Self Examination

In the sweet time after you bleed,
once every cycle after you bleed,
comes a moment of deep self-knowing.

First, free yourself from clothes and interruptions.
Then lie down as though on summer grass,
lie down with a pillow under your right shoulder.
Put your right arm behind your head.
Relax – you are warmed by sun and shaded by leaves.
With your left hand,
with the soft pads of your three middle fingers
touch the outside edge of your bare right breast
the place where hill meets plain…
Press gently but firmly, gently but firmly,
spiraling in toward the nipple
(private labyrinth,
true Milky Way) –
ah, the nipple, keeper of pleasure.
Squeeze it to show there's no discharge.
Ask are there changes. Ask is there is pain.
Ask if you're worried by what you feel.

Trace the arc that runs from breast to shoulder bone
Now reach beneath the muscle to the gland,
and ask is it hard like a jellybean.

To notice a change, you must know yourself by touch,
your own particular breast, its bumps, marks, streambeds, scars,
its independent size and shape, its own particular beauty.

Now again:
move the pillow under your left shoulder.
Put your left arm behind your head.
Relax – you are warmed by sun and shaded by leaves.
With your right hand,
with the soft pads of your three middle fingers
touch the outside edge of your bare left breast

the place where hill meets plain…
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(private labyrinth,
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To notice a change you must know yourself
by look as well as touch.
Get up, as from a nap outside, and
come to your mirror.
Recognize yourself.
Slide your hands to the arcs of pelvic bone
and flex the long fine muscles that support your breasts.
Study yourself
all the while asking
are there changes
are there dimples or redness or swelling
are you worried by what you see.
Bend at the waist,
the double pendulum seeking the center of the earth,
and look again.

Honor yourself.
To notice a change you must know yourself,
your own particular breasts, your own particular beauty.

Farrell Collins