PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Tougher League

BOOK NINETEEN



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

The Red on the Left

“It’s going to need us,” Nora said.

Piper lowered her brush beside Nora’s. Maisie’s second red was coming toward them, and Wren wanted it farther into the house than the first.

“Sweep!” Wren called.

Their brushes worked together ahead of the stone. Piper could hear Nora breathing beside her. Then Wren called them up, and both brushes lifted clear.

The red kept going. It slowed on the left, behind the middle of the house and nearer the center than Maisie’s first one.

“There,” Maisie said when she reached them by the clear side. “Two places.”

Piper liked both places. She liked the sound Maisie’s voice made when a stone finished where she meant it to.

Then Evie’s second player put a yellow nearer.

Nora looked toward Wren. Wren chose the open hit, and Nora went back to deliver. Maisie took the sweeping place beside Piper.

This was their first game in the experienced group of their club’s junior league. The building was the same. Evie was the same girl who sometimes laughed with them and sometimes wanted a little space after a loss. The junior stones and farther starting place were familiar too.

But this was a whole block of six games, each scheduled for six ends. Piper, Maisie, Nora and Wren had chosen to try it together.

They had chosen something else too.

“More wins than losses,” Wren had said at their last ordinary practice.

“That would be good,” Nora had answered.

“That would be very good,” Maisie had said.

Piper had imagined finishing the last game and counting them. She had liked the picture enough to want to begin at once.

Helmets fastened, they watched Nora’s red meet the yellow.

Click.

Yellow traveled through the back. Red stayed near the place where they had met.

Piper lifted her glove toward Nora after the stones stopped. Then Evie’s second took that red out with her next yellow.

“Oh,” Maisie said softly.

Nora watched the new yellow stop. “I liked mine better.”

“So did I,” Piper said.

Wren chose a draw for Nora’s other turn. This one came into the left-middle part of the house, closer than the stones on the wings. Maisie and Piper had their brushes ready, watched its speed and lifted before the middle line.

Nora came down looking pleased.

Then Evie’s vice removed that red too.

Piper watched Nora’s stone travel out. Two useful shots, both answered. Evie’s girls were talking quietly together at the side. They looked busy and pleased with their own work.

Piper had her own work now.

She was still third. Maisie still led, Nora played second, and Wren was their fourth and skip. When Wren delivered, Piper would take charge of the house.

After Tess's last clinic, they had one more ordinary practice before the league block began. Jo and the helpers had watched each girl deliver and sweep, checking that they stayed balanced and comfortable as play went on. Jo had talked to them one at a time about the repeated longer games. Their families had made room for the longer visits.

That morning, after their full warm-up on the dry side, Jo had watched their familiar practice deliveries again.

"How are you feeling about the longer game today?" she had asked Piper.

"Ready."

"And you can tell me if that changes."

Piper had nodded. Now Jo and the helpers were nearby, watching the play.

Wren wanted Piper to take out the yellow on the right, the one that had replaced Nora's first red.

Piper checked the target from the familiar farther starting place.

She delivered with her ordinary controlled hit weight.

The yellow went out through the back. Her red stayed.

Piper felt the small solid pleasure of a shot doing its job.

After the next yellow stayed wide on the right, Wren chose another open hit. This time Piper took out the yellow nearer the middle on the left. Her second red stayed too.

She would have liked to look at both of them for longer.

Evie's first stone removed the one on the right.

Piper covered her slider before walking to the house. She joined Wren beside the stopped stones.

"The left one's still there," she said.

Wren nodded. "I'd like another near it. On this side."

They checked a finishing area right of the middle, then agreed the aiming target. Wren went to deliver, and Piper held the broom for her. Maisie and Nora waited ready to sweep.

Wren's draw reached the place they wanted. Evie answered with another hit, taking it out.

Piper let out a breath. Every red seemed to need a turn to enjoy being red before a yellow arrived.

Wren's final hit removed Evie's new yellow. This red stayed, and Piper's left-hand red was still there.

"Two red," Piper said to Evie's vice.

The other girl looked carefully, then nodded. "Two."

Maisie came over when the count was agreed. "My two stayed too."

"Farther out," Nora said.

"I know. I'm allowed to like them."

"You are," Wren said. She held out her glove.

Piper met it, then Maisie's and Nora's. They had won the first end of their harder block.

There were five ends left in this game alone.

CHAPTER 2

A Whole Saturday

Evie’s team took one in the second end.

By the third, Piper was noticing how often the house changed between choosing a place and getting her own turn. Maisie began with a useful red on the left. Her second stopped in the front rings, and Nora made a clean hit on the right.

Piper was enjoying the little sound of stones meeting today. She also remembered a red moving across after a hit, into the broad patch she had chosen with Tess.

She wanted to work on that again.

There had been three clinics with Tess. They were finished now. Jo had said they could keep a little roll time in ordinary practice, and Piper had been carrying the thought around with her ever since.

It was a good thought. It did not fit every yellow she saw.

In this end, Wren wanted an exposed yellow out of the left-middle area. Piper sent her first red onto it, and the yellow went out. Her red stayed near the contact place.

Evie’s vice took it out.

For Piper’s next turn, Wren wanted a draw nearer the middle. Maisie and Nora worked ahead of the red, but it settled in the front rings, short of the place Wren had chosen.

Piper came down and looked at it.

“I wanted it farther in.”

“I know,” Wren said.

Evie drew a yellow behind the middle, nearer than Piper's short red. Wren's first draw stayed wide. Her final hit took out Evie's nearer yellow and gave them one point.

Three to one for the Too-Cold Club at halfway.

Piper and Evie's vice agreed the count. The adults closed the lane for clearing, and the girls followed the safe route off the ice. There was time to change their shoes, undo helmet straps and put their things down before the seated break began.

