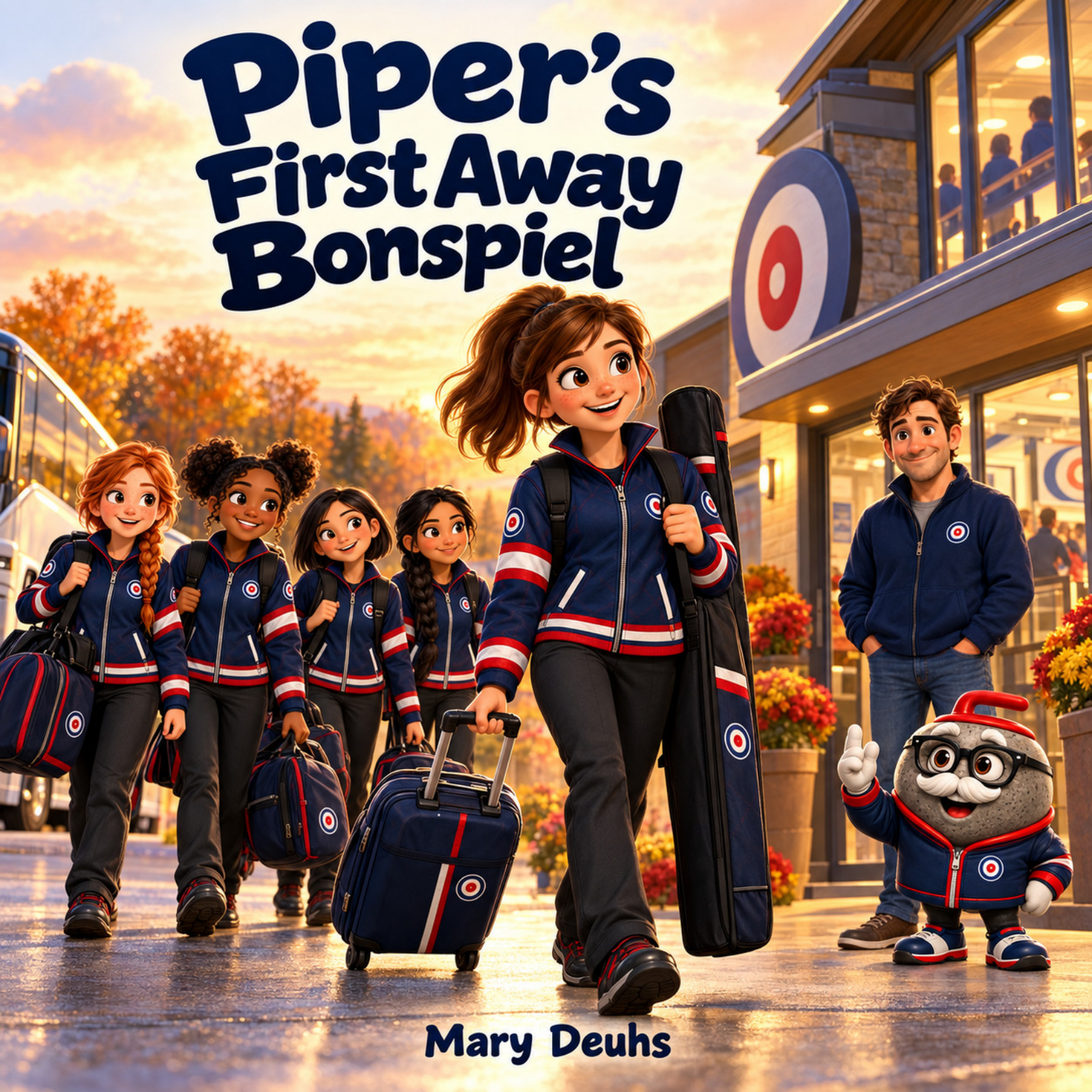
Piper's First Away Bonspiel



Mary Deuhs



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This is a work of fiction.



For every junior curler
with a dream.


Piper had packed for her first away bonspiel.
We leave tomorrow.
I know. I'm late.


A bonspiel was a curling tournament. An away bonspiel meant a whole weekend with her team.
Are we nearly there?
We've passed two mailboxes.


New ice. New people. A whole new place to curl.
I want to do everything.
We should probably go inside first.
WELCOME CURLERS


Piper was the fifth player on her all-girls team.
Four played at a time.
Bea starts tonight.
Piper, you're in tomorrow.
Ready.


That night, Piper watched her teammates learn the unfamiliar ice.
That side curls more.
Good eyes.


One game finished. There were more tomorrow.
Good start, everyone.
More curling? Excellent.


Upstairs, the club smelled like soup and warm bread.
There's a whole other bonspiel up here!


At the hotel, the team meeting continued.
Best shot of the night?
Best snack of the night?


They talked about shots. School. Snacks. Everything.
Okay.
Last story.
It was not the last story.


Morning comes early, curlers.
I'm not even tired.
Morning disagreed.


Their suite had a little kitchen. Dad helped Piper make breakfast.
Pancakes for the team!
Cook first. Celebrate after.
HOUSE CALL


What shape is that one?
A very difficult shot.
They ate every pancake.


Saturday morning, Piper took her turn at lead. Bea watched from the bench.
I've got the cheering.
I've got this.


Her first draw slid too far.
Her next shot missed its line.
Oh, come on.


Piper knew how to play. Today, knowing and doing felt very far apart.
That was awful.
Come sit with us.


Nobody asked her to earn her chair.
I wanted to play so much better.
I know. Eat something. Rest a little.


There were games. And waiting. And warming up again.
Bonspiels are...
Long?
Extremely long.


A grown-up team had just lost.
Piper waited for the grumbling.
Did you see my last shot?
We all did!
They laughed until someone snorted.


You lost. You're still having fun?
I wish we'd won. I'm still glad we came.


A visiting curler's broom broke. Nia had a spare.
But we play you next.
You'll need a broom, then.


Piper rested. Ate. Played again. Some shots worked. Some didn't.
Good game.
See you upstairs?


They packed the bags and returned the borrowed things.
Remember that pancake?
That pancake had potential.


On the way home, Piper remembered the late-night laughing. The pancakes. The people who made room.
The scores were already getting fuzzy.


Want to do another one?
When?


Piper has packed her broom, her pajamas,
and enough excitement for the whole team.
But her first away bonspiel has a few surprises:
a very late bedtime, a very long weekend,
and a very important pancake.
A story about curling, belonging, and the
best parts of being on a team.
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