

## The Night House

Every day the body works in the fields of the world  
mending a stone wall  
or swinging a sickle through the tall grass --  
the grass of civics, the grass of money --  
and every night the body curls around itself  
and listens for the soft bells of sleep.

But the heart is restless and rises  
from the body in the middle of the night,  
and leaves the trapezoidal bedroom  
with its thick, pictureless walls  
to sit by herself at the kitchen table  
and heat some milk in a pan.

And the mind gets up too, puts on a robe  
and goes downstairs, lights a cigarette,  
and opens a book on engineering.  
Even the conscience awakens  
and roams from room to room in the dark,  
darting away from every mirror like a strange fish.

And the soul is up on the roof  
in her nightdress, straddling the ridge,  
singing a song about the wildness of the sea  
until the first rip of pink appears in the sky.  
Then, they all will return to the sleeping body  
the way a flock of birds settles back into a tree,

resuming their daily colloquy,  
talking to each other or themselves  
even through the heat of the long afternoons.  
Which is why the body -- that house of voices --  
sometimes puts down its metal tongs, its needle, or its pen  
to stare into the distance,

to listen to all its names being called  
before bending again to its labor.

~ Billy Collins ~

*(Sailing Around the Room)*