Piper sat beside Maisie. Her shoulders were glad to settle.

Ben brought her water bottle from the end of the table. "Here you go."

"Thanks."

She drank, then opened her snack. Across from her, Wren was examining a pear with a very long stalk.

"It looks as if you're supposed to ring it," Maisie said.

Wren held the pear still. "What would come?"

"Another pear."

"That seems inconvenient," Nora said. "You'd never finish."

Piper laughed. "Unless the second one didn't have a stalk."

Maisie considered this. "Then it would be the last pear."

Granite came past in his sneakers. His white-gloved hand held his clipboard close to his jacket.

"How's the break?"

"There's a problem with the pears," Maisie told him.

He looked at the one in Wren's hand. "I'll leave you to it."

He went on, and Wren took a bite.

For a while they ate and talked about other things. Nora had seen a dog carrying a stick much wider than a gate. Piper wanted to know whether it had worked out how to get through.

“The person opened the gate wider,” Nora said.

“That dog has a useful person,” Wren said.

They stayed seated for their whole break. Afterward there was time to change, check how they felt and warm up again before the fourth end.

Evie and her team were ready too.

The game did not stay three to one. Evie’s second put a useful yellow near the middle in the fourth end. Later, Wren’s last hit removed Evie’s new draw and stayed, but Evie’s last hit took that red out. The early yellow and Evie’s new one counted together.

Three each.

In the fifth end, the yellow nearest the center belonged to Evie’s vice. Wren’s last hit passed without touching it, and Evie’s team gained another point.

Now the Too-Cold Club needed two in the sixth to win.

Nora supplied a red right of the middle with her second stone. Piper liked it as soon as it stopped. It was nearer than the wing stones, and it stayed while other reds and yellows came and went.

When Piper took charge of the house for Wren, she looked at Nora’s red again.

“Still useful,” she said.

Wren nodded. She made a close draw on the other side. Evie took it out, leaving a yellow Piper could see clearly from the delivery direction.

Wren chose the familiar hit.

Piper held the agreed target. The red came down; Maisie and Nora cleared their brushes before contact.

The yellow went through the back. Wren's red stayed.

Piper looked from it to Nora's earlier one. Both were nearer than the closest yellow.

"Two red."

Evie's vice agreed.

Five to four. They had won the first game.

Piper smiled so widely that her cheeks pressed against the edge of her helmet. Nora and Maisie bumped gloves. Wren came down the clear side toward them, looking at the two counting reds.

"Your one," she said to Nora.

"And your one."

After the handshakes, they changed without rushing. The six fixture Saturdays would take the place of their usual practice visits during this block. There would be two practice Saturdays among them, making eight weeks altogether. They would meet Evie's team, the Lanterns and the Ravens twice each. The fixture list gave the Too-Cold Club the first-end last stone in the first meetings; the other teams would have it in the returns.

Piper knew all that. Now one whole game had happened inside it.

On the changing bench, Maisie pulled on her shoe.

"I liked my two at the beginning," she said. "But I wanted to see what we'd do with them."

"We had other things to do by then," Wren said.

"I know. I want to practice that part too."

Piper reached for her other shoe. She thought of Maisie's opening reds, Nora's sixth-end draw and all the replies that had come between.

She still wanted her roll. There were other things she wanted to get better at with them too.

CHAPTER 3

The Lanterns' Yellow

The next Saturday, Inez shook Piper's hand and said, "Good game."

"Good game."

The Lanterns had been at their club before the Too-Cold Club began this block. Piper had seen them on other lanes, heard their sweep calls and waited beside them at the door. Playing six ends against them would be different from knowing which bags were theirs.

They had all warmed up. Jo had checked in with each girl, and the helpers were in their places. The first end went to the Too-Cold Club, one point.

In the second, Maisie's first red stopped well short of the front rings she wanted. It stood as a guard in the middle, outside the house.

"I didn't give it enough," Maisie said when she reached Piper.

Her second went farther, but too deep and wide on the right. Meanwhile, the Lanterns had a yellow on the left wing and another in the front rings.

Nora drew a useful red on the right. The Lanterns' second took it out. Nora answered with a hit of her own, removing that yellow and leaving her red nearer the middle.

Then the same opponent drew a yellow on the left, closer still.

Piper waited while Wren looked at the house. There was work in more than one place. Wren chose the

exposed yellow in the front rings, the one the Lanterns' lead had delivered.

Piper made the hit.

Yellow traveled out through the back. Her red stayed in front of the yellow's old place. Piper had done what they had asked of the shot.

The nearer yellow remained near the middle.

Then the Lanterns' vice removed Nora's red on the right.

When Piper's next turn came, Wren wanted a draw into that side. Maisie and Nora waited to judge it together.

"Plenty," Nora called soon after the release.

Piper watched from behind them. The red looked steady at first. Then Maisie glanced toward Nora.

"It's slowing."

They began sweeping when Wren called. Both worked until she called them clear, but the red stopped short and wide of the area they had wanted.

Piper came down after it stopped.

"I thought it had more," Nora said.

"So did I at first," Maisie said. "Then I wasn't sure."

Piper looked from the red to the empty patch. "Mine didn't go along the line we wanted either."

Nobody could give that turn back to her. Wren was already looking at what they could do now.

She removed another exposed yellow, but the nearer one on the left stayed. Inez drew close, Wren took that stone out, and Inez took out Wren's red in turn. Two yellows counted: the Lanterns' second player's earlier draw and Inez's last stone.

One to two.

Before the next end was set, Wren asked Jo to join them at the side. Their club allowed a short coaching conversation between ends when the players wanted one.

“We made the hits,” Wren said. “But there was another yellow nearer all the time.”

“Which part would you want to look at again?” Jo asked.

Maisie pointed toward the emptying house. “My beginning.”

