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# Sleeping with the Animals

by Glenda Zumwalt

In my past lives I must have been quite ordinary:  
a baker's wife in Glasgow, a scullery maid at Hampton Court,  
the girl herding geese along the banks of the River Wye,  
or just another red head digging potatoes near Dublin. Nothing  
unusual about me except for this:

At one time, while everyone else was busy being Anne Boleyn  
or Cleopatra or Joan of Arc, I was living with animals  
in a mud hut or thatched hovel, huddled against wind  
and loneliness, sheltering what saved me—the chickens  
who pecked at the pests in my cabbage patch and gave me eggs,  
the goats who gave me milk and cheese, the ox who pulled  
my cart to market, the dog to guard me, the cat to purr me  
to sleep. All of us together—a community of feather, fur,  
hoof, and flesh. This is the life my blood and bones remember

the life of matter. Nights now I lay me down to sleep  
once again with animals. The old dogs wheeze, grumble  
hush themselves into soft snores; the little terrier yips  
dreaming gophers. The cats wind, twine, stretch, sharpen  
claws, roll themselves into piles of balls, become a humming  
choir of angels murmuring tidings of quiet joy. All night  
our breathing fills the room, food for the fern and ivy,  
a symphony discordant to the modern ear, but a chorus in harmony  
with the wind under the eaves, with our brother moon and sister stars.

