PIPER'S CURLING ADVENTURES

Piper and the Whole Game

BOOK FOURTEEN



Mary Deuhs

An illustrated chapter book

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CHAPTER 1

Before Her First Stone



Maisie was waiting for Piper’s target.

Piper stood in the receiving house with her broom steady, looking down the ice toward Maisie.

A yellow stone rested in the left-front rings. The Blue Comets had put it there with the first delivery of the game. Most of the house was still empty.

“On the right,” Piper called. “Nearer the middle than that yellow.”

Maisie nodded. Nora and Wren got ready beside the lane.

Wren and Nora. Piper liked seeing them there together. Usually she would have been beside Nora herself, ready to follow Maisie's stone. Today she had chosen where that stone should go, and she would be choosing the next red's place too.

She wanted two reds to count in an end she had helped build from the beginning.

Several ordinary Saturdays had passed since their three-game day. At practice, Piper had watched one of Maisie's opening stones stay useful right through an end. Afterward she had said she wanted to try calling a whole game, starting with that very first red.

"I'd like the early sweeping," Wren had said. "I like doing it in practice. Especially with someone beside me."

Maisie was happy to keep starting. Nora wanted another proper four-end game with the Blue Comets. They and the coaches had agreed on one friendly with Piper fourth and skip, Wren third and vice, and Maisie and Nora in their usual first two places.

They had declared that lineup before this game. It would stay the same for all four ends.

Now Maisie delivered.

Piper watched the red come toward her. It had a long way to travel from the familiar shorter start, but she could already see it moving onto the right side.

"Needs a bit!" Wren called.

"Sweep!"

Wren and Nora brushed in quick strokes ahead of Maisie's moving red.

Piper kept looking between the stone and the place she wanted it to finish. Wren's brush made a quick, scratchy sound. Nora was right beside her, working too.

“Up!”

They finished their strokes to the sides and lifted clear before the tee line. The stone went on a little farther and stopped right of the middle.

Piper grinned at Maisie.

“That’s a start.”

There had been plenty of time to warm up and practice before the toss. The coaches had checked all eight children’s deliveries and safe routes between their jobs. Jo and Ben had set the portable hack while the lane was stopped. Two other coaches were helping them, and Granite was beside the receiving house.

They had the same junior stones as usual. The painted lines had stayed put. Their local release cue was still the imaginary line between two marks on the sideboards: let go before the stone’s front reached it.

Piper’s helmet strap was fastened under her chin. She could feel both grippers firmly on the ice as she moved to the waiting place for yellow’s turn.

The Too-Cold Club had won the toss and chosen the hammer, the last delivery of the first end. The Blue Comets, going first, had chosen yellow. Tali was their fourth player and skip. Their lead, second and vice were in their usual order too.

“Four ends,” Jo had reminded both teams. “And a tie can stay a tie.”

The Comets’ next yellow went farther back on the left. Piper asked Maisie for another red nearer the middle, but this one traveled wide.

“Leave it,” Piper called.

Wren and Nora kept their brushes clear. Maisie watched her stone stop near the outside of the house.

“That one liked the edge.”

When it was safe to come down, she looked at her first red instead.

“I’m glad that one’s there.”

So was Piper. Then the Comets put a yellow closer to the middle.

Piper wanted Nora to add a red on the right. Nora’s first went wider than she meant, despite a little help from Maisie and Wren. While Nora covered her slider and returned by the side, Tali called a hit on Maisie’s useful first stone.

The yellow made contact. Red went out. Yellow stayed.

“Oh,” Maisie said quietly.

Piper looked at the new yellow, then at the one nearer the middle. There were two different problems now. She chose the nearer one for Nora’s next turn.

Nora’s red hit it squarely. The sweepers had cleared before contact, and Piper watched the yellow travel out behind the house.

Red was closest again.

“That one will do,” Nora said when she joined Piper.

Piper was already finding a place for Wren’s first stone. Maisie and Nora took the sweeping jobs while Wren went to deliver. Piper stayed with the house.

Wren’s draw came just right of the middle, a little closer than Nora’s.

For a moment they had two reds nearest.

The Comets’ vice took Nora’s out. Wren tried to add another with her second turn, but it stayed too far right.

She came back along the side, her slider covered, and stopped beside Piper.

“Your turn after Tali.”

Piper looked toward the hack. She had made six calls for her own team's stones. She had watched every yellow change what she was looking at. She had not delivered anything yet.

"I've played more than half an end," she said, "and my first stone is still waiting."

