



GEMEINSCHAFT:  
POEMS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

A 2003 CHAPBOOK  
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## YELLOW DOGS RUN

Yellow dogs run down country roads,  
Smacking up dust with leathery paws,  
Graying their sun-tainted hair.

Yellow dogs run through country fields,  
Seeking the weasel's home or poor rabbit's lair  
To bury their scent-famished snouts in.

The farmer's wife opens the pantry door  
And casts her scraps to the ground:  
Curdled yogurt, tuna pie, dried pork chops,  
Corpses of poultry and beef—  
A small open grave of animal bones  
Are devoured amid yelps and burps  
Till the yellow dog snarls,  
Grappling for the final bone.  
Running away, bloody fur  
Drips between his teeth.

The forest has left its mark on him:  
A twig, like a pencil, behind the ear,  
Clover between the toes,  
And raspberry running down his red-stained mouth.  
Nettles and burrs cling to his shaggy blond tail.

I spot one snooping around the back porch:  
The unmistakable wag, the agile, lifted leg,  
Rising above the fallen petals of the Dogwood.  
He grins, rolls over and barks uncomfortably,  
He's just discovered a flea, then . . .  
Runs—homeward bound hound.

You don't expect a thing,  
Then suddenly, the alfalfa moves,  
And there's a yellow dog!

Reclining along the mashed alfalfa  
Like Michelangelo's Adam,  
He turns to you and sneers: "Sorry honey,  
I'm running away, maybe from love, maybe my past,  
And I won't stop till I find what I'm looking for.  
But you sure gave me a run for the money."  
His long snout quivers. "Men are dogs,"  
He snickers and strokes his yellow hair.

## FOURTH OF JULY PARADE

A dirty old man slumps on a park bench,  
Tooth pick dangling between worn teeth,  
Heart beat slowly tick-tocking  
Like a grandfather clock,  
Chiming as the cheerleaders pass by.

Hands with jagged nails clench  
With the freedom to think vile thoughts  
That blacken out an old man's mind  
Till he is void of other idea.

The horny old miser gives away his last eye sight,  
Straining at the view beneath the skirts.  
His dream weaves right into the pleats.  
Desire burns and spoils him  
As the last artful acrobats flip and summersault  
And the glamour girls dizzily wiz their batons.

Then the brazen old pervert starts bellowing:  
"The American Dream was for a little freedom!  
So let an old man claim his rights of time—  
Let him be like the sun moving effortlessly  
Through the Oaks and across the branches,  
Right into somebody's bedroom window!"

The lecherous old patriot clutches his little flag  
And begins vigorously waving  
As the rest of the fourth of July parade marches on.

Main Street empties itself  
But for spills of popcorn and peanuts,  
Cotton candy bits and pretzel ends,  
Cigarette butts and fried chicken scraps,  
Blown-out firecrackers and pop cans.

But alone sits an old man,  
Unattended in his dirty Depend.  
Gurgling up the morning's Ensure  
Like a formula-fed baby,  
He finally transpires like a delicate lady  
Who daintily faints  
When a suitor hurls himself through the sill.

## A PERFECT NEW LIFE

Shadows dance throughout the room.  
Candles flicker as wax melts over the hearth.  
Winter cold taps on the windowpane  
And rattles the shutters.

And now Love blushes,  
Slips off a bathrobe,  
And stands naked and ashen  
Before the fireplace,  
Discharging its sinuous heat  
And effervescent, orange sparkles of fire.  
Fizzing logs release the aroma of  
Sensuous warmth—  
A fragrance of woody Love  
And a feeling of closeness.

Tucked inside a feather bed rests another lover.  
A fresh rose peeps out of a vase—  
Its little red head held high with turpor.  
The crooked little thorns have all been clipped,  
Adding tender meaning to the mantle . . .

Downstairs, the landlady reclines in a rocking chair,  
Censoring its loud orange pillow.  
She remembers how she had not so long ago,  
In this same musty old house,  
Pronounced her vows  
And stripped off all her clothes  
Before the luminous and crackling pine,  
Burning up and out the chimney.

Now she prevents the house from going up in sale  
Or from being left empty.  
Her bed and breakfast has given strangers  
A place out of the cold,  
And she hasn't presumed,  
Thinking, "a whoremonger and whore!"