“And us deciding about the weight,” Nora said.

Piper wanted both of those. She had made a good hit and still arrived at her next turn with more to put right than one red could manage.

“An end with all those bits still in it,” Wren said.

Jo nodded. “Keep that question for our practice Saturday.”

Maisie went to start the next end.

Her second red in the third end lacked the depth she wanted again. Nora put a nearer red in, and the Lanterns’ vice removed it. Piper made another familiar hit, only for the next yellow draw to settle close to the middle.

Inez did not make everything. Her last attempted protection finished too low and wide, leaving a way in. But Wren’s final hit missed the close yellow. The Lanterns took one more point.

At halfway they led three to one.

The girls went off, changed and sat down for their full rest. Piper ate slowly. Maisie had put her water bottle directly in front of herself and was gazing past it.

“What?” Piper asked.

“I think I know that person outside.”

They looked through the warm-room window. A person in a large coat walked past, face hidden by the hood.

“Who?” Nora asked.

“I don’t know.”

Wren took a drink. “That will make it harder to check.”

Maisie laughed. Piper did too, though she still wished her second draw had traveled farther. She leaned back and finished her snack.

When they had rested, changed and warmed up again, they returned to the ice.

The fourth end gave them two. Nora’s earlier draw remained useful, and Wren’s final open hit left another red counting beside it. Three each. Piper pressed her glove to Nora’s, pleased to have helped them reach that point.

The Lanterns earned two in the fifth.

In the sixth, Piper put her second red into a useful place near the middle. Inez removed it with her first stone. No red remained in play, but Wren still had two to deliver. Two reds could still tie the game.

Wren’s first draw ran too far. It went through a clear route and completely over the back line without touching another stone.

Now there were no reds in play and only one left to deliver. They could no longer make the two points they needed. Jo confirmed the game was finished.

Inez and Wren both had an unused stone. The sixth end was marked with an X; it added no points. The Lanterns had won five to three.

Piper shook their hands. She did not much enjoy saying “Good game” while she was disappointed, but it had been a good game. The Lanterns had kept giving them things to work on.

Later, on the bench, Wren sat with her helmet on her knees.

“I want that whole end at practice,” she said. “Starting with Maisie.”

“I want my draws with Piper and Nora sweeping,” Maisie said. “So they know which place I’m trying for.”

“And I want us to say what we think sooner,” Nora said. “Both of us.”

Piper nodded. “I want to help do that.”

She pulled one glove out of the other. She also wanted the yellow set on its own and the open patch to its right. She wanted to see her red move across again.

“Could we still have some of our own turns?” she asked.

“Yes,” Wren said at once. “I still want mine.”

Piper looked up. Wren was rubbing the edge of her helmet strap between her fingers.

Their next Saturday would be practice. Piper was beginning to see how many things could fit inside that word.

CHAPTER 4

One More of Mine

Maisie's draw stopped in the front rings, and Maisie beamed at it.

"That's the one."

Piper had helped sweep it with Nora. Wren had shown Maisie the finish first, then the target. When Maisie came down the side, she looked at all three of them before looking at her red again.

"I wanted you there when I tried it."

"We were," Nora said.

Their practice Saturday had begun with warm-ups and familiar deliveries. Now there was a little time for each girl's chosen work before they tried the connected end Wren wanted.

For Nora's own draw, Piper swept with Maisie. Nora called her first thought about the weight while the red was still traveling. Maisie gave hers too. The red stopped in the front-middle area on the right.

"Mine felt quicker than it looked," Nora said afterward.

"From here, I thought it would stop about there," Maisie said.

Piper looked along the route. She had been watching it slow, as well as listening. She had a little more to tell Nora than whether the draw had worked.

Then it was her turn.

The adults cleared the stopped lane. Ben set one yellow on the left, a little behind the middle, with open

ice beside it. Wren came to look at the patch Piper wanted.

“Across toward the middle,” Piper said. “After I take the yellow out.”

Jo stood with them, listening. Piper checked the aiming target and went to deliver. Maisie and Nora waited with their brushes clear for this try.

The red met the yellow on the side.

Yellow went left and back. Red moved to Piper’s right.

Piper’s fingers tightened around the handle of her brush. There was the part she liked.

The yellow went out over the back line. The red slowed before it reached the broad patch. It stopped a little too far left and forward.

Piper walked down once both stones were still.

“It went across,” she said. “Just not enough.”

Jo looked at the red with her. “You caught some of the side.”

Piper wanted to compare that delivery with another while she could still remember it. The memory felt quite clear in her arm.

But Wren was ready for her own draw work.

Piper took the house. Wren showed her a place just left of the middle, then checked the aiming target before walking back. Maisie and Nora swept when Piper called, and the red reached the area Wren had chosen.

Wren smiled when she arrived. “That’s what I meant.”

Piper nodded. She liked knowing she had understood before Wren let go.

They came off for water and a seated rest. Maisie tried to describe a dream in which she had been carrying a door everywhere. She could not remember what the

door was for. Nora wanted to know whether it had a handle on both sides, which Maisie said was a very difficult question about a dream.

After the break, they changed and warmed up again. Wren was ready to begin her connected end.

“Could we try Maisie’s one on the left staying there?” she asked. “And build the next part from it?”

Jo would deliver the yellow replies, with a helper at the house for her. They chose the replies together before starting. The girls would keep their usual team jobs and leave the stones where they actually stopped.

Maisie’s first red reached the front of the house on the right. After Jo’s wide yellow, Maisie drew her second into the left wing, farther in.

Jo delivered the center guard they had agreed on. Maisie’s left red stayed.

Nora followed with a draw into the left-middle area. Maisie and Piper watched its weight together. Wren could see her next idea taking shape.

“That’s the bit,” she said.

