

City Lights

By Mary Avidano

My father, rather a quiet man,
told a story only the one time,
if even then—he had so little
need, it seemed, of being understood.
Intervals of years, his silences!
Late in his life he recalled for us
that when he was sixteen, his papa
entrusted to him a wagonload
of hogs, which he was to deliver
to the train depot, a half-day's ride
from home, over a hilly dirt road.
Lightly he held the reins, light his heart,
the old horses, as ever, willing.
In town at noon he heard the station-
master say the train had been delayed,
would not arrive until that evening.
The boy could only wait. At home they'd
wait for him and worry and would place
the kerosene lamp in the window.
Thus the day had turned to dusk before
he turned about the empty wagon,
took his weary horses through the cloud
of fireflies that was the little town.
In all his years he'd never seen those
lights—he thought of this, he said, until
he and his milk-white horses came down
the last moonlit hill to home, drawn as
from a distance toward a single flame.

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Mary Avidano's most recent book of poems is *The Zebra's Friend and Other Poems* (2008). She earned a BA from Loyola University Chicago and lives in Nebraska.

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