"It's had a very easy morning," Wren said.

They went quiet as Tali settled to deliver.

Her yellow struck Wren's nearer red and sent it out. When everything stopped, the yellow sat where Wren's stone had been.

Piper and Wren looked at it together.

"I want that one out," Piper said.

"And yours to stay?"

"Yes."

Wren took charge of the house. Piper went back to the hack, uncovered her sliding foot for the delivery and checked the target. It was Wren's familiar broom at the other end, in a house full of stones Piper had been calling toward all morning.

Piper delivered and let go before the local cue.

Maisie and Nora followed, keeping clear as the red approached the yellow.

Clack.

The yellow went out. Piper's red stayed.

"Good!" Maisie called after the stones had stopped.

Piper came to look. Her red was closest, but another yellow was next. She still wanted two.

After Tali's last draw finished farther out on the left, Piper had one turn left. She and Wren checked the open hit on the nearest yellow. If her red could take its place, they would have a second point.

But Piper sent it with too little weight.

Maisie and Nora brushed when Wren called. The red slowed in the front rings, nowhere near the yellow. They lifted clear, and it stopped.

Piper stayed still for a moment at the delivery end.

She had wanted to finish beside her first stone. Instead, there was a long stretch of ice between them.

Wren and the Comets' vice agreed on one red before any stones were moved.

"One," Wren told her.

Piper nodded. "I can see."

Maisie came beside them as the adults began resetting the stopped lane.

"My first one didn't last very long."

"It made them use a shot," Nora said.

Maisie considered that. Then she looked toward the hack.

"I'd still like the next one to stay."

CHAPTER 2

The Place She Chose

Red went first in the second end because the Too-Cold Club had scored. The Blue Comets had the hammer now.

Maisie's first stopped on the left. Her second came in on the right, with Wren and Nora brushing for part of the way.

This time Piper could hear Wren calling the weight before she needed to ask.

"Still coming!"

"Up," Piper answered.

The brushes cleared. Red slowed and stopped in a useful place.

Wren straightened, looking pleased. When she and Maisie next got ready to sweep Nora's first stone, Maisie gave her a quick smile.

"Same sort of work."

"I liked that work."

Nora's red needed a little help too. The two brushes went down at Piper's call, then lifted to the sides. The stone stopped left of the middle, closer than Maisie's.

Nora came along the clear route to see it.

"That felt like the draw I wanted."

Piper looked from Nora's red to the space on its other side. She could imagine a second red there. It was easier to imagine with one already close.

The Comets' second player put a yellow just behind the middle, a little closer still.

Tali bent to look, then straightened.

“Yes. There.”

Her teammate was smiling when she came down. She and Tali spoke briefly before Nora’s next delivery, and Piper could see Tali pointing to the red on the right.

Nora’s second draw went wide. Then the Comets took out Maisie’s nearer stone and left a yellow in its place.

Wren was ready for her own turns. Piper called the open hit on that right-hand yellow, and Wren made it. Maisie and Nora stepped aside before the stones met.

The red stayed. Wren’s next draw went wide and out the back.

Piper had watched the middle yellow through all of it. Nora’s red was still near on the left. Wren’s was farther away on the right. There was room just right of the middle to put a red closer than the yellow.

She wanted to try it.

Wren came beside her to check the finish before taking the house.

“Nearer than that one,” Piper said, pointing without touching anything.

Wren nodded. “I’ve got it.”

Piper went to deliver.

At the hack, she looked all the way to Wren’s broom. She remembered the weight of her last stone in the first end, the one that had stopped so early. This was a draw, and she wanted to feel the red travel away smoothly.

She settled, slid and released.

The red kept coming. Maisie and Nora followed it, brushes ready. Wren called them on briefly, then up before the tee line.

It stopped just right of the middle.

Closer than yellow.

Piper smiled before she even stood up. Jo was nearby while she got steady and covered her slider. The stone had finished where she had asked it to go.

When she reached the house, Wren was looking from it to the yellow behind the middle.

“That’s in.”

“I wanted it there,” Piper said.

Tali wanted that place too.

From her waiting position, she could see the front of Piper’s stone. When it was yellow’s turn, she checked the hit with her vice and went to the hack.

Piper stood still at the clear side.

The yellow came toward her red. Its sweepers lifted and moved clear before contact.

The clack sounded very sharp from here.

Piper’s stone went back and out. Tali’s stayed near its place.

There were two yellows closer than Nora’s red now: Tali’s, and the one her second player had drawn earlier.

