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# The Oaten Cakes

BY

Rea Woodman, M. A.

PRICE 15 CENTS.

ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE  
Franklin, Ohio



# The Oaten Cakes.

An Historical Play for Little Folks  
in Three Scenes.

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By **H. REA WOODMAN, M. A.**

Author of "The Rescue of Prince Hal," "The Clever  
Doctor," "His Uncle John," and "Billy Ben's  
Pirate Play."

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**Eldridge Entertainment House**

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DEDICATION—To Frederic Evans Delzell, a Texas boy, this little story of the noble Saxon King—the kingliest King I know about—with my abiding love.



THE CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY.

Alfred, King of England, called "The Great."

His Chief Counsellor.

The First Courtier.

Captain Boldheart, Leader of the Danish Forces.

First Robber.

Second Robber.

The Cottager.

The Cottager's Wife.

Messengers, Soldiers and Courtiers.

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Scene I. In the Palace.

Scene II. In the Wood, the Next Day.

Scene III. In the Cottage, One Week Later.

# The Oaten Cakes.

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## SCENE I.

*In the Palace.*

*(The Throne Room. King Alfred, simply dressed, but wearing a gold crown, is seated on a rude throne. His attitude is that of one absorbed in anxious thought. The First Courtier and three other Courtiers are standing grouped in the background, apparently sharers of the King's anxiety.)*

*(Enter the Chief Counsellor.)*

*Chief C.* Your Majesty, a Danish soldier has just been found hiding in the courtyard. We think he is a spy. *(The Courtiers listen earnestly. Alfred looks at him absently.)* What does your Majesty desire to have done with him?

*King.* What makes you think he is a spy?

*Chief C.* Your Majesty, he will not speak a word. He pretends to see nothing, but he sees everything. He is not armed, and he does not look like a common soldier. *(Alfred does not answer, or move.)* What does your Majesty desire to have done with him?

*King.* *(rousing himself).* What have you done with him?

*Chief C.* We have put him in the dungeon.

*King.* There is no need of that. Take him out, give him some food, and put him under guard.

*Chief C.* Your Majesty, the man is a spy.

*King.* *(beckoning a Courtier to his side).* Go tell the Captain to take that man out of the dungeon, give him food and drink, and put him under a strong guard.

*Courtier.* Yes, your Majesty. *(He goes.)*

*Chief C.* Your Majesty, the man is a Dane. *(The*

*King nods.*) And a spy. . . . . A Dane and a spy. What can you expect?

*King.* (*passing his hand across his troubled brow*). Do not be uneasy. We will keep him well guarded.

*Chief C.* (*spreading his hands outward*). He is a Dane. Your Majesty knows too well what the Danes are. (*Alfred does not answer.*) The Danes have broken every promise they ever made your Majesty.

*King.* (*resting his head on his hand*). That is quite true.

*Chief C.* Then why should you trust them this time?

*King.* What can I do? I can not have them arrested. There are not jails enough in England to hold them. I can not give them battle now; my soldiers are scattered, my people are very poor. The Danes have promised that they will leave the country. What can I do but trust them? I can not get an army together in five minutes to drive them out. (*The Courtiers nod agreement.*)

*Chief C.* (*with lifted brow*). Can King Alfred trust the Danes?

*King.* (*looking at him helplessly*). I shall have to— for a little while, until I can get my soldiers together.

*Chief C.* (*leaning on his staff*). Your Majesty, you were a young man of three-and-twenty when you came to the throne, were you not?

*King.* (*adjusting his crown*). I was, my Counsellor.

*Chief C.* In the first year of your reign you fought nine battles with the Danes, did you not?

*King.* (*wagging his head*). I did—nine hard battles.

*Chief C.* You conquered them and made treaties with them, did you not?

*King.* I did. You know all this perfectly well. (*The Courtiers yawn, and rest, wearily, on one foot.*)

*Chief C.* You have been King of England four years. In that time have the Danes kept one single promise they have made your Majesty? Answer me that.

