

Four Knights Opening

If life could be described in algebraic equations, with love and hate, passion and reason, ingenuousness and perfidy balancing each other out perfectly, then the story I want to tell you would be totally apropos, whereas at present it risks being relegated to the ranks of the merely curious, although I do hope this will make it none the worse - maybe even better - for what if not the curious can spice up the watery puree of the everyday. Of course, among my readers there are vegetarians as well, who prefer lenten verses and unseasoned novels, but these I would beg in advance not to trouble themselves and refer them to the literary disciples of Bragg.

Last fall I spent ten days in Abkhazia, at a small resort, in the home of a Greek woman I know, where besides me there were two other Muscovites, a young couple with a toddler from Leningrad, a Lithuanian woman with her granddaughter, and a big noisy family from I think Donetsk. I felt like part of a happening going on in that cramped yard, on the patch of ground between the well, the makeshift kitchen, and the hen-house. Here, under an awning entwined with grapevines, stood a long table - the main prop and, simultaneously, the logical center of the improvisation played day in and day out, with variations, without pause or cease, with only a brief intermission of three or four hours, the hours when all cats are gray. The first, even before dawn, to cast his vote was the toddler behind the thin veneer screen that demonstrated yet again the conventional nature of the barrier artificially erected between Muscovites and Leningraders. Directly under the window of my small room in the half-basement where, in addition to me, two other devotees of sea bathing gladly took shelter, a stray mutt yelped irritably as he relived his proletarian origins with particular intensity in his dreams. The door to the annex opposite slammed - the miner dynasty was beginning its pilgrimage to holy places. Then a light blazed on in the kitchen: Grisha's wife, for whom all the sounds of the world had been drowned out once and for all in the howl of the giant pterodactyls that had chosen the Adler airport, put the coffeepot on the burner. A little later Grisha would get up and prime the well pump - an act of mercy (not for his wife, for us (:: maybe today we wouldn't hear their children, a girl and a boy, youthful terrorists with imaginations, carry out their next military sortie bombarding the peaceable nursery. Sudden animation in the hen-house could mean just one thing: the chicken god, whose superiority the rooster himself reluctantly acknowledged, had come out into the yard. I'll say! He was carrying a pail of choice millet mixed with something that doesn't have a name, and if it does, then an

abstruse one, Latin, for the man runs a pharmacy, and his name is Fyodor, and he's married to Grisha's younger sister, who, as every chick knows, is expecting a child, otherwise why would the sewing machine be buzzing day in and out - Sofia is sewing a layette, that's quite obvious. But if Sofia doesn't get up soon, then her other sister, Olga - she's the one who invited me to visit - she, I hear through my slumber, will have completely taken over in the kitchen. Meanwhile the nice Leningraders' fed toddler is stirring up trouble with the disgruntled mutt, who is at his wits' end in the morning trying to figure out where he buried his sugar bone the night before. The miner dynasty amicably begins their ablution rite. In the annex, the six-year-old cutie is lisping something in Lithuanian. Car horns - that's Olga's parents, whose appearance the lightly sleeping grandmother blesses from the upper terrace, returning from a wedding.

That is how - more or less - the prologue to the day's action was played out, usually in several open areas, but primarily in the yard, and more specifically at the long table under the awning, to the cackling of hens, the buzzing of the above-mentioned sewing machine, and the unobtrusive muttering of the two televisions, one color and one black and white, that stood in front of the kitchen, one on top of the other, and fell silent long after midnight. But if I experienced the prologue somewhat vicariously, then the subsequent peripeteiae unfolded with my direct participation. I immediately became virtually the central, albeit passive, figure - because I was a guest and, consequently, the ideal repository for food in the eyes of three women. Soon, though, my role expanded somewhat. I suspect that, willingly or not, I had come under attack from Grisha, who had given the grandmother an earful about how I wrote for Moscow magazines, whereas the only actual publication I could claim was a want ad in the classifieds ("Prepared to publish a story, 25 pages, in any magazine. No offers for foreign issues please...") and how through me they could all go down in History. The cult of the printed word is obviously so highly developed among Abkhazian Greeks that I wasn't even all that surprised when two days later the yard filled with visitors. Neighbors came to get my help writing a letter to a minister suggesting that the therapeutic mud baths finally be built next to their house, on the site of a perpetual puddle whose curative properties had been enjoyed by local inhabitants from time immemorial; under cover of night I was approached by a fussy man wearing an elastic headband who implored me in a theatrical whisper to inform certain authorities about the criminal activities of the local mafia, who secretly, in the foothills, behind a solid fence with an "M" on it, were testing explosive devices so

powerful they made his skull crack; a shepherd came down from the mountains to stir up a case against a large flock of sheep that had refused to yield "hot" wool. I was sitting at the dining table, under the awning, which bent under its heavy load of grapevines, among steaming polenta, and lavash, and roast chickens, amid big bottles and small, huddled over petitions, complaints, and proposals. I'm not exaggerating: never before had I worked so intensively. The main thing was that never before had I tested myself in so many different genres at one time.