The stones kept coming. Nora drew on the right too. Jo removed that red, and Piper removed Jo’s yellow in turn. For Piper’s other stone, Wren chose an ordinary draw on the left.

It reached its place. Jo then sent the expected yellow deeper into the middle.

Piper’s turns in the exercise were finished. Wren still had hers.

As they stood beside the stopped lane, Jo glanced toward the session clock.

“We’ve got room to finish this,” she said. “Or stop here and use the last little bit for the extra try you asked about, Piper.”

Piper looked at the house. Her roll would need the lane cleared and the yellow set on its own again. She wanted another try. She could still picture her red stopping just outside the patch.

Wren was beside her, looking at the deep yellow Jo had delivered.

“I haven’t tried my part yet,” Wren said.

“I know.”

Piper looked back toward the delivery place. All three friends had helped her try the roll. Wren had checked the patch; Maisie and Nora had watched with her. Now their reds made a position that Wren had been waiting to play.

“Let’s finish this end,” Piper said.

“All right,” Jo said.

“But I still want my own turn at the next practice.”

“Keep that bit,” Maisie said. “I want mine too.”

Nora nodded. Wren turned toward Piper. “Both parts.”

Piper held the target for Wren's first hit. Yellow went out through the back, and red stayed. Jo made the agreed wide reply, then Wren drew into the available middle. Jo's last hit removed Wren's earlier red.

They stopped with the whole position in front of them.

Maisie's left-wing red was still there. Wren's last draw was nearer the center. Piper could see why Wren had wanted to reach this part.

She was glad they had finished it. She was also sorry that her extra roll would have to wait.

While the adults cleared the stones, she rubbed one thumb along the seam of her glove. The clear feeling in her arm was fading now.

Wren came beside her. "Thanks."

Piper nodded, then lifted her brush. They went off together to change.

CHAPTER 5

The Red That Didn’t Stay

In the third end against the Ravens, Maisie made the red they remembered.

It stopped on the left, farther into the house than her first. Nora and Piper had watched its weight together, and Piper had said what she thought while there was still time to help.

Maisie came down smiling at the finish.

“Like practice.”

Wren nodded. “Now if that one stays—”

The Ravens’ second was getting ready to deliver.

Her yellow came straight toward Maisie’s red. It met the nose, sent the red out through the back and stayed near the place where they had touched.

Maisie’s smile vanished.

“Oh. That’s mine gone.”

The yellow guard in the center had not moved. Maisie’s red had been inside the house, open on the left, where the Ravens could take it out.

Piper looked at Wren. The practice picture had lasted less than one opposing turn.

This was the fourth Saturday of their block. They had warmed up for their first meeting with the Ravens, shaken hands with Zoe and her three teammates, and begun with one point. The Ravens had answered with two in the next end. Now the Too-Cold Club trailed two to one.

Nora waited beside Wren.

“We wanted mine over there,” she said, looking left.

"Yes." Wren looked at the new yellow. Then she looked at the other side. "There's room on the right."

Nora crouched to see it from beside her.

"I like that."

Piper had liked the practice plan too. She could almost see Maisie's missing red, with Nora's next one coming nearer. But Wren was showing Nora a different finishing area now. Piper went to sweep with Maisie.

They watched Nora's red from the start. Maisie spoke first about its speed. Piper agreed, and they worked when Wren called. The red stopped in the right-middle area.

"Good place," Piper said when Nora joined them.

The Ravens took that one out as well.

Nora let her arms hang for a moment. "I would like to keep one."

Her second draw reached the left-middle area, nearer the center. This one stayed while the Ravens' vice put a yellow farther out on the left.

Piper took out the yellow on the right, the one that had replaced Nora's first red. Her own stayed. She tried a left-side draw with her second, but it stopped short of the depth Wren wanted.

Zoe removed Piper's right-hand red. The end kept refusing to look like their practice.

Wren drew close. Zoe hit that red out too. Wren's last hit took out Zoe's new yellow, leaving two reds nearer than any yellow: Nora's second draw and Wren's final stone.

Piper agreed the count with the Ravens' vice.

Three to two for the Too-Cold Club.

Maisie looked across the house. “We got two without mine.”

“I still liked yours,” Nora said.

“So did I.”

They came off for their halfway rest, changed and sat down together. Piper was hungry. Wren leaned back with her water bottle between her hands, and nobody spoke for a little while.

Then Maisie asked whether anyone could make one eyebrow go up without the other. All four tried. Nora said she could feel both of hers doing exactly the same thing.

After their full rest, they changed and warmed up again. Piper’s face felt ordinary by the time the fourth end began.

Later in that end, Wren asked her for a draw into the front-middle part of the house. Nora called it light early, and she and Maisie began helping.

Then Maisie said, “It has more now.”

Their brushes came up before the middle line. The red went on, past the front-middle area and a little behind the center.

Piper looked at it after she arrived.

“Farther than we wanted.”

“I said light too soon,” Nora said.

“I wasn’t sure at first,” Maisie told her. “Then it kept going.”

The red was still useful. It had simply finished somewhere different. The Ravens played their own stones, and Zoe’s final open hit earned them one.

Three each.

They took another point in the fifth. Wren's last ordinary hit in the sixth gave the Too-Cold Club one to make it four each.

That was the result. Ties stood in this league group, so there would be no extra end.

"Good game," Zoe said, shaking Piper's hand.

"Good game. Your second took Maisie's out very quickly."

Zoe smiled. "We wanted it gone."

Piper smiled back. "We'd noticed."

On the dry side, Wren sat beside Maisie.

"I asked Jo for the replies I wanted to practice," she said.

"They did help," Nora said. "I liked seeing where my next one could go."

"So did I. But I kept expecting your red to stay," Wren told Maisie.

"I kept hoping it would."

Piper understood both things.