*King.* I can't say that they have. But this is neither



here nor there. What is the use of all this history? (*The Courtiers shrug and smile.*)

*Chief C. (unmoved).* They swore they would leave the country; they did not. They swore they would keep the treaties; they did not. They swore they would keep the peace and obey the laws. They did not do so. They stayed here, and plundered and robbed and killed women and little children. They burned villages and stole cattle. That was four years ago. Have the Danes changed? If they lied then, will they not lie now? What reason has your Majesty to believe that they will keep a promise now if they did n't then?

*King.* What do you advise me to do?

*Chief C. (drawing himself up, and bringing down his staff with a thump).* Fight! Call your soldiers together and fight! Drive the Danes back across the sea! Fight, your Majesty,—fight till there is not a Danish soldier left on English ground.

*First C. (stepping forward).* How can he fight without any soldiers? It is easy to talk! (*The King gazes sadly from one to the other.*) How can he pay soldiers without money? Why don't you talk facts?

(*Enter a Messenger.*)

*King. (so eagerly that his crown falls off).* What news? What news? Who sent you here?

*Mess. (choking for breath).* Oh King, the Danes—the Danes—

*King. (putting his crown back on).* Get the man a cup of water. (*A Courtier goes out.*) Hand him a chair. (*The Messenger is scared, and handed a cup of water that the Courtier brings.*) Is he able to speak now? . . . . . Is he able to speak now?

*Courtier.* The man has recovered, your Majesty.

*Mess. (rising to address the King).* Your Majesty, the Danes are burning the villages, and threatening to kill all the people. They have set a price on your head, and Captain Boldheart is seeking you. (*There is a commotion among the Courtiers.*) Your Majesty, your life



is in danger while you remain here. (*He throws himself at Alfred's feet.*) Dear King, for the sake of your people, leave the Palace! Captain Boldheart swears that he will carry your head to the Danish king. The people cry out, "What will we do if our good King Alfred is killed?" Oh King, hear me! Hear me! Leave the Palace this very day!

*King.* (*stooping to raise the Messenger*). We will consult what is best to be done. You must have food and rest. (*to a Courtier*). Take care of this poor fellow. He is exhausted. (*The Messenger kisses the King's hand, and retires with the Courtier.*)

*Chief C.* (*grimly*). Do you still trust the Danes, your Majesty?

*First C.* (*to Chief Counsellor*). This is no time for sarcasm. Let us think only of the King's safety. (*To Alfred.*) You must disguise yourself and leave the palace.

*King.* I will never desert my people.

*First C.* But consider, your Majesty! There is a price upon your head.

*King.* A King can not run away and hide like a beggar!

(*Enter a Soldier, excitedly.*)

*Soldier.* (*to Counsellor*). I must speak to the King!

*King.* Well, soldier, what is it? Where did you come from?

*Soldier.* (*breathing hard*). I have been hiding in the swamp for three days.

*King.* Alone?

*Soldier.* Your soldiers are scattered far and wide. Many of them are dying of hunger. The Danes are hunting us like dogs, and every man they find, they kill. (*stops to breathe*). You must leave the palace. This is no place for you. The Danes are coming.

*King.* But where shall I go?

*Soldier.* Go to some peasant's hut and stay there till

the Palace is out of danger. In a few days, we—we  
(*He sways a little.*) we will drive—we

*King.* The man is weak from hunger. (*He beckons a Courtier.*) Take him to the courtyard, and let him rest. Then give him food.—You are an honest soldier.

*Soldier.* (*weakly, to the Chief Counsellor.*) Tell him to go—tell him to go! (*He is led out by the Courtier.*)

*Chief C.* You see how it is, your Majesty. We must drive the Danes out of the country, and how can we do that if we have no King? You must seek shelter until we can collect our soldiers and prepare for war.

*King.* (*rising.*) I will do so. (*To the First Courtier.*) Go at once and prepare me a peasant's dress and staff. I will leave the Palace immediately.

*First C.* Your Majesty will not go alone?

*King.* I will go alone. You are all needed here.

*First C.* (*kneeling.*) My King! (*He kisses the King's hand, rises, and goes in haste.*)

*King.* (*stepping down from the throne.*) I will go bid farewell to the Queen. (*to the Chief Counsellor.*) I entrust the affairs of the kingdom to you.

*Chief C.* (*kneeling.*) I will do the best I can to preserve and protect the kingdom.