She sits in her rocking chair—afghan spread over her lap,  
Reading deeply into the Bible.  
The visiting neighbor boy  
Quietly bounces an India rubber ball against the wall  
And a de-clawed, Persian kitten  
Scoots a yarn ball across the floor.

## SABBATH

Hibiscus droop outside the chicken-coop.  
Cicadas creep from their cocoons.  
Fig trees fancy themselves with fruit  
As dogs lie down in the flower bed—  
Heads inside the soft shade.

Cats sleep by the wrought-iron gate,  
Quivering with unseen reality.  
Sunshine proliferates on steeples and peach-painted  
homes  
And blooms and trembles on swimming pools.

The world spends Sunday dappled in rest and play,  
For life seems tranquil outside of the still walls—  
Tranquil as sound from bubbling white water—  
Tranquil as the shade,  
Cooling a nursing mother.

## WINTER HUNT

Autumn arrives.  
Frost specks the valley.  
Trees trade their green  
For orange and gold  
And crispy leaves float  
Down to the eager pond  
Down to its dark glass  
Down through its desperate depths  
Down to where the catfisherman's soul rests.

Winter lumbers forth.  
The hunter fumbles  
Through the brambles.  
Naked limbs rasp his orange jacket.  
First snow drifts to shadowed branches  
In a wisp  
And thickens each step.  
Cold drizzle soaks onto his neck  
Like a wet kiss.

His journey ends where the forest fails  
Before a clearing.  
There moose hover like gargoyles  
Over the reflective murk  
Where a paddle still protrudes  
Like a shark fin—  
He's lost his friend.

## FISHERMEN

Who can forget those bashful bachelors,  
Sitting motionless in their boats  
While the orange-white buoys bob?  
They close their eyes  
When deep desire finds them dreaming—

Surely love is infinite.

Exquisite pleasures ripple their minds,  
Enshrouding them in a peaceful net,  
As tranquil morning covers the waters  
After a stormy night.

They bridge their emptiness—  
They wait patiently to hook a good catch.  
Then darkness eases across the sky,  
Banishing them from their good intent.

Their faces never show surprise,  
And nobody ever threatens them—

Surely love is infinite.

# THE YACHT

I chew nuts by the sea,  
Awakened by violins  
And a dog barking.

I breathe the brine's aroma  
Then roll over the gold quicksand bed  
In just my skin and bones  
Then sail down,  
Humbled by the thought of you, my son--  
Not quite the mother I thought I'd become.  
But because I am, you had to be.

Sleazy seamen bug the sand for clams,  
So I long for home  
Or someplace else, far away  
With chickens and a barnyard  
Or woods with wolves.

Here or there, my son,  
I'll put down my easel like a foot  
And paint you a picture  
To satisfy the mystery of love.

Back on the yacht, my son  
I picture your face,  
Covered with bread crumbs and puree,  
And you are crying for me.

Back on the yacht, my son,  
I imagine our captain,  
Stiff and with his binoculars,  
Just staring at the sea girls!

## THE NECKLACE

Sapphire and silver shimmered  
Like wet grass.  
He made a pass  
Beside the still blue ocean of the world.  
And now against the wind  
And the stillness of the hillsides,  
The brush upon the plains  
Beckons him again.

Sound whispers with the wind,  
Slipping through itself again  
Like harmony past the heavens  
Into islands again.

Somehow illusion touches perfectly,  
Gliding through its peace  
Like the man hastening across terrain,  
Twisting along the green,  
Under the gentle blue  
Before night catches up with again.

For unless he reaches her,  
Within the charming wind,  
Upon the mellow heights  
And on the very grass,  
He'll never bow to love again  
As do the willows in the glen—

Alas to the lass—  
As coos the dove,  
That man fell in Love!

## HITCH-HIKER

Somebody's fingers have dipped into honey,  
Even as the days have been dunked in milk.  
Everything in life seems delicious  
And full of praise for Heavenly Love  
And for good fortune, falling lucky lovers into money.

Peaceful pilgrims climb the greatest heights,  
Above the fields of wild flowers,  
Divided by rivers quenched with their quaint perch,  
As the years drink the very seas and the fires dance  
As fools in Love cackle and light up and off like firecrackers  
And Dreamy Lovers take off their portable heads  
And lay down for a nice long doze.