At practice they had chosen what Jo would try next. The Ravens had chosen Maisie's red.

Wren picked up her shoes. "Next time, I want to find out what comes back."

CHAPTER 6

The Statue That Sneezed



On Sunday afternoon, Wren stood under a tree with both arms folded and an extremely serious face.

She was a statue.

Piper had to make her laugh without touching her.

Maisie had already been an astonished frog. She had crouched with her mouth open until her legs got tired, then stood up and announced that the frog had grown. Nora's statue had been a person waiting for a bus.

"That's just standing," Maisie had complained.

"Very still standing," Nora had said.

Now it was Wren's turn, and Piper was having trouble.

The park grass was dry enough to sit on in most places. Their grown-ups were at a nearby bench with the bags, talking and watching. Ben had been asked to judge Maisie's frog, but he had said that he did not know enough frogs to compare it with.

Piper walked slowly past Wren.

"Excuse me. Have you seen a statue?"

Wren did not move.

"A small one. It looks very cross."

Nothing.

Maisie came up beside Piper. "I think this one's asleep."

"Standing up?"

"Perhaps it can't find its bed."

A tiny change happened beside Wren's mouth. Piper saw it. Maisie saw it too.

"There's a bench over there," Piper told the statue. "But you would have to unfold your arms to lie down."

Nora had been watching with her hands in her pockets. She stepped forward, looked at Wren and gave a very ordinary little sneeze.

Wren laughed.

It came out suddenly, as if it had been waiting behind her folded arms for the wrong thing.

Piper stared at Nora. "Was that on purpose?"

"No."

"That doesn't count," Maisie said.

"I think it counts," Wren said, still laughing.

"You would."

Piper tried to be annoyed, but Nora sneezed again. This time all four laughed, including Nora.

They changed the game. Piper became a statue with one hand raised as though she knew the answer to a question. Maisie asked her what the question was. Then she asked whether the statue could please put its hand down because she could not see past it.

Piper lasted less time than Wren.

Later they sat on the grass near the bench. Maisie tipped her face toward the branches and tried to find the bird they could hear. Nora found it first, high up and almost the same color as the twigs.

Wren lay back on her coat. “I’m being a statue again.”

“This one’s much easier,” Piper said.

“Yes.”

They stayed there until Ben called them over for water.

When it was time to leave, Wren picked up her bag. Piper fell into step beside her.

Maisie came between them, looking at Nora.

“You have to tell me before you sneeze next time.”

“I didn’t know.”

“Then tell me just after.”

Nora took a breath. “I sneezed.”

“I meant next time.”

Piper laughed all the way to the gate.

CHAPTER 7

Evie’s Other Answer



“Could we start with a guard on the right?” Maisie asked.

Wren looked at her.

“Out there, before the rings,” Maisie said. “Then use a different place for my next one.”

Piper glanced down the sheet. Maisie usually loved seeing her red arrive in the front rings. Today she was pointing to a place outside them.

“I’d like that,” Wren said.

Their fifth Saturday had brought them back to Evie. This time Evie’s team had the first-end last stone. They

had taken two in the first end, and the Too-Cold Club had earned one in the second.

Now Maisie wanted a different beginning for the third.

She made the right corner guard. Evie's lead drew into the open left-middle area.

"She's going over there," Maisie said.

Wren nodded. "We can use this side."

For Maisie's next draw, Piper and Nora took their sweeping places. Nora watched it come.

"More weight," she called early. "Leave it."

Both brushes stayed up. The red traveled deeper into the right side of the house than Maisie had meant.

"Good call," Piper told Nora. "It had plenty."

Maisie came down looking at the red. "Still farther than I wanted."

Evie's lead took it out.

The corner guard remained outside the house. The red that had gone was the separate one, exposed on the right.

Piper looked toward Evie, who was talking to her second player. They had beaten Evie's team once in this block. That did not make this the same game waiting to happen again.

Nora put a red near the front of the house, then sent her second too deep. Evie's second removed the front red. By Piper's turn, the place Wren wanted was in the left middle.

Piper checked it with her, then went to deliver.

"Light," Nora called.

Maisie and Nora brushed briefly. Then they lifted. The red kept going, beyond the intended front-middle area, and stopped just behind the middle.

When Piper reached them, Nora was looking at it with a frown.

"I was wrong about that one."

"It's still close," Maisie said.

"Yes. I still want to get the call right."

Piper understood. Nora had noticed Maisie's extra weight in time. That had not made her certain about every red afterward.

Evie's vice removed Piper's draw. Wren wanted the new yellow out, and Piper made the ordinary hit. Her red stayed in the left middle.

With her own first stone, Wren drew another close red. Evie took it out. Wren's next draw stopped short, and Evie found the available route to the center with her last yellow.

One yellow. Three to one for Evie's team.

At the break, Piper sat with her water and let her legs rest. Ben came to the table with an extra napkin for Maisie, who had somehow managed to get crumbs on both elbows.

"I haven't even put them in my food," Maisie said.

Wren looked at her own clean sleeves. "Yours are more interested."

Maisie brushed the crumbs onto the napkin. For the rest of the break she kept her elbows close to her sides, which made drinking look rather difficult.

After they had rested and warmed up again, Maisie chose another right corner guard. Her other red went into a separate deeper place in the house.

Nora removed an exposed yellow near the front, then came up short with her next draw. Evie's vice took out Maisie's deeper red.

Piper watched it go. Maisie had given the end two places to begin, and Evie's team had decided which red to deal with. There was a close yellow on the left now. Wren chose that one for Piper.

Piper's hit removed it. Her red stayed.

Her next draw came nearer the middle on the right. Evie removed it, Wren removed Evie's new yellow, and Evie answered Wren.

The red from Piper's first hit was still there.

Wren had one stone left. She chose a draw into the open space near the middle. Piper held the house while Maisie and Nora helped it travel.

