PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Three Game Saturday

BOOK THIRTEEN



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

Which One Would We Miss



Jo put two cards on the table. Granite stood beside it, listening.

Piper leaned forward. She had expected to hear who they would play next Saturday. Instead, Jo was asking what sort of games they wanted.

The Pinecones, the Blue Comets and Evie's team had stayed after their shared practice. Jackets hung from chair backs. Somebody was still trying to get a glove out of a sleeve.

"The adults have checked both plans," Jo said. "The ice, coaches and family arrangements are ready. You get a say in which one we use."

Piper had helped with signs at a club day before. She had helped make a newspaper too. She had never helped choose the playing format.

Jo tapped the first card.

“Two games of four ends. You’d play two other teams.”

Then the second.

“Or three games of two ends. You’d play all three.”

“Like the round robin on our overnight trip?” Piper asked.

“Yes, with shorter games, all on Saturday.”

Piper looked around the table. Ada had her orange water bottle. Tali was easing the trapped glove through its sleeve. Evie sat beside her own vice.

“Which one would we miss if we picked two games?”

“Your team would miss Evie’s this time,” Jo said. “Everyone would miss one opponent.”

Piper looked at the second card again.

“I want to play everybody.”

“I like four ends,” Nora said. “After two, I’m just getting used to playing that team. I want to see what we can do next.”

Piper had been thinking about the new opponents waiting after each game. Nora was thinking about the opponent who would leave.

Wren turned the first card a little so she could read it.

“Do the scores start again for each match?”

“Yes. Separate games. Ties can stay ties. We aren’t adding everything up for a champion.”

“So one game can be completely different from the next,” Wren said. “I’d like that. Though I like having more ends to change a game too.”

“Do we still get lunch and sitting-down time?” Maisie asked.

“Both plans have proper breaks,” Ben said. “Nobody has to eat a sandwich in the hack.”

“I wasn’t going to,” Maisie said. “It would get cold.”

Tali freed her glove with a small pop.

“The Blue Comets want three games,” she said. “We talked about it while we were changing.”

Ada wanted all the opponents too. One of her teammates preferred four ends, like Nora. Evie said her group liked having three fresh starts.

Jo gave the others time to speak. A few wanted more ends. Most wanted more opponents.

Piper kept her hands beside her own card. She had said what she wanted. She listened while Nora looked from one plan to the other.

“For this Saturday, I’ll choose three,” Nora said. “I do want to play all of them. I’ll still want longer games sometimes.”

“Me too,” said Ada’s teammate.

When Jo checked, the other children were happy to use the three-game plan this time. She gathered the cards.

“Then that’s our day.”

Piper counted the opponents on her fingers. Pinecones. Blue Comets. Evie.

Three whole games.

Two ends each.

She knew those were two ways of saying the same plan. One sounded much bigger.

CHAPTER 2

Already the Last End

On Saturday, Maisie’s first red headed for the left side of the house.

“Leave it,” Wren called.

Piper and Nora kept their brushes clear. The stone settled in the front rings. Ada watched it with her own vice from their waiting place behind the back line.

The first game had begun.

They were using the familiar shorter start today, with the same junior stones. All sixteen children had practiced at this arrangement, and their coaches had checked that it suited them. The farther start Piper had used with the Silver Mittens was still available for other sessions.

Before the warm-up ended, Jo and Ben had checked the portable hack on the stopped lane. The painted house and lines stayed where they were. Two marks on opposite sideboards gave them their local release cue: let go before the front of the stone reached the imaginary line between the marks.

Ben and Jo had two other adult coaches helping on this lane. Four more worked with the Blue Comets and Evie’s group on the other one. Granite was beside the house. Everyone knew the waiting places and clear side routes.

“Two stones each in every end,” Jo had reminded them. “For this day, we finish all the turns, even if a game’s winner is already certain. And a tie stays a tie.”

Now their helmet straps were fastened, their grippers were clean, and their usual order was underway. Maisie led, Nora played second, Piper third and vice, and Wren fourth and skip. Ada played fourth for the Pinecones.

The Pinecones had won the toss and chosen the hammer, the last delivery of the first end. The Too-Cold Club, going first, had chosen red.

Maisie's second stone came closer than her first. Piper helped Nora sweep it, lifting before it crossed the tee line. Then she stood at the clear side to watch yellow's answer.