But today an Angel stands out on the highway,  
Raising his thumb like a lonely hitch-hiker,  
Braving another weekend in his jeans and leather jacket,  
Looking like a vagabond biker.

## AMORE

Love always fills the days of the beautiful ones,  
As surely as the liquor of grapes  
Spills from an uncorked wine bottle.

You seem so bright and lovely on the veranda  
And not so closed to them.

But please do not act surprised  
At the wiles of men  
And their “Amore does not say no!”  
At the lull of candled dinners—  
Rich steaks and creamy puddings,  
Diamond rings and incense,  
Violins and harps encouraging romantic sentiments--  
And all of those Italian bards  
Boarding their little boats,  
Singing love songs into the starlight:  
“There’s no tomorrow;  
There’s just tonight . . .”

Please,  
I cannot take such feigned innocence!

## RENDEZVOUS

He ate cheese slivers and crackers for breakfast  
After the sun woke them from sleep  
And rose like some naughty thing  
Around their lake-side cottage  
And the open window swallowed up  
The musty smell of lust.

They lunched on chicken salad and straight black coffee  
At high-afternoon by the rocky beach . . .

But something was eating them both . . .

They talked of Ghandi and Glastnost  
As the cunning little motor-boater  
Churned up the lake  
Like some archetypal dragon  
Then supped late—  
Split three sandwiches and a bag of apricots.

Then he asked her why she'd given him crabs,  
Like she'd mean to or something,  
Or should write down the answer on paper  
With her "Hand of Love."

She didn't mean to.  
It was an accident.  
He came, all candy and flowers,  
And offered her money.

## THE SEED

Musk of moist earth  
Rises through the open window.  
Glistening ivy, clinging to red brick,  
Twitches in light wind.

Cows browse the pastures—  
Snouts covered with hairs of loose grass.  
Brown hides, husky and damp,  
Escape a plague of flies.

Soft rain sprinkles towns  
And slides in single tears down trees,  
Church steeples, and quiet homes.

And so, my soul germinates like a seed,  
Embedded in soft soil,  
Soon to break forth with fresh life,  
Surprising a new dawn,  
Perhaps the very next sunny day!

# INDIAN SUMMER

Love is free  
In the sweet autumn days.

The scythe reaps the ripened fruit of wheat.  
Gold sheaves rustle  
During an October harvest.

My hands are not so calloused.  
I dance with the seasons.  
I hope to find love.

In a summer without rain,  
Wind rips through parched grain.  
Desire ravishes a heart  
Like hot fire whirls through a dry corn field.  
But November always comes,  
Bringing cold.

I stand by the grain.  
Now is the time for love.

I remove the kerchief from my head,  
And the wind lifts my brown hair.  
I raise my hands towards Heaven,  
And the breeze whooshes through my fingers.  
I have ceased from toil.  
I no longer wish to share in the labor.  
My window is open for trust's delightful yields,  
And I do not place my trust in loaves of bread!

My heart is in season.  
I laugh at the thought of years.  
I am young and ready to be harvested.  
I was born to love.

## AFTER THANKSGIVING

Raindrops fall heavier than yesterday's cheeseburgers and turkey.  
Pellets pound down like harsh words over a trailer park family,  
Experiencing the aftermath of feasting.

A son pukes in the shower and just leaves it there—  
The phone is off the hook,  
But all the flowers have been watered.

A daughter stands before the looking glass and drowns inside the mirror,  
Screaming inside, mouth wide open—  
Fat, where a tan should be.

A mother has thrown herself into bed,  
Wanting to go back to a time when her face was not so ripe and red and  
Heavy arms and legs didn't pin her down to the mattress like she were  
dead.

Her hand stretches out as if an apple has been released.  
She stares outside the dripping window,  
Remembering when she forced herself a jog.  
The sounds of rain keep speeding up  
Like runners that catch up with you then pass you by.

Junior's little head jots around the room.  
Happier than all the rest,  
He laughs at how they seem to love themselves the best.

## FRIED CHICKEN DINNER

A tub of delicious flesh and appendages—  
Deep-fried cooking to the last crispy crumbs—  
Blue-ribbon prized piles of greedy, oozing food—  
Globs of melted butter over biscuits in honey catacombs—  
Crunchy to limpid French fries and  
Goopy cherry pie leaves them sucking the plate  
And echoing the spicy fat words, “Thank you, Mother,”  
As she turns again, lopping on more hot spoonfuls,  
Swapping memory for apology with those who missed too much.