It stopped nearer than the yellows. Piper checked the count with Evie's vice: Wren's draw and Piper's earlier red.

Two points. Three each.

"That one stayed," Maisie said to Piper.

Piper smiled. "Eventually, something did."

Evie's team took two in the fifth end. In the sixth, Piper made a close ordinary draw that remained nearest. A yellow was second, keeping them to one point.

Wren's last hit could remove that yellow and leave two reds for a tie. It caught the yellow too thinly. Yellow traveled out on the left, but Wren's red kept moving and went out through the back.

Only Piper's earlier red counted.

Four to five. Evie's team had won this time.

That made one win, two losses and a tie. Piper had been counting Saturdays until this game. Now she counted the games left. Two. They would need to win both to finish with more wins than losses.

Piper's face felt hot when she shook hands. Wren looked disappointed. So did Nora. Maisie kept glancing back at the house.

On the changing bench, Wren said, "I wanted that hit."

"I know," Piper said.

For a little while they got on with changing. Then Maisie looked at Wren.

"I want the guard and the other place again."

"Even though they took your red?"

"Yes. I want to be able to put both where we choose."

Wren nodded. Piper pulled her bag toward her. Maisie had already found something she wanted to keep from this game. Piper was still disappointed about losing it.

CHAPTER 8

A Place for the Roll

Piper saw the space before Wren spoke.

There was a yellow on the left, a little behind the middle. It was the closest stone in the house. Beside it, toward the center, lay a broad empty patch.

“Take that out,” Wren said. “And what about bringing yours across?”

Piper looked from the yellow to the patch.

“Over there?”

“Yes.”

It was the third end of their return game with the Lanterns. Six Saturdays into the block, Piper had wanted plenty of hits and draws. This was the first time one of their game positions had given her a reason to ask her red for the broad roll she was practicing.

She looked carefully. The yellow was exposed. No guard covered the place she wanted her red to finish.

“Even if it stays at the hit, we get that yellow out,” she said.

Wren nodded. “I’d like it nearer the middle afterward.”

“So would I.”

Piper went back along the side.

The game had begun with one for the Too-Cold Club and two for the Lanterns. In this end Maisie had put one red in the right front rings and another deeper in the house. Nora’s draws had stayed wider than she wanted. The Lanterns’ second had made the useful yellow Piper was now looking at.

Piper settled at the hack and checked Wren's target.

She wanted the same controlled feeling as her ordinary hits. She wanted to meet the side and see the red move to her right.

Maisie and Nora waited ready. Their brushes stayed clear as the stone approached the yellow.

Click.

The yellow went straight through the back.

Piper's red stayed near the front of the yellow's old place.

The empty patch remained empty.

Piper let out a small breath. She had caught the nose.

When the stones were still, she covered her slider and came down. Wren looked at the red with her.

"More of the middle than I wanted," Piper said.

"Yes."

"I was trying for the side."

"I know."

The Lanterns' vice was preparing her next stone. Piper moved to the waiting place and watched.

Yellow met red. Piper's shooter went out through the back, and the new yellow stayed.

Her roll turn in a game was over. She would have liked another look at her own stone. She had a different turn to play instead.

Wren wanted a draw into the open middle.

Piper checked the place, returned to the hack and sent the red. Maisie and Nora judged its weight together. It reached the left-middle area, nearer than the yellows.

Inez took it out.

Piper took the house for Wren, who answered with an ordinary hit. Then Inez's last draw stopped short in the front rings, leaving Wren's red nearest.

Wren had one more stone. She drew into the open right side, and Piper watched Maisie and Nora bring their brushes clear before it reached the middle.

It stopped nearer than any yellow.

"Two red," Piper said to the Lanterns' vice.

Both counting stones belonged to Wren. Piper could see one on each side of the middle. She grinned at her friends as the count was agreed.

They led three to two at halfway.

During the seated break, Piper told Ben, "We tried my roll in the third."

"I saw."

"I got the yellow. Mine stayed."

Ben nodded. Piper took a drink. Across the table, Maisie was telling Nora that she could whistle sometimes, but only when she wasn't trying to show anyone.

"That makes demonstrations difficult," Nora said.

Maisie made a silent circle with her mouth.

"See?"

Piper laughed. She still wanted to think about the hit, but Maisie's completely silent whistle was hard to ignore.

CHAPTER 9

Still Playing

After resting, changing and warming up again, they began the fourth end. The Lanterns took two.

Their vice had a yellow that stayed through the later exchanges. Inez added a closer draw with her last stone. Piper checked the two with the other vice, then went to join Wren.

Three to four. They had two ends left.

The Lanterns began the fifth with a guard on the left. Maisie looked toward Wren.

“Could I use the right front?”

Wren checked the open area. “Yes. And then a separate one farther in.”

Maisie made both draws. The Lanterns’ second chose to remove the nearer front red. Maisie’s deeper one stayed.

Nora’s first draw was wide, stopping outside the rings. She frowned at it when she arrived.

“For the next one, I want to tell you what I feel,” she said to Maisie and Piper. “Before you tell me.”

Wren chose the available right-middle area. Nora delivered.

“Enough to get in,” she called.

Piper watched beside Maisie. “I think so too.”

They helped when Wren asked, then lifted clear. The red stopped just behind the middle on the right, closer than the yellows.

Nora smiled before she reached them.

“That felt more like the one I wanted.”

The Lanterns' vice took it out.

Nora watched it leave. Then she looked at Piper, whose turn came next.

"At least you know where mine went."

"I do."

Piper made the familiar hit on the yellow that had replaced it. Her red stayed. She had another useful draw later, but Inez removed that one. Wren's first draw came close, Inez answered again, and Wren's last ordinary hit earned one.

Four each.

