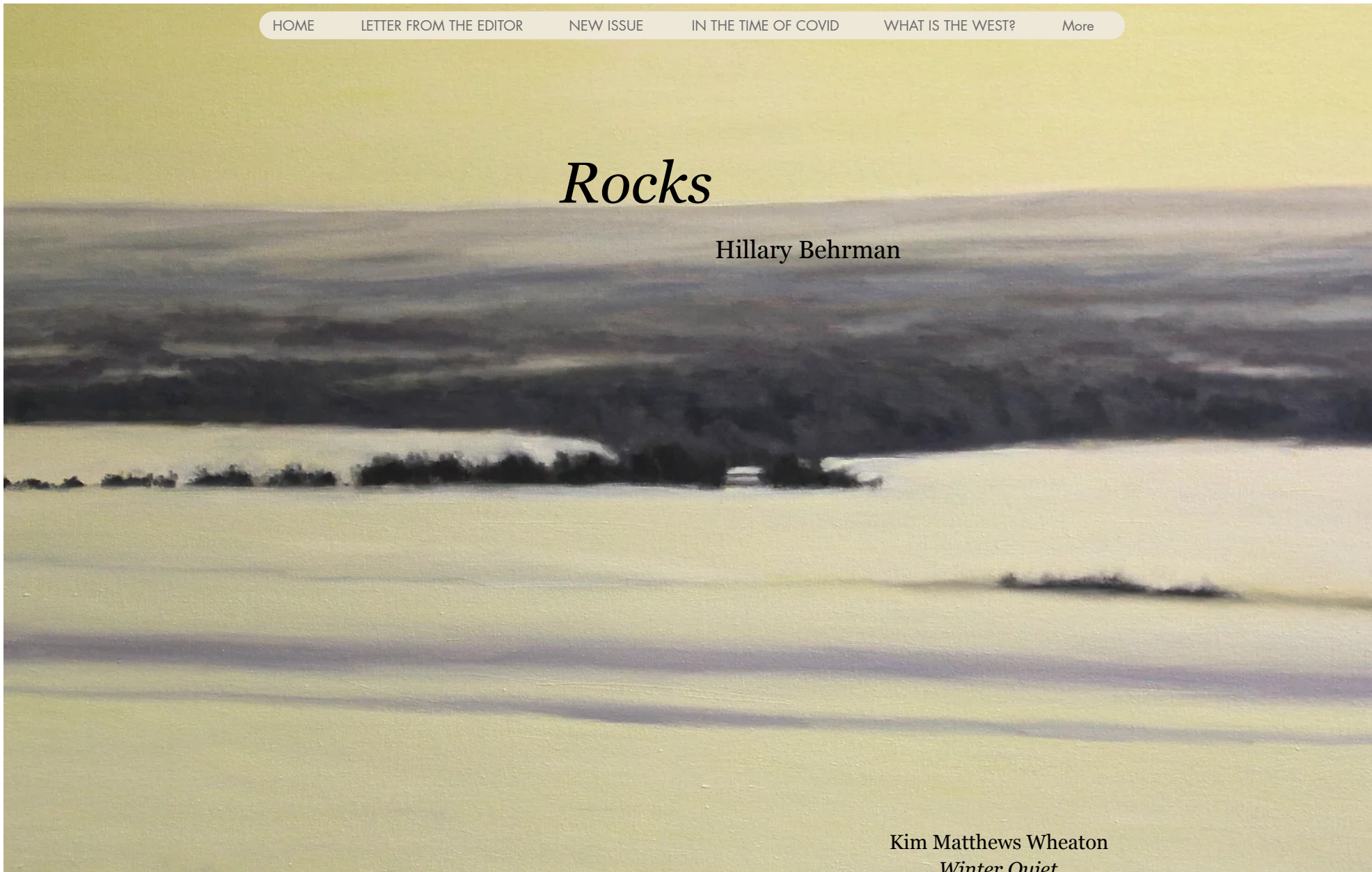


# *Rocks*

Hillary Behrman



Kim Matthews Wheaton  
*Winter Quiet*

his is how we show each other love in our family – rocks. Smooth white river rocks,

**T** jagged unruly hunks of granite, thin shiny slices of Mica, rocks with rings around their middle, perfect skipping rocks, heart-shaped rocks, painted rocks, Jack Daniels on the rocks. Hell, even a pebble off the sidewalk will do.