The grandmother took an active part in my work. This expressed itself in her recounting for each petitioner, in his presence, all there was to know about him, starting with the petty theft in his bare-belly past and ending with the escapades in his jeans present, and with such knowledge of the affair, moreover, that one could only guess what role she herself had played in this, shall we say, chamber play. She unrolled each compromising scroll with frightful thoroughness, and woe to whoever tried to make changes or clarifications in that list. For some reason the story has stuck in my memory about some distant relative who at his daughter's wedding put the gifts of money in a canvas bag and made sure to write down the exact sum and name of the giver so that he couldn't be caught unawares later by the organs of taxation.

So once when, I remember, I had just finished composing for a nervous young man a petition to the police to issue him a new passport or, at least, insert a page in the old, for the young man dreamed of marrying, and it turned out there was nowhere to note this seminal event in his life other than under "Military Service" since the preceding one, "Family Status," had been thickly tattooed by various registries in the country and there was no more space, on that quiet Sunday afternoon, yes, Sunday, because it was on Sundays that the clans joined in battle, the two branches of the Onufriadi family tree, which during the week would have no part of one another over the six-foot fence that separated their adjacent lots, a stone fence festooned with the yellow flowers of hate, and so on one such quiet Sunday, when the morning battles had abated and someone was getting first aid and often second aid immediately after from the chicken god, who, which in this case is more important, was also the head pharmacist, and until the evening skirmishes, for another two or three hours, in that pause when, exhausted by the midday heat, the fowl fell silent in the dusty branches of the persimmon and the very air breathed love and forgiveness, the grandmother asked me to bring her her book from the bedroom. I climbed to the upper terrace, walked through the living room with the real stucco molding, through the sisters' room, where a week's worth

of panties was exhibited on the columns of their Akai sound system, and down a small hall past a hank of cans of Greek olives - a kind of Hellenic flourish that successfully enlivened the interior - and finally found myself in the grandmother's bedroom. Here reigned cleanliness and barracks-like order. I easily located the right book on the shelf and was already getting ready to leave when my eye fell on chess figures set out on the nightstand in the niche. I took a step closer to size up the position. The next move would checkmate White. But if... I moved a white pawn to h4.... Still checkmate, just two moves later. I restored it to its previous position and left the bedroom.

The grandmother was giving the nervous groom tea, but as soon as I handed her the dog-eared, coverless volume, she forgot all about her guest. She carefully took the well-read book, opened it at random, and began reading to herself, turning several pages at a time due to her obvious agitation. The silence was getting heavy; even the spool on the sewing machine whirred in fits and starts. The nervous groom undertook a concealed maneuver in the direction of the far corner of the table, having forgotten all about his ill-starred passport. Suddenly the grandmother tore herself away from the book and, aiming the bulging pupils in her sunken eye sockets at the groom, uttered, either her own words or citing from memory: "In passionate love perfect happiness consists not so much in intimacy as in the last step toward it." The groom stiffened. The sewing machine fell silent. Even the hen-house experienced some confusion, or so it seemed to me. The grandmother sighed heavily and once again gave herself over to reading. Sofia, with exactly the same sigh, which was streaked not only with understanding but with tacit approval for the grandmother's hidden thoughts, turned the wheel on her Singer. A few minutes later the grandmother laid the book down on her knees, and her face became pensive.

"He's right," she said quietly. "A proud woman is most vexed by petty, inconsequential people, and she vents that vexation on noble souls." Distractedly, the grandmother straightened a folded under corner of the oilcloth. "Out of pride a woman is capable of marrying her idiot neighbor just to sting the idol of her heart that much more. Yes, yes, an idiot!" she repeated, convinced, turning for some reason toward the groom, who under her gaze progressed to a new stage - petrification.

"What kind of match is it you have set up in your room?" I tried to steer the conversation into a calmer channel. Sofia's eyes blazed in my direction, but I didn't understand the signal and continued with the undue familiarity of a companion to the grandmother: "To tell the truth, in that situation I wouldn't risk playing White."

"Or Black," followed the scathing rebuke.

I bit my tongue.

"Perhaps I should go, yes?" the groom interjected, and he leaned all the way across the table for his passport.