The housewife will stand before her dishwasher privilege  
And become more powerful than bubblegum,  
Till Love replaces the walls.

Beneath an overflowing bathrobe,  
Her cavity of ribs expands with every breath.  
A golden locket rests against her bones of chest.

## JACK AND JILL

Young Miss,  
Sore and cross,  
Dream of Twelve Flags  
After a soccer game of 10 goals  
In the union fields—

Country miles that keep gray memories—  
Or peaceful swims after sunburned days  
In streams of minnows,  
Meandering through hillsides of green woods  
That camouflage any curse.

Young Girl,  
Go easy on the dogma—  
The Hells Angels rev through the Bible Belt  
And zoom away from your hometown.

But dream of passion in the lonely days,  
If Father Time makes you an Old Maid,  
And the gossips start talking about your kin,  
Whispering, “her Ma let on with too many men,  
And bad luck broke her leg right ‘fore Sadie Hawkins’ Day.”

Young Jill,  
Savor Love in a hot land  
With a simmering bent,  
When the grasshoppers become silent with morning,  
Like Yankee Jack, poised with intent—  
Or like a field rabbit, fatefully dying.

## THE OLD HIPPIE

Slowly, the rusty laugh comes—  
Some cancer-clogged old man  
Exhales his home-made “cigarette”  
Like the trail of a steamboat  
Slipping quietly through the reflective cogs  
And into nothing.

He sips more whiskey  
To try out more than just  
His only lungs and smiles.

But, as if in slow motion,  
Another man comes up,  
Traversing to his side—  
His son, who’s rather spiritual,  
And knows what made him  
Love, not suicide.

# AFTERNOON PICNIC BY THE BROOK

Dusty feet dangle over the prairie  
Into the cool ripples of a stream,  
Meandering through the country meadows  
With grass, more like a garden or a dream,  
Buzzing with drifting butterflies and floating bees,  
Dripping with pollen towards the honeycomb.

Mama fans away the dust and heat  
And sways her calico skirt like waves of sea or grain.  
The apple orchard's crows fly through the sky's windy shadows—  
The puffy clouds will linger until suppertime.

She will bring the bunch more peanut butter and jelly sandwiches  
In a unique bouquet of flavors—  
Lemon-line and grape to orange.  
She yawns as the kettles clink and clang.  
Papa's whiskers bristle as he hums and smiles.  
His rocking chair squeaks against the porch boards.

Upstairs the sheets are off the bed and twisted—  
The breeze feels just too warm,  
And the cat, quick as a wisp in icy frost or mist,  
Stretches out across the road as if it's truly found its boon.

The windmill keeps spinning  
As the children scramble in play throughout the barn.  
Another quietly reads beneath the Maple  
And sighs quietly at how only love can make a home.

A tire swings slowly,  
The screen door creaks open then bangs shut.  
Church bells chime away for school cessation  
And then the sun falls down beneath the moon.

## THE FARMER

Your Caesar's bust,  
Your cherished sculpture with its disfigured nose,  
Lies shattered.  
Crops are drying in the sieving heat.  
I see the decay of wheat  
Outside your red brick home.  
Sickly cattle reap the degenerate pasture,  
Smoothing their snouts through  
The blamed contents of earth and grass.

The antiquated graveyard has been exhumed,  
Like a fetus shooed from its walls of slumber,  
Unearthing six gone families.

A disappointed femur spots the soil,  
And a regal brooch of pure gold crowns the muddy display.

But the skeletons will not steal with the thieves curled barley  
From the stark turf  
Or again endure such silent memorial  
As do those mocking love or the eternal.

Now summer is coming to another vibrant end.  
You sit alone crying,  
Clasping that photo in its iron frame  
Of your wealthy ancestors who lived in great luxury,  
But all you've left's the family name.