We give them to each other. They fall out of the kids' pockets when my wife does the laundry. My jeans make a dull thud when they hit the bedroom floor. Rocks line the kitchen windowsill, slide around the dashboard of our truck.

Here's how it goes. My sister, Jenny she can't seem to get pregnant. All that fucking and nothing. She and Nick have lots of postage stamp sex -- "lick em and stick em" he mutters -- still nothing. So my mom gives her two rocks. One is a pebble, round and smooth and milky white, quartz maybe, no bigger than an almond. The other is that same silky white but bigger. It fits perfectly in the palm of your hand. The small one sits right on top the big one, mother and child. And BAM, just like that, Jenny's pregnant.

She carries those two rocks around with her in her pocket, or if necessary tucks them into the elastic of her sock or underwear for the whole nine months. Then she loses the small one. She can't sleep for the worry. Something will happen to the baby, something will go wrong. The baby will die. It doesn't. But two weeks later our mom finds a pebble-sized lump just under her right breast. It's that goddamn lost rock, Jenny just knows it.

Then there's my other sister, Maxine. She's a wanderer, never stays put anywhere too long. Hasn't had a boyfriend or girlfriend that lasted more than four months since she was 16. Never thought she would settle down, stay put, marry, no way.

Then Lewis comes around with that four-pound green rock. The story, as Lewis tells it, goes like this. He followed my sister anywhere, up one damn mountain trail and down another. They head into the back country late in the fall, too late really to be in the high country. They say they'll be out for a week, ten days. Who knows. Maxine doesn't like to be pinned down by an exit date. They hike up the South Fork, up over one pass and then another, following small piles of rocks – cairns when they start to lose the trail in all that barren scree. The larches are turning, the heather has gone red, a few shriveled huckleberries cling on to almost leafless bushes. They wander from lake to lake: Mirror, Moccasin, Glacier. Head off trail to Prospect, drop down to Little Frazier. Maxine is antsy, as Lewis tells it. Not satisfied, searching for just the right place. So they keep going 12 hard miles right up to Hawken's Pass. One relentless switchback after another he follows her. It starts to rain, sharp vertical gusts that smell of ozone and snow. It lets up just as they make the pass, a tight V-shaped crotch of a place no more than eight square

feet of flat ground covered with these strange greenish rocks. They linger just long enough to stare down at the Imnaha River far below only visible by a lightning flash.

Then they mad scramble back down. The aluminum frames of their packs buzzing all the way. Maxine, usually a real klutz, feels more secure, rooted with each foot fall, anchored by some unknown extra heft.

Later she finds it. The greenish heart shaped rock at the bottom of her pack. They were married that year, by time snow fell in the lower valley.

Me and my wife we don't make it out of the valley much these days. When we do there's always a kid or two in tow. So I don't know where it came from. But this morning when I rolled over there it was. A dark grey river rock still damp wedged between us. A perfect fit, nestled right up against her bare curve. I pull in tight, belly to back.



Hillary Behrman lives and writes in the west. She has worked in homeless shelters, as a criminal defense investigator, a children's civil rights attorney, a public defender and is currently the director of legal services at a non-profit in Washington State. Hillary is pleased to be writing short stories that don't require legal citations and supporting declarations from her characters. Her story, 'Rocks' was recognized in the Top 25 list of *Glimmer Train's* April/March 2018 Very Short Fiction Contest. 'Rocks' is set in the Wallowa Valley and the high country of the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area in the Greater Hells Canyon region of northeast Oregon.





