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Mary Mackey

Back in 2020

how can you understand what it was like

how we were all together
and all alone

how each of us had books with our lives
crossed out our plans cancelled
our imagined futures
unimagined

how sometimes we
felt we were in dark tunnels
with trains coming toward us
from all directions
how the bodies of our
friends were kept

in silver trucks
and parks were ploughed
with souls

the terror is easy
to describe the long restless
nights the sudden awakenings
the way we reached out in
darkness and pulled back
empty hands
the way we clung to one another
every morning like people
on a thin ice floe being
swept out to sea

but how do we describe the joys
the way spring came back
and the bees kept plunging
drunkenly into the sage
coyotes roamed the cities
lions slept on the roads
and we walked under skies
bluer than they had been
in fifty years breathing air
so fresh it went to our heads
like wine

how can you understand our guilty
pleasures people sitting on their front
porches again small children and their
parents walking together every
afternoon hand in hand

night after night
day after day
a great silent peace
fell over us
like a blanket of roses
and we felt a gentleness
that made it seem as if

we were living
in a world where words
had never been
invented

you know now where we
were going
and how all this turned
out but we didn't know
there was no end we
could see no other life
we could imagine
only this one here
now
this life we grasped with clean
hands breath after
labored breath

Mary Mackey is the author of eight collections of poetry, including *Sugar Zone*, winner of the 2012 PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award for Literary Excellence and finalist for the Northern California Book Awards; and *The Jaguars That Prowl Our Dreams*, winner of the 2019 Eric Hoffer Award for the Best Book Published by a Small Press and a 2018 CIIS. She is also the author of 14 novels, one of which made *The New York Times* Bestseller List.