*King.* I know that, my faithful Counsellor. Until we meet again, farewell. (*He goes out sadly, attended by the remaining Courtier.*)

*Chief C.* (*alone.*) A price upon the King's head! (*He thinks hard, looking absently at the vacant throne.*) The country is full of outlaws and robbers. They must not harm the King. (*He thinks harder.*) They must not harm the King. I know what I will do. I will cause it to be known to the robbers that the King is disguised and travelling through the woods. There is not a robber in the land that would harm a hair of his head. I will send messengers out in every direction. God save the King from harm! (*He goes.*)

CURTAIN.

## SCENE II.

*In the Wood, the Next Day.*

*(The Wood; a vacant space, hung with green baize or lining. Enter Captain Boldheart, with eight or ten soldiers, armed with (paste-board) battle-axes and pikes.)*

*Bold.* Halt, my brave men! *(The soldiers stand in two lines, facing the Captain.)* Listen, and I will tell you why we are in this lonely wood, separated from the rest of the army. King Alfred has left his Palace in disguise, and is traveling through the wood. He is dressed as a peasant, and carries a wooden staff. I will divide the prize money with that brave soldier who brings the King before me alive or dead. Part of you will search the wood in that direction *(pointing)*, and the other part, in that direction. Remember that Captain Boldheart never forgets the man who is faithful. The division that finds the King will blow the horn three times, and return to this place. First division, attention! Right about, face! March! *(The first line files out.)* Second division, attention. Right about face! March! *(The second line files out, with Boldheart at the head.)*

*(Enter King Alfred, disguised as a peasant, with a staff.)*

*King.* It is very lonely in this wood. *(listens)*. How distinct every sound is! It seems to me that I have heard every leaf that has fallen in the forest this afternoon. I wonder where I am? That *(pointing)* ought to be the north, but I do not know. Oh my poor people, what a plight your King is in! His soldiers hiding in fens and bogs, his enemies seeking his life, himself wandering in an unknown forest, lost and alone! *(He goes out, cautiously.)*

*(Enter a Soldier, cautiously.)*

*Soldier.* There is a price on the King's head. If I can catch him and get that money *(listens, turning quite*

around) I'll go back to Denmark. I am tired of war. I (*listens*) want to see my wife and little children. There's somebody coming. (*He lifts his battle-axe.*)

(*Enter two Robbers, dressed in green, with bows, arrows, and arrow-quivers.*)

*First Rob.* Stand still! (*He lifts his bow.*)

*Soldier.* I have no money. I am only a poor soldier.

*First Rob.* (*to Second Robber*). See if he has. (*The Second Robber searches the Soldier.*)

*Sec. Rob.* He has n't even a handkerchief!

*Soldier.* I am hunting the Saxon King. When I find him I'll have money enough.

*First Rob.* (*scornfully*). Do you think the King will give you any money? He will order your head cut off?

*Soldier.* (*with a swagger*). Before he cuts *my* head off I'll sell *his* to Captain Boldheart. You'll see what will happen to your fine Saxon King! (*He starts out, grinning meanly.*)

*First Rob.* Hold! (*The Soldier stops.*) Wait. What are you talking about, honest soldier?

*Soldier.* (*with a snarl*). "Honest soldier" is it when you want to know things? *You* want the money, do you? What do you take me for? (*He goes out, ugly and threatening, his battle-axe raised.*)

*First Rob.* There must be a price on the King's head. Now how much do you suppose it is?

*Sec. Rob.* (*selecting an arrow*). It's more than we have earned in many a day.

(*Enter King Alfred, wanderingly, as if lost.*)

*First Rob.* (*shaking his head to his companion*). It's only a peasant. Let him rip.

*King.* I have lost my way in this dismal forest. (*He sees the Robbers.*) Oh!

*First Rob.* He sees us. (*He rushes at the King, his bow raised.*) Your money or your life!

*Sec. Rob.* (*rushing at the King*). Hold up your hands!

*King.* (*holding up his hands, his staff falling to the ground*). There is no use of all this. I am a poor peasant.

*Sec. Rob.* We will see about that, my good man. (*He searches his clothes.*)

*King.* I tell you I have no money. I am the King.