That yellow stopped on the other side of the middle.

Wren wanted Nora closer still.

Piper and Maisie followed the red. At Wren's call they brushed briefly, then cleared their brushes. It stopped near the button.

Nora came along the side after covering her sliding foot.

"I liked that one."

Piper liked it too. But the Pinecones' second player had a clear look at it. Her yellow made an ordinary, solid hit and stayed where Nora's red had been.

The other stones began gathering farther out.

When Piper reached the hack, Wren showed her a patch on the right of the middle. There was room to draw closer than most of them.

Piper looked at the broom and delivered.

Her stone came into the house. It stopped on the right, nearer than Maisie's best red, though the yellow by the button was still closer.

Wren nodded at Piper when the lane was clear.

"That gives us something."

Piper's next one went much too wide. She watched it disappear out the back, then returned by the side to take the house for Wren.

She and Wren checked the target together. Maisie and Nora waited to sweep.

Wren's first red came close on the left. Piper looked from it to the middle yellow. Red had improved again, but yellow still led.

The Pinecones kept that one yellow nearest through the rest of the end. Wren's second draw stopped in the front rings. Ada's final stone stayed outside the house.

Piper and the Pinecones' vice agreed on one yellow before the adults cleared anything.

"One to them," Piper told Maisie.

Maisie nodded. "Next end."

Their coaches reset the stones while the lane was stopped. Piper had a drink at the side before they were called back.

Yellow went first this time. Red had the hammer because the Pinecones had scored.

Maisie's two stones reached the house. The Pinecones put another yellow close to the button, and Nora drew beside it on the left.

From the waiting place, Piper could hear Ada talking to her next player.

"A bit farther right. We've got the middle."

They did have the middle. Piper and Wren looked at it when it was Piper's turn.

Her first red stopped in front of the nearer stones. Her next finished too far left. Ada's intended guard came too far, stopping in the front rings ahead of the central yellow.

Piper studied the space beside it with Wren. There was a draw on the left. Wren tried it, but the red stayed outside Nora's.

Ada's next yellow ran out. Wren's last red went much wider on the left than either of them wanted.

The Pinecones scored one again.

Two to nothing.

Piper looked toward the hack. She was already thinking about another draw when Ada came over with her hand out.

The game was finished.

Piper shook hands with the Pinecones. Their second player was smiling about the two yellows she had put near the middle.

"They both counted," Piper said.

"Yes!" the girl said. "I didn't know the first one would stay there so long."

Nora stood beside Piper as the adults began clearing.

"I wanted another end with them."

Piper watched Ada join her team.

"So did I."

They still had two other teams to play. Right now, Piper would have liked a third end with this one.

She followed Nora off the ice for lunch.

CHAPTER 3

A Place at the Table



Piper’s feet were glad to be in her ordinary shoes.

After washing her hands, she carried her lunch box to the warm room. Ben had brought it from the insulated bag where it had stayed cold. Maisie was already sitting at a table with room for all four of them.

“I saved you this chair,” she said.

Piper sat down. Nora put her water bottle beside her lunch. Wren sat at the corner.

The room filled slowly. Nobody had to hurry back onto the ice. The other game had finished too, and the adults were taking care of the stones and equipment while the children ate with their families.

Piper unwrapped her sandwich. For a little while, she was too hungry to talk much.

Rain began ticking against the window.

“Was it raining when we came?” Wren asked.

“No,” Piper said.

Dad arrived with damp shoulders and his coat over one arm.

“I went back to the car for this.”

Piper looked at the wet coat.

“Did it help?”

“It will help when I go out again.”

“Your coat missed its first turn,” Wren said.

Dad hung it on the back of his chair.

“It has a whole afternoon to recover.”

Tali came past with her lunch box. She stopped at the end of the table while one of her teammates found a seat nearby.

“We’ve got you next.”

“We know,” Maisie said. “We’re having sandwiches first.”

“So are we.”

Tali sat at the next table. Piper could see her talking with the Blue Comets, but she couldn’t hear what they were saying over the families around them.

Nora opened her fruit box. Wren tipped her head toward the window, listening to a sudden rattle of rain.

“That was a big bit.”

“Lots of bits,” Nora said.

“An organized big bit.”

Piper swallowed a laugh along with the last bite of her sandwich.