In the sixth end, Maisie began with a guard on the left and a separate red in the left wing. Nora made two good hits, one on the right and one near the middle. Her second red stayed while other stones changed places around it.

Piper removed a yellow in the right front rings, then drew nearer on the left. The Lanterns' vice took out that new red.

Wren replied with an open hit. Now Nora's earlier red and Wren's shooter were nearest. Inez's first draw stopped behind them in the count, cutting off the farther reds.

Wren put her last stone in front as a guard. Inez still had an open draw on the other side that could get nearer.

Piper stood in the waiting place beside Wren. They watched the yellow come.

The Lanterns' sweepers worked hard, but the stone slowed before the middle. It stopped in the front rings.

Nora's red and Wren's red still counted.

Two points. Six to four for the Too-Cold Club.

Piper grinned at Nora, then at Wren. Maisie lifted both gloves. They met them one at a time before going to shake hands with the Lanterns.

Inez looked back at her last yellow.

“I wanted that farther in.”

Piper nodded. She knew. Then the Lanterns’ vice came to shake her hand, and the two teams began making their way off.

On the dry-side bench, Nora sat down with a pleased little sigh.

“My second hit stayed.”

“Your draw in the fifth felt good to sweep,” Maisie told her.

“I liked that one too.”

Piper took off her helmet. She could remember her own red staying at the nose in the third end, and Wren’s two reds counting afterward. She could also remember knowing what Nora thought about the fifth-end draw before they had begun to help it.

“That’s something I want to do at practice,” she said. “Judge a draw with you again.”

Nora looked at her. “Mine, or somebody else’s?”

“Both, if there’s room.”

CHAPTER 10

Both Parts

At their second practice Saturday, Piper got her roll turn.

She had warmed up and made familiar deliveries with the others. Maisie had already tried the front-rings draw she wanted, with Nora and Piper sweeping. Nora had delivered her own draw too, comparing the weight she felt with what Maisie and Piper saw.

Now one yellow waited for Piper on the left, with empty ice beside it.

Jo watched her check the patch and the target with Wren. Piper went back to the hack. She wanted the yellow out and her red farther to the right afterward.

The stone traveled toward the yellow.

It caught the nose.

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

Piper shut her eyes for a moment, then opened them. The red had not moved anywhere else while she wasn't looking.

When she reached Jo, she pointed along the approach.

"I thought I started more toward the side."

"It came onto the middle of the yellow," Jo said. "We can keep watching the start with you."

Piper nodded. She still wanted to. Having her turn had not made the roll happen, but she had wanted the turn and she was glad it was hers.

Wren chose a draw just right of the middle for her own work. Piper took the house and checked the finish before setting the target. Maisie and Nora judged the red

together, and it stopped in the front-middle area Wren had chosen.

Afterward, Nora spoke to Jo.

“Could I use the last part of mine to sweep with Piper?”

“Whose delivery?”

“Maisie’s. I want us both to say what we see. Maisie can tell us first.”

Maisie looked interested. “Where?”

They chose a broad area on the right in the front rings. When the lane was ready, Maisie sent her red.

“I think it has enough,” she called.

Piper watched beside Nora. She gave her first thought; Nora gave hers. They kept looking after they spoke. Wren called them to help, then to lift.

The stone stopped in the front rings on the right.

Maisie came down. “That felt about right.”

“I could hear both of you this time,” Wren said.

Nora smiled. She had used some of her own time standing beside Piper with a brush. Piper would have needed a partner for that work however many stones she delivered herself.

At their seated break, Maisie reported that she had managed a whistle in the kitchen. Nobody had been there to hear it except a bowl.

“Did the bowl like it?” Piper asked.

“It didn’t complain.”

Wren nodded. “An excellent audience.”

After the rest and re-warm, Wren spoke to Jo before they began the connected work.

“Choose your own replies this time,” she said. “When you see where ours really go.”

Jo agreed. A helper would hold her target, and the girls would keep their usual roles.

Maisie drew into the right front rings. Jo chose the opposite side. Maisie’s next red went farther into the left side of the house.

Jo took it out.

Piper watched the red leave, then looked toward Wren. This time Wren had been waiting to see what Jo chose.

“Right middle?” Nora asked.

Wren checked. “Yes.”

Nora’s draw reached that space. Her next one came up short, making a different front position from the one she wanted. Jo added a wide yellow on the right.

Nobody cleared those stones to begin again.

Piper took out the yellow that had replaced Maisie’s red. Jo answered somewhere else, removing Nora’s nearer red on the right.

Piper came to look beside Wren.

“There’s room left of the middle,” she said.

Wren checked the route. They chose the draw, and Piper made it.

Jo’s next yellow ran through the back.

Maisie looked from it to the house. “We’re keeping that bit too?”

“That’s where it went,” Jo said.

Wren chose the available left wing for her first draw. Piper held the house. Afterward Jo removed Piper’s closer red, and Wren chose a different space for her last one. Jo’s final reply stayed wide.

The position in front of them was untidy. It had Nora's short red, useful stones in other places and gaps where good reds had been taken out. It did not look like their first rehearsal.

Wren studied it from the side.

"I had to choose twice," she said. "For my two."

Piper nodded. She had watched Wren look again after Jo's last hit instead of pointing to the place she had already imagined.

They left the stopped stones for the adults and went to change.

The following morning, Piper ate breakfast slowly while Ben read beside her. A radio played quietly on the counter. When a tune he knew came on, he whistled a little of it.

Piper stared at him.

"What?" he asked.

"Maisie's been trying to do that."

Ben tried again. This time only air came out.

Piper laughed so hard that she had to put her cup down.

"Don't tell the bowl," she said.

Ben looked puzzled, which made her laugh again. She explained about Maisie, and he listened with his book still open in his hand.