*Sec. Rob.* (*ready to shoot if he moves*). You said you were a poor peasant.

*King.* No, I am the King.

*Sec. Rob.* (*surveying him*). I guess you don't know who you are. If you are the King, where is your crown?

*King.* I am the King, trying to escape from my enemies.

*Sec. Rob.* You don't look much like a King!—Shall we kill him?

*First Rob.* (*to the King*). You should not tell lies. If there is anything a decent Robber hates, it is a liar.

*King.* (*meekly*). May I take down my hands a minute?

*First Rob.* (*to Second Robber*). Shall we let him?

*Sec. Rob.* (*lifting his bow higher*). Yes, just for a minute.—If you try to escape, I will shoot you!

*King.* (*showing a gold ring, which hangs around his neck, suspended by a black ribbon*). I am telling the truth. I will not try to escape. I am the King—Alfred the Saxon. (*He slips the ring on his finger.*) Dare anybody wear this signet but the King?

(*Enter Captain Boldheart, haughtily.*)

*Bold.* What, ho, my honest men! Have you seen the King? (*Alfred hides his ring, and noiselessly kicks his staff behind him.*)

*Sec. Rob.* (*with a swaggering front*). Hello, Soldier! How are you? What King?



*Bold.* Alfred, King of the Saxons. I have sworn to kill him before the setting of the sun.

*First Rob.* Then you'd better hurry up.

*Bold.* Keep a civil tongue in your head. Have you seen the King?

*Sec. Rob.* I guess the King is in his Palace.

*Bold.* No, he is n't; he's in this wood somewhere, disguised as a peasant. (*He sees Alfred.*) Who's this!

*Sec. Rob.* That is a man who has lost his sheep.

*Bold.* (*after a long, hard stare at Alfred*). How do you come to know so much about him?

*Sec. Rob.* I don't know much about him. Ask him yourself, if you want to know.

*Bold.* (*to Alfred*). So you have lost your sheep?

*King.* I think they have been stolen.

*Bold.* Oh, you do. (*He looks him over again, and turns away.*) Then you have not seen the King?

*Sec. Rob.* We did n't say we had n't seen the King. Is he an old man with a long staff and bare head?

*First Rob.* And stooped in the shoulders?

*Bold.* How should I know? I never saw the King.

*Sec. Rob.* I saw a man that looked just like the King go down that way. (*He points with his arrow.*) I think I know where he went.

*Bold.* (*suspiciously*). Do you know the King?

*Sec. Rob.* Of course I know the King. I was not always a robber.

*Bold.* Was he in disguise? Did he have a staff?

*First Rob.* The man I saw did. (*The Second Robber nods curtly.*)

*Bold.* My honest man, I will give you gold if you will take me to the King.

*Sec. Rob.* (*superbly*). I am an Englishman!

*Bold.* But even an Englishman likes gold! (*He gives money.*) Lead on, good Robber.

*Sec. Rob.* Come on. I will show you where I think

the King is. (*They go out, the Second Robber leading, his bow held high.*)

*First Rob.* (*kneeling at the King's feet*). Oh, King, you are safe! (*He kisses the King's hand.*)

(*Enter the Soldier.*)

*Soldier.* (*shouting*). It is the King! (*The First Robber springs up.*) I'm a made man! (*He approaches, his battle-axe raised.*)

*First Rob.* (*lifting his bow*). Stand where you are. If you move I'll shoot you dead. I never missed my man yet.

*Soldier.* (*gloating over his prize*). I'll divide with you. I'm a made man!—So you're "The good King Alfred!"

*First Rob.* If you speak to the King again, I'll shoot you through the heart. Drop that battle-axe. (*The soldier stares at him.*) Drop that axe. (*He lowers his bow, and takes deliberate aim.*) You drop that axe, or you're a dead Dane. One.....two.....(*The axe falls heavily to the ground.*)—Your Majesty, I'll trouble you for that axe. (*Alfred hands it to him.*) Now, your Majesty, I'll trouble you for the rope that lies behind that tree. (*Alfred finds a coil of rope, and hands it to the First Robber.*)

*Soldier.* Do not kill me! I have four little children in Denmark.