## UNDER THE APPLE TREES

Two lovers on a 3-wheeler,  
Pelt across a prairie beaten down with rain.  
They laugh at wet dandelion wishes  
As love overcomes the loneliness.  
Passion finds them,  
Kissing, by the tight-fast flowers behind the fence posts,  
Caressing, beneath the cherry-plum leaves—  
Or silent when sunrise entwines with morning daydreams,  
Love finds them somewhere—  
Reminds them of faraway, childhood days  
Before he found her—  
Beneath the hot breeze—  
When the jealous Nebraska summer waited in tears  
For the frozen miles of winter  
And the trees passed out their leaves  
At the thought of them no longer resting  
Beneath their solitude  
There, where love grew greater than all mountains,  
All oceans, all human plans,  
All cities with their pavements trodden upon by man.

## THE VAMPIRE

Blackbirds glaze the cliffs  
Like popcorn on a park bench.  
Roses toss their tips into the duck-stocked shadows.  
Squirrels cross the trails in park-bound fashion.  
And the Indian drinks in his peace-pipe—  
Swearing by his pine-straight feathers.

But I have painted over my true face—  
Daubed my eyes  
Pinto to dark midnight.  
My long black hair,  
Dusky as a chicken coop,  
Sweats in a pile beneath my hat.

I stride along the sun-warmed pavement—  
Wanting to read some love into a forgotten past.  
I do not desire hatred—  
I offer a laugh amid life's shadows.  
I would fly away,  
Sure as an eagle to the climbs,  
For I have stood still,  
Counting only to myself  
When you drew in the dust a straight line.

You posed a sign.  
I winced like a vampire with a stake in my heart.

# FANTASY BEACH HOUSE

Jagged cliffs jut upward into sky,  
Spoiling above the rolling sands.  
Now and again the gold slowly looses its grasp  
And subsides beneath the incoming tide.

Beyond the cabin's web-like screen  
A black fisherman picks up sea shells for his granddaughter.  
He grins as if he's found buried treasure  
And the soft sand so delicious beneath to his bare feet—  
It flows slowly through his fingers,  
Then he vacates the beach—  
Empty now, but for one solitary drifter,  
Kneeling, as he heaves up his daily beer,  
While the neighborhood molester, with candy bar,  
Beckons a schoolgirl, "c'mere."

Seagulls scream.  
The sun scurries monstrously like a moving clock  
Behind the horizon's insistent demeanor.  
I hear the tiny tick tock of my own stop watch and feel  
The burn across my back and thighs,  
Testifying that today I lost my brain  
Braving perched dream in a skimpy thong without sunscreen.

Everything burns silly  
As if rats were chewing me.  
But the rooftop will not cave in—  
Beauregard murmurs comfort—  
Smooths his cool, Noxema-filled hand  
Across my cutting agony,  
Wondering if I am too fried and crusty  
To breastfeed our crying son—our crying son—  
Saying he can't, laughing, pleading, pushing slowly—  
Have I lost my undaunted freedom?

Not all that awake,  
I roll over the silk sheets like a capsizing ship—  
I'm on my way down—  
A little of this or that will end me.

The night wind has blown itself blind.  
I am not like I was.  
Rolled over again,  
I die.

## THE REPUBLIC

The lollypop tastes delicious in Kindergarden,  
But the God-full hot-gospeler appears unconcerned  
At forced intimacy between the angel-voiced child  
And the dry-mouthed seducer-voyeur.  
Parched tongues stick when the curtains drop.

The queer tree-planter grows diseased and finicky,  
And the deacon finds him unworthy.

Reservedly contrary,  
The demon-warrior zealot  
Battles the evil spirits away  
But often never think to say,  
“Hey, that was you back there  
Behind the elemental curtain  
Of everything and everywhere.”

So yank back the Republic  
Before the idiot-savant-spiritualists.  
Let the fortune-telling psychics grow sober  
And the spell-casting witches even more enraged.

Gypsy shamans will chant the day's magic  
As the city marshals poke their empty vessels,  
And the love poets pen-worthily write it all down.

## PRIVATE SCHOOL

Dormitory room—  
Young girls broom the dust.

Such a funny prison  
Of familiar floors  
And Neanderthal mirrors,  
Sparkling clean and overhung,  
Reflecting the real world  
Of dustless, spotless corridors  
And grades  
And grades  
From each top-notch student,  
Out-doing the broom,  
The room,  
The dorm.

Oh, those little bars are shining!  
The mop goes there.  
They swab the soft boards  
And glance at the inspector,  
Walking meticulously  
From up and down the corridor.

The dustpan is filling.  
They are not fleeing.  
School isn't free anymore.

