

Third Place Fiction ~ Ages 10-13

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Age 11

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“Skipped”

The day the rock arrived changed my life. It was a comfort, and a reminder of who I once was, and who I would be. At least that's what I think, when I look back on it now.

We had lived in the Philippines for only two weeks when the package arrived. It had come from a friend, a best friend. Ruby. In the package were a card and a gift. Ruby had been my best friend for two years when I lived in Zimbabwe. Then, of course we moved from Zimbabwe, to the Philippines, continents and cultures apart.

As soon as I saw the package was from Ruby, I ripped it open with all my might and looked at the card. I was disappointed by it. It had weird little magazine cutouts all over it. I only liked the message:

*Hi Charly,
I miss you a lot,
Your Friend,
Ruby*

Then I stared at a little present wrapped in newspaper. I smiled. Ruby was never really very artistic. I ripped open the paper to find right before my eyes, a rock. But it was the most beautiful rock I had ever seen in my life. It was as smooth as skin, but it didn't feel like skin at all. It had a gray color to it, but not in a dull way. It was a gray that reminded me of the ocean, deep. It kind of looked like part of a tree trunk. It was as hard as anything though, and not, made of wood. It was cold but it felt warm in my heart. It was mine.

Then, I remembered why Ruby had given me it. We had a lot of experience with rocks. At lakes we would find strange ones and give them names. I don't mean names like 'Alexandra' or 'Ronald'. I mean names like "Crocodile Rock". But this one beats the "Crocodile Rock" by far.

When my Mom and Dad came back from work, I thrust my arms around both of them at the same time. I screamed "I got MAIL!" and then I held the rock out before them and they gasped.

When my family saw the rock they were really excited.

"Charlotte, that is the best skipping rock I've ever seen!" My Mom said with excitement.

"Wow" Said my dad, with surprise.

"It's really cool," My two brothers Eric and Michael agreed.

"Thanks," I replied, feeling proud, that I had something valuable and special in the house for the first time in my life.

Later as I was going to bed, my Mom came in to say 'Good Night'. She sat on the side of my bed and said to me "You know Charlotte, that is by far the best skipping rock, I've ever seen."

"I know, Mom" I said matter-a-factly.

“So I was thinking, we could practice in the pool, so when we fly back to Lewes for vacation we could skip it on our special beach”

“Okay, but could you go now? I’m kind of tired.”

“Oh, sorry,” said my Mom as she got up off the bed so quickly I thought she was going to fall down.

That night and for many nights after, I fell into deep sleeps about myself and the rock.

Eventually, we did start practicing in the pool. And we got pretty good. Usually my day consisted of this.

6 AM - Wake Up

6:30 AM - Get on the Bus

7:30-2:15 – School

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM – Homework

4:00 PM till dinnertime – Practice skipping.

The rock wasn’t just a keepsake, it was a ritual. Every evening we would practice and practice till it got dark and our fingers started hurting. I was getting really good at skipping it by now, and I knew when we got to Lewes it would skip without a problem.

We only had 2 more days before we flew to Lewes and skipped our rock. But even when I thought about the idea of letting it go, I felt queasy. Like I was giving up a part of me. The rock had been my only connection to Ruby and Zimbabwe throughout the last year. If I threw the rock into the bay, it would be gone forever.

That was the negative part of my brain thinking.

The day we left for Lewes wasn’t a sad one. We were just going for summer vacation. But as I boarded the plane, I thought of the rock inside my pocket. I thought maybe if I gave up the rock, I’d be giving up Ruby too. But I was sure that Ruby meant for me to do something with it, something meaningful.

So while was on the plane, I didn’t even watch the movies, I just thought. I looked back on my memories of my life in Zimbabwe, of my memories with Ruby. And for some strange reason, when I thought of all those happy times, tears came to my eyes. But I wiped them away. I remember reading somewhere that Dr. Seuss said, “Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened.” And since I didn’t want any more sadness during the trip, I listened.

Our summer in Lewes was the best it could ever be. There was lots of stuff to do, so we never got bored. But more than anything, we went to the beach. And every time we were there, my Mom would ask “Charlotte, do you want to throw it now?” and I would say, “No, I’m waiting for the right time”.

I waited to throw the stone until July 15th, Ruby’s Birthday. My mom expected it. I knew she did. But I didn’t want anyone watching me launch the rock, I didn’t want to be watched. I wanted to be alone. But they had to watch, I knew they did. So at 4:32 PM precisely on the dot, we went to the beach and when we had been there for five minutes, I said I wanted to throw the rock.

There was a brief silence then Michael complained, “Mom, can I throw the rock?”

Then my Dad without being asked said, “Its Charlotte’s rock, Michael, let her throw it.”

Michael complained again “C’mon, Dad, why does Charlotte always get to do the fun stuff?”

I waited a few seconds before I stood up, and the sand went through my toes. A little breeze rustled through my hair. Then the sand started blowing in shapes I knew only I could see, towards the bay. And as I stepped forward, ready to throw, I felt a tear roll down my cheek. I ignored it. Then as I gracefully tossed the rock into the water, attempting to skip it, I smiled.