After they had eaten, Maisie leaned back and let her hands rest on her knees. Piper did the same. Ben was talking to another parent, and Nora had turned her chair enough to join in.

There was time to listen. Time to get another drink. Time for Piper to stop feeling as if she ought to be at the hack.

When the coaches called them for changing and warming up again, the rain had softened to a whisper.

The Blue Comets were ready for their game.

They checked their lineups and had a new toss. This time the Too-Cold Club won. Wren chose the first-end hammer, and the Blue Comets chose yellow. Tali was playing fourth and skipping.

The score began at nothing to nothing.

Piper liked seeing the empty score spaces. They belonged to a game that hadn't happened yet.

The Blue Comets' lead put a yellow in the left-front rings. Wren called Maisie to the other side.

Piper and Nora went with the red. It traveled smoothly into the house and stopped on the right, much nearer the middle than the yellow.

Maisie came to look when it was safe.

"I thought it was going farther."

"It stopped in a good place," Wren said.

Maisie's second went farther back on the left. Then the Blue Comets' second player drew a yellow into that side too, inside Maisie's back stone.

Wren asked Nora for the middle.

Piper waited with Maisie, their brushes ready. Nora settled into her delivery, let go before the local cue, and watched the red slide away.

“It’s slowing,” Piper called.

“Sweep!” Wren answered.

Piper and Maisie brushed beside Nora’s red, keeping their feet and brushes clear of the stone.

For a few moments Piper heard almost nothing except their brushes. The red was coming. It needed a little more.

“Keep going!”

Maisie’s brush swished beside hers.

“Up!”

They finished their strokes to the sides and lifted clear. The stone slid into the inner part of the house, stopping just in front of the middle.

Nora’s mouth opened in a pleased little smile.

Piper smiled back. She could feel the work in her arms.

“Thank you,” Nora said when she joined them.

“We were busy,” Maisie told her.

The next yellow tried to hit Nora’s red. It missed on the right and went out the back without touching anything.

When Piper’s turn came, Maisie and Nora still had the two closest stones. The Blue Comets had a yellow farther back on the left.

Wren pointed to it.

“Hit that and stay?” Piper asked.

“Yes.”

Piper could see the whole front of the yellow. She took the clear route back to the hack, uncovered her sliding foot for the delivery, and checked Wren’s broom.

This red made contact where she wanted. The yellow went out. Piper's stone stayed.

Four reds were closest now.

Piper stood up with Jo's help, covered her slider and came back along the side. She looked at the four stones from the house end.

"That's a good collection," she said.

Tali thought about the collection too. After Piper's next red went wide, Tali took out the farther one Piper had just made. Her yellow stayed there, outside both Maisie's and Nora's.

Wren tried to add another nearer red, but her first ran long. Tali's other draw stayed outside the two counting reds. Then Wren's last stopped short.

At the end, Piper and the Blue Comets' vice checked the house together.

"Nora's," Piper said. "Then Maisie's. Two red."

"Two," the other vice agreed.

Maisie touched gloves with Nora.

Piper looked at the two stones again before they were cleared. They had arrived early in the end, and they were still doing their jobs at the end of it.

Now there was one end left with the Blue Comets.

CHAPTER 4

The Comets Answer

The Blue Comets spent their second end finding places near the middle.

Nora put a red there first. Their second player drew a yellow a little to its left. Later, their vice took Nora's red out and left another yellow close to the button.

Piper had made a useful hit on the right. She had a red in the house, but the two yellows were inside it.

Tali was looking at those yellows with her vice. They were not talking about the two points on the scoreboard. They were working out what to do with the stones in front of them.

Wren came to Piper before her first delivery.

"I want to get inside those."

Piper checked the target with her. Then Wren returned to the hack, leaving Piper in charge of the house. Maisie and Nora waited to sweep.

The red stopped short and to the right of where they had wanted it.

Piper watched it settle in the front-right rings. It was still useful, inside some of the Blue Comets' farther stones. It was outside the two near the middle.

Wren came back by the side.

"I let it go over there."

"A bit," Piper said.

Tali chose that red for her next shot. She and her vice agreed on the target before she went to deliver.

The yellow came with firm weight. Its sweepers lifted and stepped clear well before contact.

Clack.

Wren's red went out. Tali's yellow stayed.

Piper looked at the house again. Three yellow were closer than any red now.

Tali gave her vice a quick grin.

