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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*.  
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### **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...*