

Carlsbad Cavern, half my life ago

By Zoe Bentley, Batty Laureate 2021

Warm desert air and lilac sky, with chattering below
A human crowd is gathered 'round to watch the night's routine
The stars all chat amongst themselves as they prepare to go
Their words are all unknown to me, and all are still unseen

Anticipation built from years of reading of this place
I watch the rocky opening and ever-dimming sky
With every sound to reach my ears, I can't control my face
At first a smile, which turns to awe as they begin to fly

The first are few and hard to spot, each dark and dodging speck
But fingers try to point them out and track the course of flight
They linger by the opening as if to double-check
But soon they head away to hunt, and then, to my delight:

The few turn to a trickle, and the trickle to a stream
The colony in hundreds, thousands, more above my head
Their voices high and charming and their path like pouring steam
Each particle a creature searching out the feast ahead

Propelled by hands alone yet speeding through the air above
The fastest out of all the lands, and I am here to see
How lucky am I being here, so filled with joy and love?
Enough to spark a dozen years of song and poetry.