Wren had her second stone to play. She joined Piper at the clear side and pointed to the space on the left of the middle.

"Here. Nearer the middle."

Piper looked along the approach, then checked it with Granite. He nodded at the open space.

She set the broom where Wren wanted it.

This time the red came in nearer. Piper called for a little brushing. Maisie and Nora helped it onward, then lifted at her call before the inner rings.

The red stopped outside the two central yellows, but closer than Tali's hit had finished.

"Two," Piper said to Wren when she returned. "It cuts off that third one."

Wren bent to look.

"I can see."

Tali still had the hammer. She tried to add another near the middle, but her last draw finished far out on the left side of the house.

The Blue Comets had their two.

Two to two altogether.

Piper and the other vice agreed on the count. The coaches let them check before they began clearing the stones.

Tali came over with her team.

"I wanted three," she said.

“I noticed,” Wren told her.

Tali laughed.

Nora shook hands with the Blue Comets’ second player. Piper looked back once more at the empty score spaces beyond the second end. There wouldn’t be a third.

“I’d have liked to carry on,” Nora said as they reached the dry side.

“Me too,” Tali said. “We were getting somewhere.”

“So were we,” Maisie told her.

They smiled at one another, both quite sure about that.

The second break was waiting for them. They changed their shoes, had water and sat down. Nobody asked them to help reset a lane or give up a piece of their rest.

Piper loosened her fingers and laid her hands flat on the table.

“Mine still feel like this,” she said, curling them around an invisible brush.

Maisie opened and closed her own hands.

“Mine are on holiday.”

Granite passed on his way to the adults’ table.

“A sensible destination,” he said.

Nora took another drink. Through the glass, the coaches were checking the empty lanes for the next games.

“I still like four ends better,” she said.

Piper nodded. She didn’t have an answer that would give them more ends today.

After a while, Evie came by with her teammates. Their game with the Pinecones was finished, and they were settling into their own break.

“Us next,” Evie said.

Piper sat up a little.

“Yes. Us next.”

CHAPTER 5

Three Reds

Evie's team won the toss for the last game and chose the hammer.

The Too-Cold Club chose red again. Maisie looked down at the handles.

"They must know us by now."

"They don't seem to remember what I tell them," Wren said.

The adults had finished resetting and checking the equipment. Both teams had warmed up again, checked their helmet straps and grippers, and confirmed their order. Evie would deliver fourth for her own group.

Piper watched Maisie's first red reach the left-front rings. Yellow answered on the right.

For her second, Maisie came much closer on the left.

Piper and Nora had followed it, listening to Wren and lifting their brushes before the tee line. When it stopped, Maisie waited for the lane to clear before coming to see it.

"That's the one I wanted."

Piper liked hearing that.

Evie's lead put her next yellow farther back. Nora's first red went to the other side, also beyond where Wren had asked for it.

Nora was still watching when she stood up.

"That had plenty."

Piper nodded. They had hardly needed to sweep it.

Before her second turn, Nora came to look at the house with Wren. The middle was open. Maisie's red was on the left, and the yellows were farther out.

"Less than my first," Nora said.

Wren put the broom down for the new target.

Piper and Maisie waited while Nora went back. Piper could see Jo beside the hack, watching her settle.

This red came at an easier pace. Wren called the brushes on briefly, then up. Piper finished her stroke to the side, lifted and watched.

The red stopped just in front of the button.

Nora was smiling at the other end.

Maisie looked from Nora's stone to her own.

"We've started another collection."

Evie's second player gave them something to think about. Her yellow drew in on the right, just outside Maisie's red but inside the farther stones.

Piper watched Evie point to it as she spoke to her vice. They had made a useful place for themselves.

Wren asked Piper to hit it.

Piper took a moment to look. She could see the front of the yellow. It was an ordinary open hit, one they had practiced many times, and she still didn't make it every time.

"Stay there if I can?"

"Yes."

At the hack, Piper checked the target once more. She delivered, released before the local cue, and watched Maisie and Nora follow the red.

They kept their brushes clear as it approached the yellow, then stepped safely aside.

The stones met with a sharp clack.

Yellow traveled out the back. Red stayed near its place.

Piper grinned.

When she came to the house, there were three nearer reds: Nora's by the middle, Maisie's on the left, and hers on the right.

