

OH, LOVELY ROCK

We stayed the night in the pathless gorge of Ventana Creek,
 up in the east fork.
 The rock walls and the mountain ridges hung forest on forest
 above our heads, maple and redwood,
 Laurel, oak, madrone, up to the high and slender Santa Lucian
 firs that stare up the cataracts
 Of slid-rock to the star-color precipices.

We lay on gravel and
 kept a little camp-fire for warmth.
 Past midnight only two or three coals glowed red in the cooling
 darkness; I laid a clutch of dead bay leaves
 On the ember ends and felted dry sticks across them and lay
 down again. The revived flame
 Lighted my sleeping son's face and his companion's and the
 vertical face of the great gorge wall
 Across the stream. Light leaves overhead danced in the fire's
 breath, tree trunks were seen: it was the rock wall
 That fascinated my eyes and mind. Nothing strange: light-gray
 diorite with two or three slanting seams in it,
 Smooth polished by the endless attrition of slides and floods; no
 fern or lichen, pure naked rock . . . as if I were
 seeing rock for the first time. as if I were seeing through the
 flame-lit surface into the real and bodily
 And living rock. Nothing strange . . . I cannot
 Tell you how strange: the silent passion, the deep nobility and
 childlike loveliness: this fate going on
 Outside our fates. It is here in the mountain like a grave smiling
 child. I shall die and my boys
 Will live and die, our world will go on through it's rapid agonies
 of change and discovery; this age will die,
 And wolves have howled in the snow around a new Bethlehem:
 this rock will be here grave, earnest, not passive: the energies
 That are its atoms will still be bearing the whole mountain above:
 and I, many packed centuries ago,
 Felt its intense reality with love and wonder, this lonely rock.

Robinson Jeffers 1962