No one stopped him.

"That's enough layette sewing already," said the grandmother as soon as she had shut the iron gate behind the visitor. "You'd think you were a hen hatching a dozen eggs. You ought to be sitting with your husband - look at the black eye Fyodor's got, and they're probably just about to start in again."

Sofia stood up abruptly, inasmuch as her eight-month belly permitted, and went into the big house. The grandmother and I were left to ourselves.

"Don't be offended at me, old lady that I am. When I think about that I'm not myself. Look, there's a gleam in your eye! All right, since that's the case, then listen. There you are looking at me, at my hands with their dark spots, and you're thinking - don't interrupt - and you're thinking the old lady is worse than a mortal sin. But do you know what I was called in my youth? Yelena the Beautiful. That's my photograph up there - take a look, take a look. Kostas stole a gold bracelet from his own mother - just to prove that he was prepared to do anything for me. And I wiped my feet on him... and a year later we were wed. Funny, yes? After that, Niko often came to see us. He came and sat - one hour, two, and then left without saying a word. My Kostas felt, if he wants to sit let him sit, Niko may have been only his cousin, but they were family, they grew from a single tree. For me it was hell. I was even happy when they sat down at the chessboard, well, I thought, even so, that made it all easier. Easier! But to see him nearly every blessed day?! True, he never started in with me about anything at all, I'm not going to lie. Even on my name day, when he brought me this very hook, Stendhal, he didn't say anything, only when they left to play and I opened up to the bookmark and there it was underlined... just a minute" - she skimmed the dog-eared volume - "here: 'The sole medicine for jealousy consists, perhaps, in very close observation of the rival's happiness.' Yes..." She paused. "You know, I don't understand anything about chess, but once my husband, pleased with a victory over poor Niko (he almost always beat him), began to demonstrate certain moves to me on the board, I listened closely and toward the end asked: 'Then why did he lose to you' My husband laughed for a long time and then said: 'He lost and he's going to keep on losing. Because he's as stubborn as a bull. I move a pawn and he moves a pawn, I move a bishop and he moves a bishop.' 'Can't you do that?' 'Yes! You can do anything! But I have my pace, you have to understand that! I have my pace!' Of course, I didn't understand anything,

and he called me a fool and vowed never to talk about chess to me again." Only now did the grandmother notice the flies crawling brazenly over the jar of fig jam - for five years already she had been trying unsuccessfully to get it past her insatiable grandchildren and feed it to her great-grandchildren, a la the classic scene in the city park where the sharp sparrows steal the best crumbs out from under the noses of the pigeons for whom those crumbs were intended. The grandmother shooed the flies away and covered the jar with a plastic lid. "But he did" - she slowed down, as if checking her own memory - "he did speak to me about chess one more time. It was right before the war, five or six years must have passed."

"You mean to say that all those years they continued sparring over the chessboard?"

"You can imagine. When Kostas was hospitalized with suspected jaundice in the winter of '39, Niko's sister - you've seen her - at his request brought my dear husband messages to the hospital for two weeks. Only afterward did we realize that the only thing in those fat bundles was his next move."

"Yelena Kharlampiyevna," I reminded her, "you said that your husband spoke with you about chess one other time."

"Yes. After the match that remains on the board today. It was their last match." The grandmother's spine suddenly unbent, her eyes flashed, and for a moment I saw before me that same Yelena, Yelena the Beautiful, for whose sake it was no sin to take a gold bracelet from your mother. "He lost that time."

"Who? Niko?"

"My husband," she said almost indifferently, but, strangely, in her tone I sensed a note of triumph. "It was that rare instance when he lost. And how he lost!"

"Yes, it's a clever trap" I agreed.

"I'm not talking about any trap." The grandmother smiled. "They were playing, as people put it then, for stakes."

"You mean for money?"

"Not necessarily. For money, for a hunting rifle, for just about anything. The Onufriadis are a wealthy family."

"So what did your husband lose that time?" I asked, smiling in turn. "A cow?"

"Me," she said simply.

"Who?" I didn't understand.

"Me," she repeated.

I made an attempt to inflate a new smile, as if to say that we too are capable of recognizing a successful joke, but I don't think anything came of it.

"My husband also decided that Niko was joking," the grandmother continued as if nothing were amiss. "But he was so sure of himself that he accepted that audacious, that insulting bet."

Afterward, trying to vindicate himself to me, he swore that he'd never even considered the thought of defeat. He knew Niko's passion for copying his moves so he settled on the four knights opening - you see, I'm not such a fool anymore, I've learned something - he settled on it as entailing no risk. They'd already come across this opening, and Kostas as White had always checkmated Niko. I don't know whether it's true, but that's how my husband explained it to me later."

