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Isolation Affirmation

Tina Schumann

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Tina Schumann is a Pushcart nominated poet and the author of three poetry collections, *Praising the Paradox* (Red Hen Press, 2019), which was a finalist in the National Poetry Series, Four Way Books Intro Prize, and the Julie Suk Award; *Requiem. A Patrimony of Fugues* (Diode Editions, 2017), winner of the Diode Editions Chapbook Competition; and *As If* (Parlor City Press, 2010), which was awarded the Stephen Dunn Poetry Prize. She is editor of the IPPY award-winning anthology *Two Countries. U.S. Daughters and Sons of Immigrant Parents* (Red Hen, 2017.) Her work received the 2009 American Poet Prize from the *American Poetry Journal*, finalist status in the Terrain.org annual poetry contest, and honorable mentions in *The Atlantic*, *Crab Creek Review* and *The Allen Ginsberg Award*. She is a poetry editor with Wandering Aengus Press, and her poems have appeared widely since 1999, including *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Ascent*, *Cimarron Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, *Parabola*, *Palabra*, *Poetry Daily*, *Rattle*, *Verse Daily*, and read on NPR's *The Writer's Almanac*.
www.tinaschumann.com

Isolation Affirmation

I make more of these moments
than perhaps I should. Last night
in a friend's garden, over a dinner
of take-out curry and saag, the last warm air
of summer cushioning our conversation, we spoke
of long-ago travel; motorcycle tours over the Dolomites,
sailing cruises to Catalina, hitchhiking in Spain.
Because we had been sequestered and forced to face
ourselves for too long the mere talk of travel felt rebellious,
thrilling in a way it hadn't since our teens.
We were rule breakers.
Throwing our masks into the air behind us
and blowing down the open road.
While the ice cream man chimed his bells
throughout the neighborhood,
we looked into each other's faces
and reaffirmed the facts of our past –
saying *We'd been there. We'd done that.*

October

Lately, it's been like Groundhog Day
around here; same thoughts, same steel
whistle of the kettle, same slow pulse
of another smoky sunset. Still, people
really are trying – what with their chipped
toothed jack-o'-lanterns
crouched on the front porch
and gauzy ghouls peeking out
the screen door. They are trying
to say hello to this misstep of a season
contained within this misstep of a year.
This close to the end of it all we reach out
for the usual and the comfort of a childhood
mask. As if the scare tactics of reality
were not enough. We want the kind of fear
we can decorate and fold away in a box
the next day. Now that we are all bi-polar
and understatements abound – it's a trick
of the mind to keep going – a treat to be
delusional together. That's OK. Let's be something
less capricious than the garden-variety delusional;
you buy the waxy candy bars in their little coffins
of colorful paper, and I'll screw in the red lightbulb
over the front door. Someone is bound to ring
our bell in their chosen disguise
just begging for something
completely different.

Self-Portrait as Shut-in

Even the summer air seems carotid
with disease. Invisible though it is.

The season is no invitation, but a rude
seducer. Not a caress, but a diabolic con-
sequence. It gives you pause, and then
another pause and another. Better to not
venture. Don't speak. Don't blink. Just
don't. Streetlights cast dystopian
beams over cars and empty bleachers.

It floods this suburban dream. Like a bad cop
in a windowless room it demands –

Where are you from? Who sent you here?

Show us your papers. The words are muffled,
of course, as every mouth is wrapped in gauze.

The radio is no help, not the news
or the mail. Those daily standbys
only reinforce the rules: *don't touch your face,*
stand six feet apart, try to make your eyes look like a smile.

Now, every love song is overwrought.

Ridiculous with ardor. Every old impulse
a broken notion; unattainable, passé, a joke
you forgot was a joke. Nature is no longer free.

Public spaces? Not so much. You feel yourself

an imposter, escapee, out-patient

on the lam and that old song keeps running

through your head ...*Got nowhere to run to baby, nowhere to hide...*