Evie was already talking with her next player. Her vice tried to put a yellow closer, but it stopped in the front rings.

Piper's own second stone didn't go where she wanted either. Her guard finished much too far to the right.

The vice's next yellow stayed short of the house.

Piper came back and took the house for Wren.

The three reds were still nearest, but there was space around them. Piper checked Wren's target carefully before stepping back with the broom.

Wren's first red stayed wide on the right. Evie drew in on the left, outside the three reds but closer than the farther stones.

Wren tried to put her second in front of the middle. It stopped in the front rings. Evie's last draw curled very wide left.

Piper and Evie's vice checked the final count.

"Three red."

The vice looked from Nora's to Maisie's to Piper's.

"Three."

Piper could feel her smile spreading again. Maisie held up three fingers at the clear side.

"One each," she said to Nora and Piper.

Wren came over to look before the adults reset the house.

"I'd like to add one of mine."

"We've got another end," Piper said.

Evie had called her team together. She was looking toward the hack, ready to begin it.

CHAPTER 6

Everybody



In the last end, Evie’s second player put a yellow close to the button.

She had waited while the early stones changed places. Maisie had removed a yellow from the right side of the house, and Nora had taken another out on the left. Now this new yellow sat almost in the middle.

Piper looked at it from the waiting place.

It was very near.

Wren wanted Nora’s second red beside it on the left. Piper and Maisie moved into their sweeping places.

Nora released. The red traveled toward them.

“Needs a bit,” Maisie called.

“Sweep!” Wren answered.

Piper bent to her brush. She could feel that they had already played most of a curling day. She kept her strokes steady beside Maisie’s.

The stone moved into the house.

“Up!”

They finished to the sides and lifted. Red stopped on the left of the middle, outside the yellow but closer than all the other stones.

Nora came along the clear side.

“Not quite.”

“It’s a good red,” Wren said. “I want it there.”

Evie did not leave the house alone. Her second player added another yellow on the right. Piper took that one out and stayed, but the yellow at the button was still closest.

Piper’s next draw finished wide left. She covered her slider and returned to Wren.

“Your turn.”

There was a new yellow in the front-right part of the house. Evie’s vice had put it there, trying to add to their count. Nora’s nearer red was still inside it.

Wren wanted the front-right yellow out.

Piper checked the target with her, then took the house. This time she would watch a hit instead of calling a draw all the way in.

Maisie and Nora followed Wren’s red, brushes clear. They stepped aside before contact.

Clack.

The yellow went back and out. Wren’s red stayed.

Wren came to look when the stones had stopped.

“There’s one of mine.”

Piper smiled at her.

There was only one yellow left in play: the one near the button. Evie had two deliveries left.

She talked with her vice and tried a draw with the first. It ran too wide and kept going out the back.

Now Evie had only her last stone left. Even if it counted with the yellow already there, two points could not catch the Too-Cold Club’s three.

Piper knew they had won this game.

She still had a job to do.

Under their all-stones arrangement, Wren and Evie both had their final turns. Wren came beside Piper to check the draw she wanted.

Piper put the broom in place. Maisie and Nora waited for the red. It came down short of the inner stones and stopped in the front rings.

Wren looked at it, then at Piper.

“Still too little.”

“A bit,” Piper said.

They moved to the waiting place for Evie’s last delivery.

Evie wanted a yellow closer than Nora’s red. Her vice showed her the patch, and her sweepers got ready.

The yellow came in on the left. It reached the front rings and stopped outside Nora’s stone.

One yellow counted.

Piper and Evie’s vice agreed before anyone moved the stones. Three to one for the Too-Cold Club.

Evie looked once more at her last yellow.

“I wanted that farther in.”

“I know,” Piper said.

At the clear side of the stopped lane, Piper and Evie shook gloved hands. Their helmets were still fastened. Maisie, Nora and Wren were shaking hands with the rest of Evie’s team.

“Good game,” Evie said.

“Good game.”

On the other lane, the Pinecones and Blue Comets had already finished. Ada stood with her orange bottle on the dry side. Tali was talking to one of her teammates while the adults cleared their stones.

Piper looked from them to Evie.

The Pinecones first. The Blue Comets next. Evie’s team last.

Nora came to stand beside her.

“Everybody,” Piper said.

Nora nodded. “Everybody.”

Then they went with their teammates along the clear route off the ice, all three games finished.