Tali came back, looked, and touched gloves with that teammate.

Piper had put her stone in a sensible place. Tali had been able to reach it. Both things were still true when Piper looked at the house again.

She had one red left.

Wren joined her, and they checked a draw into the front of the middle. There was space to get nearer than those yellows. Piper went back for the turn.

This red stopped short.

It reached the house, but it stayed well in front of the stones Piper needed to beat. She watched Maisie and Nora lift their brushes. Wren waited until it had settled before moving from her place.

Piper pressed her lips together.

Two tries at the middle, and the good one had gone out.

Tali's last draw finished farther away on the right. It did not add another point, but the two nearer yellows remained.

Wren and the other vice agreed on two.

The Blue Comets led two to one.

As the children left by the clear side route, Piper could hear the Comets' second player talking to Tali.

"Mine stayed in the whole time."

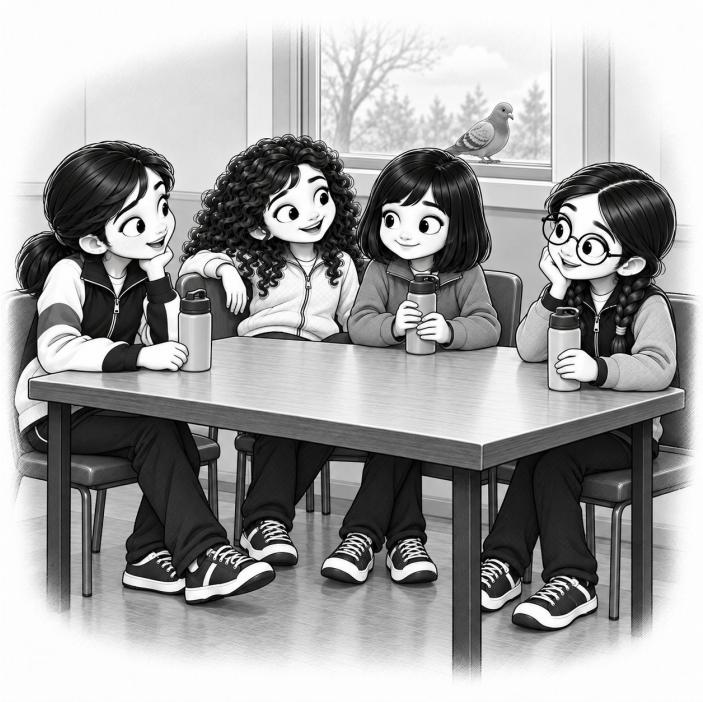
"I know," Tali said. "I kept looking at it."

Piper had kept looking at it too.

Now it was time to sit down.

CHAPTER 3

The Pigeon at the Window



In the warm room, Piper took off her helmet and changed into her ordinary shoes. Her hair felt flattened where the straps had been.

She sat down with her water. For a little while, she only drank and listened to the voices around her.

Maisie leaned back in her chair. Beside her, Wren had both hands wrapped around her water bottle.

Nora sat opposite Piper. Through the rink-viewing glass, they could see the adults clearing and resetting the stopped lane. The Blue Comets were at another table with their families.

“I liked sweeping your first one,” Wren told Nora. “When we both thought it needed a bit more.”

“Then it did need a bit more,” Maisie said.

“It did.”

Wren stretched her fingers, then settled her hands around her bottle again.

Piper watched Ben speak to one of the visiting coaches. She wondered what he was saying, but she could not hear him through the glass. It was pleasant to stay in her chair without listening for a call.

At the other window, a pigeon landed on the outside sill.

Maisie noticed it first.

“He looks as if we’re in his way.”

The pigeon turned its head and looked into the room with one bright eye.

“We might be,” Nora said. “He could sit here when we aren’t here.”

“In my chair?”

“On the sill.”

Maisie looked at the narrow space under the window.

“His chair is terrible.”

The pigeon took three quick steps, stopped and puffed out its throat. Wren leaned a little nearer to see.

“He knows something.”

“He knows the window’s shut,” Nora said.

Piper laughed. The pigeon looked toward her, which made Maisie laugh too.

“Now he knows you’re noisy.”

They watched it for a while. It tucked its head down to fuss with a feather, quite unconcerned about the game, the score, or the four girls at the table.

Eventually it flew away.

“He’ll complain,” Maisie said.

“To another pigeon,” Wren told her.

Nora sat back. Piper took another drink. Ben came in and sat nearby, talking with another parent, and the girls stayed in their chairs until their proper rest was over.

