Piper's fingers. It was heavier than she had expected from looking at it, though easily held by the four of them together.

Maisie looked down into the shiny bowl.

"My face is enormous."

Nora leaned just enough to look. "Mine's sideways."

"Mine's underneath," Wren said.

Piper laughed so hard that she had to look away. Ben raised his phone for a picture, and all four girls looked toward him, still smiling.

Piper could feel Maisie's fingers beside hers. Nora had a firm hold of the other handle. Wren's palm supported the cup below.

It was their first cup together, in the last junior game of their second season.

"Ready?" Ben asked.

Piper looked once at her three friends.

They were already grinning.

"Yes," she said.