"So what happened?"

"No one knows. He was like a crazy man afterward. Shouting, tearing his hair. He wanted to kill me, himself, him. He'd even convinced himself that I'd set the whole thing up."

"But maybe Niko" - I stopped short, looking for the word - "maybe he didn't play completely above board?"

"You mean he cheated? the grandmother clarified brutally. "Niko would never have done that!" For the first time she seemed to raise her voice, though she immediately took herself in hand. "Do you really think that my husband didn't check each move a hundred times? He sat over that devil's board until dark."

"And didn't find a mistake?"

"No."

I stole a look at the grandmother - old, completely gray, all in black, which made her seem almost incorporeal - and I couldn't ask the question that was on the tip of my tongue.

"I know what you want to ask. You want to ask whether my husband kept his bet? This is how I'd answer: he was too weak to send me off to something like that. He sprawled at my feet, hugging his gun, but when I got up from bed in the middle of the night and started dressing, he pretended to be asleep."

She fell silent, and so did I, even the two hens circled each other silently in mortal combat over a watermelon rind.

"But Niko, he didn't pretend," the grandmother continued. "No, he was not one for pretending. He was waiting for me.... He was waiting to spurn me. Imagine! Niko turned me out! But my husband never found about that, you understand, and before dawn they set out for White Cliffs. Have you been there?"

Yes, I had. The day I arrived the Leningraders took me with them to White Cliffs, which turned out to be stone cankers like dripped candle wax, right by the sea, about a half-hour's brisk walk. White Cliffs... a beautiful spot, no denying it... only desolate, especially that early.

"So I don't have to explain how far it is from here. But I heard it. A milky fog had just begun to disperse outside my window when I heard two shots, almost simultaneously."

I was expecting more, but the grandmother rose heavily from the bench and started clearing the dirty dishes.

"That's all?" burst out of me. I could tell how incredibly

naive that sounded. Like a child who hears a sad story and expresses his objection to the cruel ending.

The grandmother shrugged her shoulders in reply.

"Help me clear the dishes away from sin," was all she said. "They'll be starting soon." She craned her neck as if she were expecting a heavenly sign: lightning was about to strike the earth, like a golden staff, and then they could start.

And suddenly I realized! It was over her, over the grandmother, that they came together every Sunday! Of course! For forty-five years two branches of the Onufriadi family - grandfathers, fathers, and now even sons - bloodied each other over a once beautiful woman, each side hoping to vindicate, albeit half a century too late, their original claims, and nothing was more important for either than this. It meant restoring the original earthly order, when love was equivalent to itself and did not require adjustments for the size of a dowry or parental ties, when higher justice meant higher justice, only that and nothing more, when it was hardly appropriate to argue in the spirit of the modern thesis of the "survival of the fittest," and even if these latter-day Achilles and Patroclus - just as bellicose, just as naive - proved nothing to each other before the Second Coming, even so, every week they tried to demonstrate beyond a doubt to this proud old woman - and with her all mankind - the triumph of the spirit over pitiful matter.

"Have you gone deaf!" The grandmother was practically shoving plates into my face. "Why feed you men! Here, take these to the kitchen, dear."

I took the pile of sauce-encrusted dishes, chicken bones crunching between them, from her hands. When I had ferried everything to the kitchen, I was ordered to take Stendhal back. In the grandmother's bedroom I made a space for myself on the sagging couch, in a lap between two broken springs, and buried myself in the book. I should say that the book was pretty heavily penciled. One sentence was circled in red: "For a girl it is a much greater violation of her modesty to lie down in bed with a man whom she has seen twice in her life after saying a few words in Latin in a church than to be forced to yield to a man she has adored for two years." Lord, that's about them! was my first thought. And my second was that she hadn't circled that in red, he had! I hurried, afraid they would call me, the courier, back. I turned the well-worn, dog-eared pages, snatching certain bits at random, and suddenly a shock ran through me: I had reread a sentence three times, not believing my own eyes, but right then I heard steps on the terrace, and I started like a thief caught committing a crime, slipped Stendhal into a slit on the shelf, and left quickly.

On the terrace Grisha, dressed, had sprawled out to sleep. Evidently the mosquitoes had finally eaten him up in his room.

