

Ani DiFranco, Parameters

Thirty-three years go by
And not once do you come home
To find a man sitting in your bedroom
That is
A man you don't know
Who came a long way to deliver one very specific message:
Lock your back door, you idiot
However invincible you imagine yourself to be
You are wrong
Thirty-three years go by
And you loosen the momentum of teenage nightmares
Your breasts hang like a woman's
And you don't jump at shadows anymore
Instead you may simply pause to admire
Those that move with the grace of trees
Dancing past streetlights
And you walk through your house without turning on lamps
Sure of the angle from door to table
From table to staircase
Sure of the number of steps
Seven to the landing
Two to turn right
Then seven more
Sure you will stroll serenely on the moving walkway of memory
Across your bedroom
And collapse with a sigh onto your bed
Shoes falling
Thunk thunk
Onto the floor
And there will be no strange man
Suddenly all that time sitting there
Sitting there on what must be the prize chair
In your collection of uncomfortable chairs
With a wild look in his eyes
And hands that you cannot see
Holding what?
You do not know
So sure are you of the endless drumming rhythm of your isolation
That you are painfully slow to adjust
If only because
Yours is not that genre of story
Still and again, life cannot muster the stuff of movies
No bullets shattering glass
Instead fear sits patiently
Fear almost smiles when you finally see him
Though you have kept him waiting for thirty-three years
And now he has let himself in
And he has brought you fistfuls of teenage nightmares
Though you think you see, in your naivete
That he is empty handed
And this brings you great relief
At the time
New as you are, really, to the idea that
Even after you've long since gotten used to the parameters
They can all change
While you're out one night having a drink with a friend
Some big hand may be turning a big dial
Switching channels on your dreams
Until you find yourself lost in them
And watching your daily life with the sound off
And of course having cautiously turned down the flame under your eyes
There are more shadows around everything
Your vision a dim flashlight that you have to shake all the way to the outhouse
Your solitude elevating itself like the spirit of the dead

Presiding over your supposed repose
Not really sleep at all
Just a sleeping position and a series of suspicious sounds
A clanking pipe
A creaking branch
The footfalls of a cat
All of this and maybe
The swish of the soft leather of your intruder's coat
As you walk him step by step back to the door
Having talked him down off the ledge of a very bad idea
Soft leather, big feet, almond eyes
The kinds of details the police officer would ask for later
With his clipboard
And his pistol
In your hallway