*First Rob.* You coward!—Your Majesty, help me bind this man. (*With the rope, they bind the Soldier's arms fast and tight to his side.*) Closed mouths make no noise. (*He binds his handkerchief around the Soldier's mouth.*) Your Majesty, this man will die poor; you mark my words. (*He tests the binding carefully.*) Now, your Majesty, I will take you to a cottage that I know of, where a good man lives. (*He listens.*) Hark! The forest is full of soldiers. Let us hasten. One never knows (*listening*) what may happen in this wood. Come, your Majesty. We must not be found here. (*They go out, the First Robber leading the Sol-*



dier by the rope, as if the latter were a dog.)

(A Soldier crosses the stage, creepingly, as if in pursuit.)

(Enter a second Soldier, cautiously.)

Soldier. They say that the King was seen in this wood not an hour ago. (He listens. From somewhere, close, a horn is sounded three times. He jerks off his cap joyously.) The King is taken! The King is taken! (He runs out, halloing.)

## CURTAIN.

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### SCENE III.

*In the Cottage, One Week Later.*

(The Cottage. A plain room, with a rude fireplace at one side. King Alfred is discovered sitting on a joint stool by the fire, making arrows.)

King. (slowly). For three days I have not heard from my soldiers. It is dreadful to wait in idleness while others are working and fighting. The cottager and his wife are good to me, but I am very unhappy. They think the King is a very powerful person. What would they say if they knew that the poor outcast stranger were the King?.....I wonder if they are thinking of me now in the Palace? The King is not always the happiest man.....

(Enter the Cottager, in rough-looking clothes, and heavy shoes.)

Cottager. (after watching the King a few seconds). Good evening, stranger.

King. (starting). Oh, is it you? Won't you come sit by the fire?

Cottager. No, I ain't got no time to set down and

think. That's for rich folks. I ain't had a thinkin' spell for more'n a year.

*King. (taking up an arrow).* Then when do the poor folks do their thinking?

*Cottager. (twirling his cap thoughtfully).* They don't think. They aint got time. I jest come from the field, and now I must go and feed my pigs.

*King.* How many pigs have you?

*Cottager.* I am rich for a poor man. I have three.

*King.* Then there are not many poor men that have three pigs?

*Cottager. (sighing).* Not in these parts, stranger.

*King.* Then how do the people live?

*Cottager.* Oh, they steal and beg and git along somehow. What's the use raising pigs? The soldiers only steel them.

*King. (sighing).* But the soldiers are hungry.

*Cottager. (shaking his head earnestly).* And so are the poor people. If the King would stop fighting a while, and take care of the country, we would be better off.

*King. (thoughtfully).* What would you do if you were King?

*Cottager.* I would give every soldier a piece of land and a plow, and let him earn his own living. There is no good in all this fighting. Well, I must go. The nights is gettin' colder. *(He lumbers out, sighing heavily.)*

*King. (looking into the fire).* "If the King would stop fighting a while, and take care of the country, we would be better off." Of course war is a hard thing, but we can not stop fighting now. He does not understand. *(He looks at his arrow, then falls to thinking, with folded arms.)*

*(Enter the Cottager's wife, briskly, with a pan and a toasting-fork.)*

*Wife. (going to the fire-place).* My honest fellow, will you watch these cakes for me a few minutes?

*King.* (*rousing himself*). Yes indeed. What sort of cakes are they—sweet cakes?

*Wife.* (*severely, stirring the fire*). No, they are not sweet cakes. You can not expect sweet cakes every day.

*King.* I do not. I beg your pardon.

*Wife.* (*putting the cakes on the fire, one by one*). These cakes are made of oatmeal, and they are very good cakes. So long as the King will keep on fighting those dreadful Danes, what can you expect? Be thankful for oatmeal cakes.

*King.* What would you do if you were King?

*Wife.* (*straightening up, toasting-fork in hand*). I would send the Danes about their business, and teach the poor folks how to read. Now, here, see that these cakes do not burn.

*King.* (*hitching his stool nearer the fire*). I will.