## ENIGMA

Slowly—imperceptibly—  
a dark cloud blots the soft blue—  
dark as coffee beyond the windows,  
dark as midnight upon the waters—  
emerging between the pillow  
and fresh breakfast,  
sometime settling fog upon the glass—  
hung,  
almost emptying,  
thick reflections  
within the silence of . . .

the soft blue sky

You

Love and the orange juice

the snow outside

the truth.

## LOBSTER AFTER DECISION

Here comes a delicacy  
Two chilepedes and a telson  
It's just a lobster  
A feisty crustacean  
That's quickly vanquished with culinasion

Here sits a bachelor  
In guilty contemplation  
Of his consumption  
Of this fine crustacean  
That's quickly ravished with mastication

With his bib and his napkin  
But without his woman  
He's dining alone  
In lonely contemplation  
He's too late to say, "Let's go procreation—"

Hop down to that chapel all dressed in white  
And commit our coition. . ."  
A knot's left untied; potential has died,  
But it took two to tango in that fateful decision.

The fruit of his loins—a symbol of love  
Worth no more than a lobster  
That ends in digestion?  
Symbol or fruit—who gives a hoot?  
He's back with his mother and Mr. Bation!

## LOVE OF FOWL!

The pessimists told me . . .  
“Mozart was not an astronaut!  
And Picasso did not sing!  
Galileo—hardly graceful!  
And Einstein, never kinged!

“And I’m the only one with values,  
And the only one who’s cried,  
And the only one who’s worth anything,  
And if you don’t like that,  
You can die!”

Then the optimists huddled around me  
To utter a supportive reply--  
In unison, boldly declaring:  
“‘Love of Fowl!’: The best love poem known to man,  
And if you say otherwise, you lie!”

“For where were you that morning,  
When the chicken laid the egg,  
You say, “don’t know which came first!”  
We say, “won’t accept your curse.  
We’re just glad God gave us birds!”

# THE LUNATIC

They spot him again outside the convent,  
Like a fearless Mt. Everest climber,  
Ascending the statue,  
Groping his way up the Virgin Mary,  
Holding her stone-gray limbs,  
And passionately kissing her marble lips.  
“Let’s run away together,”  
He groans, nibbling her pebble lobes.  
No answer.

He returned the following night with something to entice her.  
He waited until for his chance then approached her,  
Pulled himself up the pedestal, blushed silently,  
Then popped the question:  
“What do you say we run away together?  
I need someone horribly,  
And I’ve always loved purity.  
Look: Pearls!”  
He held his hands forward.  
The tiny moons sparkled in the starlight.  
But no answer.  
“You are so hard, Mary; so cold.”  
No answer.

Weeks later, just when Mother Superior  
Thought she’d seen the last of him,  
She glanced out the window and saw  
Two knobby hands caressing Mary’s lower spine.  
“That is enough,” she huffed,  
Pounding down her fist like a raw onion.  
She mustered the troops outside, encircling the statue  
Two nuns with brooms struck him.  
He almost toppled over.  
But Mary, stiff as stone, stood her ground,  
And there he hung.

## CHRISTMAS IN THE COUNTRY

Pine decks the white hills.  
Cozy sleigh-bound couples wisp  
Down the frosty slopes.

Snow flakes surprise boys'  
Open palms like dragonflies.  
Specks glisten and melt.

Men hall evergreens  
As girls jingle coral bells.  
Sugar cookies rise.

## JUST A THOUGHT

The Calico cat  
Purrs  
Upon a shelf  
Curls twice  
And extends  
Itself  
Against  
The window  
Pane's  
Cold glass.

## MOZART WEeping

Mozart weeping into the violins  
Leaves an echo in the breeze  
And a presence in the air—  
As an essence fills the soul  
And all of Fifth Street.

## HAYING

The sun hung over a farm in Maine  
Sweat stung our sunburns  
Straw stuck to our skin like spaghetti  
The wind threw my baked hair  
Windfried cackled  
Eric wheezed  
Edward threw up bales  
Chris blew the alfalfa a kiss  
A bald man, gloved like a boxer  
Steered the red tractor over fertile soil  
Wheels dug deep into the ground's cracked back  
Like the glaciers that gouged out the earth long ago

# GEMEINSCHAFT ANNA CATES



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