Sleeping with the Animals

Glenda Zumwalt
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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.