They had separate time afterward to change, check helmet straps and grippers, and warm up again. Nobody had to hurry from a chair straight to a delivery.

When Piper returned to the house, the stones were ready for the third end.

The Comets had scored, so yellow went first and red had the hammer. Their lead put the opening yellow on the left, away from the middle.

Maisie came to check Piper’s choice before she went back to the hack.

“I’d like mine nearer in.”

Piper showed her the patch left of the middle.

“Here?”

“Yes. I like that bit.”

Wren and Nora got ready. Maisie’s stone came toward them, slowing sooner than Piper hoped.

“Sweep!”

Both brushes worked. Piper watched the red keep coming, then called them up before the tee. It slid on and stopped close on the left.

Maisie smiled all the way along the clear side.

“That bit,” she said when she reached Piper.

Her second went farther back on the same side. This one had plenty of weight, and Wren and Nora left it alone.

The Comets were making places for their yellows too. One was far out on the right. Another stopped behind the middle, outside Maisie’s nearer red.

Piper wanted Nora’s first draw on the right, closer than that back yellow. Wren and Maisie followed it, but it was traveling strongly. They kept their brushes clear.

The red went farther back than Nora wanted.

When Nora came down, she was looking at it.

“I gave that more than the one before our break.”

“A bit more,” Wren said.

Piper was thinking about Nora’s next draw when the Comets’ second player changed the house.

The yellow came in near the middle, just on the right. It stopped closer than Maisie’s red.

Nora looked at Piper.

“Still another draw?”

Piper looked at the front of the new yellow. Nothing was in the way of a hit.

“No. That one first.”

CHAPTER 4

What Was Still There

Piper showed Nora the yellow she wanted out.

"If yours can stay there, we'll have it with Maisie's."

Nora looked from the yellow to the red on the left. Then she went back along the clear side route. Wren and Maisie took their sweeping places, and Piper stayed in the house with the target.

This was a different shot from the one Piper had been imagining a minute ago. She watched Nora settle for it.

The red came firmly toward the yellow. Wren and Maisie kept their brushes up as it approached and stepped clear before contact.

The yellow went out. Nora's red stayed.

Piper let out a pleased breath.

Two reds were nearer than the remaining yellows.

Nora looked delighted when she came down. She stopped beside Maisie while the Comets' vice prepared her answer.

Her yellow made the same open hit. Nora's red went out, and yellow took its place.

Nora's mouth tightened.

"I'd only just put that there."

The Comets' vice was smiling at her own teammates. She had made the shot Tali wanted.

Piper looked again. Maisie's first red was still on the left, close enough to matter. The nearer yellow was on the right. It had already been two different yellows with a red between them.

Wren came to Piper for her first delivery.

Piper chose a draw on the left. If Wren could get it nearer than yellow, red would be closest again.

Maisie and Nora followed Wren's red. Piper called for sweeping as it slowed, but the stone stayed short in the front-left rings.

Wren looked at it when she returned.

"Needed more from me."

Piper nodded. "We've still got that yellow to think about."

The Comets' vice tried another draw. This one went wide and out the back. The near yellow remained exactly where it was.

For Wren's second turn, Piper chose the hit.

Wren checked the target from beside her. Maisie's red was clear on the other side, and the yellow's front was open.

"I want to stay," Wren said.

"So do I."

Piper held the house while Wren went to deliver. Maisie and Nora waited with their brushes ready, then followed the red. It had enough weight. They kept clear and stepped aside before the stones met.

Clack.

Yellow went back and out. Wren's red stopped near its place.

Piper looked from that red to Maisie's first one.

They were the two closest again.

Wren came down with a small smile. Maisie was already looking at the pair.

"Mine's still there," she said.

Tali had been studying Nora's other red, the one that had gone too far back on the right. She chose it for her first delivery. Her yellow hit it and stayed, giving the Comets another stone in the house.

Their lead clapped once after everything had stopped.

Piper looked toward the hack. Her own two turns had arrived, and there were still yellows she would have liked to get farther away from the middle.

She and Wren checked a draw. Piper wanted another red nearer than the Comets' best yellow, the one at the back of the middle.

Her first did not get there. It stopped in the front rings, even with Maisie and Nora working at Wren's call.

Piper covered her slider and returned by the side.

"Too little again."

Wren glanced at the stopped stone. "Yes."

They watched Tali's last delivery together. The Comets wanted to get a yellow inside the two reds. It came in on the left, but stopped farther from the middle than either of them.