CHAPTER 11

The Sixth Game

The Ravens' yellow was moving toward Maisie's red again.

Piper knew the place. Left side, farther into the house. Maisie had put one red in the front rings and this second one deeper. The Ravens' second had chosen the exposed deeper stone.

Click.

Red went out through the back. Yellow stayed.

Maisie watched from the side. "They still like that."

"They do," Nora said.

It was the second end of their last scheduled game. The Ravens had taken one in the first. Piper and her friends had warmed up, checked in with Jo and begun their eighth Saturday in the same familiar places. Now there were real stones to choose from.

Wren looked at Nora. Nora pointed toward the open right-middle area.

"Over there?"

Wren checked it. "Yes. In front of the middle."

Maisie and Piper went to sweep. Nora's red came toward them, and Maisie gave her first thought about the weight. Piper watched, agreed, then kept watching as it slowed.

They helped it reach the right-middle area. It stopped where it could be useful.

Nora's next draw stayed wide. The Ravens' vice removed her nearer red, leaving Piper with a yellow on each side to think about.

Wren chose the one on the left, the stone that had replaced Maisie's deeper red. Piper made the open hit. The yellow went through the back, and her red stayed.

Her second turn was a draw. There was room on the left side of the center guard to bring another red closer. Piper checked the target and sent it smoothly.

This one came into the front-middle area. Maisie and Nora were clear before it stopped.

Zoe took it out.

Piper went to the house for Wren. Their earlier red was still there, but the new yellow could change what else they could make. Wren removed it. Zoe removed Wren's shooter in return.

Now Wren chose a draw into the available middle.

Piper showed the finishing area first, then the aiming target. Wren checked both and went to deliver. Maisie and Nora were waiting together.

The red reached the middle. It stopped nearer than the yellows, joining Piper's earlier red in the count.

Two points. The Too-Cold Club led two to one.

As they left the stopped house, Maisie glanced at the open left wing.

"Mine went a long time ago."

"And they used a yellow to take it out," Wren said. "Then we played what was there."

Piper remembered Nora choosing the right side. At their first practice, they had wanted the left red to stay. This time they had seen it leave and kept making the end.

The Ravens earned two in the third. Three to two for them at halfway.

Piper sat down with her friends after changing. Her water felt cool all the way down. Ben was at the other end of the table, listening while a helper told him something about the club.

Maisie leaned toward Piper. “I can do it.”

“Whistle?”

“No. One eyebrow.”

She tried. Both eyebrows went up.

Nora inspected her face. “Those are still working together.”

Wren laughed into her cup. Maisie gave up and ate her snack.

They had a quiet part of the break too. Piper leaned back, listening to the room. Five games were finished: two wins, two losses and a tie. Their sixth was still being played. She wanted to finish it with the third win they had hoped for.

When their full rest was over, they changed and warmed up again.

In the fourth end, Maisie supplied a left corner guard and a deeper red. Nora removed an exposed yellow, then came up short with her draw. The Ravens took out Maisie’s deeper red.

Wren chose the close yellow on the right for Piper. Her hit removed it. Her shooter stayed through the later exchanges, and Wren’s last draw reached the middle.

Two red again: Piper’s earlier hit and Wren’s draw. Four to three for the Too-Cold Club.

Piper met Maisie’s glove. Then Nora’s. Wren came down to join them.

Two more ends remained, and the Ravens were ready to begin theirs.

CHAPTER 12

The Games They Played



The Ravens took two in the fifth end.

That left the Too-Cold Club one behind, with the last stone in the sixth.

Maisie began on the available far side, then put her other red in the outside-left wing. Nora's first draw reached the front of the house; the Ravens removed it. Her second ran deep and wide.

The Ravens' vice took out Maisie's left-hand red. Piper chose the close draw Wren showed her on the open side.

"Looks enough," Maisie called as it traveled.

Nora gave her judgment too. Piper watched them from behind. They were looking at the same moving red and giving Wren something she could use.

It stopped near the center, a little to the right.

Piper's second draw stayed wide. When Wren went to deliver, Piper took the house. Her nearer red was still first, with a yellow on the right next in the count.

Wren's first draw went wide. Zoe's last draw did too.

There was one red left to deliver.

Wren came beside Piper and looked at the available space left of the middle. Another red there would give them two points and the win.

They checked the finish and the target. Maisie and Nora went to their sweeping places. Piper held the broom for Wren.

The red came down.

"Needs us," Maisie called.

Nora agreed, and their brushes worked side by side ahead of the stone. Piper watched the line and called them up before the middle.

The red kept moving a little farther.

Then it stopped on the left, nearer than the closest yellow.

Piper crouched beside the Ravens' vice. Her own red was nearest. Wren's last red was next. Then came the yellow.

"Two red," Piper said.

"Two."

Six to five.

Piper stood up grinning. Maisie's gloves were already in the air. Nora laughed once, a short delighted sound,

and Wren came down the clear side with a smile spreading across her face.

They had won.

Piper met Wren's glove hard enough to feel it through both layers. Then they went to shake hands with Zoe and the Ravens.

"Good game," Zoe said.

"Good game."

The result was agreed and put on the board. Six games were finished. Three wins, two losses and one tie. They had done what they had set out to do: more wins than losses.

Piper looked at the last two reds before the adults began to clear them.

"The draw," she said to Wren. "I liked your last draw."

"I liked yours staying."

Maisie came beside them. "I liked knowing where you both wanted them."

Nora nodded. "Before they got there."

Piper laughed. She remembered Maisie's two opening reds, Nora's hits that stayed, Wren's targets, and the little move her own red had made at practice. She had enjoyed that move. She had enjoyed helping this last draw arrive too.

Maisie held out both gloves.

"You needed these too."

Piper tapped one. Nora tapped the other. Wren reached across to join them.

"We noticed," Piper said.