*Wife.* (*handing him the toasting-fork*). If they begin to burn, turn them with this fork. Now, be careful. If you let them burn, you will not have any supper, that's all. (*She bustles out.*)

*King.* (*alone*). I think that I must be a poor sort of King, after all. These honest folks think I am fighting for glory, when I am fighting to protect their homes. What would become of all the poor little cottages in England if I let the Danes have their own way? I think that cake is burning. (*He leans over the fire.*) Yes, it is. (*He turns a cake with much care.*) They smell pretty nice. I am always hungry these days. I think it must be the fresh air. (*He leans on his elbow, watching the cakes dreamily, and gradually falls asleep, the fork slipping to the floor.*)

(*Enter the Cottager's Wife with a tin plate.*)

*Wife.* Has the good man come in yet? (*The King does not hear.*) Has the good man come in yet? (*She goes up to the King.*) Oh, the lazy fellow is asleep! And the cakes are burning! (*She shakes him roundly.*) You are an idle fellow! For shame!

King. (*waking*). I—I—why—

Wife. (*boxing his ears lightly*). You have left the cakes burn! You will be willing enough to eat them by and by, and yet you can not watch them for two minutes! (*There is a knocking without.*) Put them on this plate—if you can do that much! (*She hurries out. The King awkwardly forks the cakes onto the tin plate.*)

(*Enter the Robbers, escorting the Chief Counsellor, in his dress of state. He carries over his arm a long dark cloak.*)

First Rob. (*waving an arrow toward the stooping King*). There the King is.

Chief C. Your Majesty!

King. (*turning*). Eh? My Counsellor! (*He drops the tin plate, and comes toward the Counsellor with outstretched hands.*)

Chief C. (*stiffly*). I am glad to see your Majesty, but what are you doing?

King. (*ruefully looking at the scattered cakes*). The good wife left me to mind the cakes, and I let them burn. And now I have dropped them all! What news do you bring? How did you find me?

Chief C. The Robbers guided me. They have kept watch over your Majesty all the time.

King. (*smiling on the Robbers*). They are my faithful friends. I owe my life to them. (*The Robbers bow very low.*)

Chief C. They will escort us back to the Palace. (*to the Robbers*). Guard the cottage until we come out. (*The Robbers bow and retire.*)

Chief C. Your Majesty, there was a great battle fought yesterday, and the Danes were driven backward toward the sea. Tomorrow we will be ready to fight again. (*He produces the King's crown and unwraps it.*) You must return to the Palace immediately. I have brought your crown.

King. (*putting on his crown*). Let us lose no time. (*He bundles up his arrows, to take with him.*)

(Enter the Cottager, hastily.)

*Cottager.* (falling on his knees). Spare me! Spare a poor cowherd! Oh King Alfred, spare me!

*King.* Rise, my friend. If my subjects were all as thoughtful as you, I could be a better King. (*The Cottager rises, and waits, silent and awed, in the background.*) All I have done is make a few arrows. (*He hands his bundle to the Counsellor.*)

(Enter the Cottager's Wife, weeping.)

*Wife.* Your Majesty, I am sorry that I scolded you about the cakes. I did n't mean to b—b—box your ears! (*She cries and cries.*)

*King.* (to the Counsellor). Give me my cloak. (*The Counsellor helps him put it on.*) You were right to scold me, Madam. I should not have let the cakes burn. You told me to watch them, and I was unfaithful to my task. (*to Cottager*). And you, sir, are right about war. War is not a good thing, but we can not stop fighting until we win. Always remember that a King is like other men; he must do the best he can, and keep on hoping. You shall hear from me soon. I do not forget my friends.

*Chief C.* Your Majesty, let us go. (*They go out.*)

*Wife.* (wiping her eyes). He is a good King.

*Cottager.* (sighing). Yes, he is a good enough King, but it is hard to be a King.

*Wife.* (picking up an arrow). Oh, he left one of his arrows! I shall keep it for my little boy! Why is it hard to be a King?

*Cottager.* Because a King is only one man. I am going to the barn. When supper is ready, call me. (*He lumbers out.*)

*Wife.* (gathering up the cakes from the floor). Here he was thinking about how he could help us, and I called him a lazy fellow! (*She wraps the cakes up in a cloth.*) I will keep them always. God bless our good King Alfred! (*She goes, carrying the cakes and the arrow, and wiping her eyes.*)



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