Piper had the final red. There was still a draw available on the right. She wanted to make one of her own count with the others.

This time she sent it too wide and too hard.

Maisie and Nora kept their brushes clear. Red traveled past the house and out the back.

Piper watched until it had stopped safely. Then she stood, covered her sliding foot and came back.

Wren and the Comets' vice were checking the count.

"Two red," Wren said.

The other vice looked carefully before agreeing.

"Two."

Maisie's first red and Wren's second.

Piper looked at the two handles. Her own stones had both missed what she wanted. Nora's good hit had been answered. The yellow in the middle had made her change her mind about a call.

And the two reds were there.

"We got two," she said.

Maisie touched gloves with Wren, then held her other hand out to Nora and Piper.

"Mine had a very long turn."

Piper laughed as she touched Maisie's glove.

The Too-Cold Club now led three to two. The coaches waited for the agreed count before clearing, and Piper had a drink while the lane was reset.

At the other side, Tali was talking with her team. Their second player pointed toward the middle of the empty house.

There was still one end to play.

CHAPTER 5

One More Answer



The Blue Comets began their answer with a good lead stone near the middle on the left.

Piper asked Nora to take it out. Nora made the hit, but the Comets' second player put a yellow behind the middle and another on the right. Tali kept looking between them while she chose the next call.

Piper could hear the second player when she came back from her turn.

"The first one felt better."

Tali nodded. "I saw."

They wanted to make more yellows count. Piper wanted to keep the lead her team had earned.

Wren took out the yellow on the right with her first red. With her second, she drew nearer than all the yellows, just right of the middle. Maisie and Nora had given it a little brushing at Piper's call.

Then the Comets' vice took Wren's farther red out and left yellow in its place.

Piper watched the hit, then looked at Wren's nearer stone. It was still closest. Nora's earlier red was near too.

Now Wren came to take the house for Piper's final two turns of the game.

Piper's first draw went much too wide and stopped outside the house. Tali's first stayed short on the left.

There were two stones left to deliver, one red and one yellow.

Piper and Wren checked a draw on the left of the middle. Piper wanted to get closer than Wren's red. She took her time settling at the hack, with Jo nearby and Maisie and Nora ready to follow.

The red traveled into the house. Wren called the sweepers briefly, then up. It stopped left of the middle, outside Wren's stone.

Piper came back by the side. She could see that it was useful, but the middle was still open.

Tali had one turn left.

She stood with her vice and looked at the reds. The Comets needed one point to tie. The yellow her second player had drawn was still behind the middle, but several reds were closer.

Tali pointed to the open space in front of it.

"Nearer in. Right there."

Her vice took the target. Tali went to deliver.

Piper waited behind the back line with Wren, clear of the Comets' play. She could hear Tali's sweepers talking as the stone came toward the house.

"It's coming."

A call from the vice brought their brushes down.

The yellow kept moving.

"Up!"

They finished to the sides and lifted clear. It slid into the middle, nearer than Wren's red, and stopped.

The Comets' second player smiled so broadly that Piper saw it from her waiting place.

Tali came down to look. Her teammates were already turning toward her.

Wren and the other vice checked the stones before anyone touched them.

"One yellow," Wren said.

"One," the Comets' vice agreed.

Three to three.

Piper would have liked to keep that one-point lead. She looked once more at Tali's yellow. It was plainly the nearest.

At the clear side of the stopped lane, the teams shook gloved hands, their helmets still fastened.

"Good game," Tali said.

"Good game," Piper answered.

Maisie was telling the Comets' lead which of her reds had survived the third end. Nora was talking to their second player. Wren stood beside Piper as the coaches began to clear.

"I liked having the early stones to sweep," Wren said.

“I could hear you.”

“I was quite busy.”

Piper smiled. Then they followed their teammates off the ice.

At a later ordinary practice, Wren was fourth and skip again. Piper was back at third and vice, with Maisie leading and Nora second.

They had warmed up, checked their equipment and begun their usual team practice. Piper finished her own two deliveries and came back with her slider covered.

Piper and Wren stood together at the clear side of the house, checking where Wren wanted her next stone to finish.

“Front rings, or nearer the middle?” Piper asked.

“Front rings this time,” Wren said.

Piper looked at the finish Wren meant, then took the house. Wren went back to the hack. Maisie and Nora settled into their sweeping places.

“Ready,” Maisie called.

Wren looked toward her. “Me too.”

She delivered.

Piper watched the red come along the ice. Maisie and Nora followed beside it, waiting for the call.

“Sweep!” Piper said.