Right before the sun set they "joined" once more. From my small room in the half-basement I heard little Niko, the legendary Niko's grand-nephew, invoke Christ the Savior to witness his opponent breaking the unwritten laws of fisticuffs; I heard Andrei Konstantinovich, Kostas' son, who had graciously opened the doors of his home to me, a stranger, loudly triumph after his crowning blow to the jaw; I heard them all. All but the grandmother's voice, but I didn't doubt one whit that during those sacred minutes she, as always, was sitting in her wicker chair on the upper terrace and from on high, like Pallas Athena, observing with interest the battle's progress. To the feeble support of my lamp, which the flies had turned into a candled quail's egg, I hastened to write down the astonishing tale. The grandmother, I felt, had omitted something important. But what? Maybe she didn't know herself. Didn't know? But what about the sentence from Stendhal? Couldn't that sentence, in fact, have escaped her notice, even though it was underlined? And that opening... four knights... why did it trouble me so? Her husband, she said, had found no mistake, had checked each move a hundred times and hadn't found... Actually though, why should I believe her husband? Niko's win was no accident, that's clear, the stakes were too high for that, and that meant... Here the thread of my reasoning broke time after time. I had to go out and rewrite the position, that's what. And play it out from there. Granted, with my chess erudition I wasn't going to play it out very far. No matter. I'd go back to Moscow and sort it out there. Yes, I honestly admit, I was quite obsessed by then, and when an idea gets hold of me, I can hang the moon in ribbons.

I apologize in advance for rattling off how imperceptibly those last days by the sea passed for me, how I took the grandmother's tkemali home with me, and, oh yes, her divine fig jam, how I didn't have a return ticket and Grisha's wife Tanya got me an "overflow" flight, favor for favor, after all I'd written a letter to Aeroflot for the girls on duty in which I wrote something histrionic about how they were going deaf on the airstrip and weren't even getting any extra compensation for it. Not that all this was unimportant, but right now, this minute, I, like you too, reader, doubtless, am already there, in Moscow, where, one would like to believe, the solution to this bizarre story awaits us.

The day after I flew into Moscow, on Tuesday, I called the Central Chess Club and was distressed to hear that the library was only open evenings. In order to make the time pass more quickly, I saw a trashy movie, ate lunch twice - on grounds of

nerves (and was still hungry)

- and roamed the city. By four o'clock on the button I was at the cozy building on Gogol Boulevard. In the library they gave me literature on the theory of openings, a box of wooden chess pieces, and a folding board. In less than an hour I had found what I was looking for. Quite agitated, I played out the fatal match that had ended in two shots. It turned out that in 1936 the newspaper Evening Moscow had chosen this opening for a match with its readers. Up to the eleventh move Black copied White's moves exactly. Further continuation of this symmetry quickly threatened the readers with checkmate, so on White's eleventh move Qd2 they moved the bishop to f3, taking the knight. But that didn't save them either and on the twentieth move they conceded defeat.

Did Niko Onufriadi know about this curious match? I don't think I would be wrong if I answered in the affirmative. But after all, he, Niko, had won with Black! Yes, won ... after losing many times, knowingly following the false lead pursued by Evening Moscow's readers. Yes, over and over again, he lost to his cousin and rival, laying the groundwork for the principal match of his life. And when the decisive moment came, he played the eleventh move in a new way

- he moved to check with his knight to f3. Lulled by easy victories, suspecting nothing, his rival made his following moves essentially under his dictate. On the fourteenth move Niko modestly moved his king to the corner of the board... and White was trapped! After Kt:f6 followed Rd8. Mate! A belated attempt to open a "window" to the white king also, as I had been convinced even then, in the grandmother's bedroom, led to mate. Well well! Kostas' eyes must have popped out of his head. I wouldn't have been surprised if he'd had a stroke.

You ask: what makes me think Niko had to have known about that match? And if he did, then what devil made him play giveaway with his rival for so long? Stop! Why don't we ask ourselves how long? If my memory serves me well, between Kostas' first and last attempts to familiarize his wife with the ancient game five or six years passed, the last one of these, shall we say, pre-duel conversations taking place right before the war. Consequently... Don't rush, this requires absolute precision. I set out for the public library and in the card file under "Stendhal, Henri Beyle," I looked for the same volume from the fifteen-volume collected works he'd given to Yelena the Beautiful. The 1935 edition! Good for you, old woman, everything checks out - six years. So that's when this maniac got the idea for his fantastic plan! I'm talking about that sentence in Stendhal that so astonished me.

So, it was then, in '35, that Niko was frequenting his

cousin's house. I don't think he had a precise plan of action at first. I think he got the idea of adopting "mirror" chess as his ally from the comment in Evening Moscow. An ingenious idea, by the way. How else, I ask you, could you program your rival for the desired result? Oh, I didn't believe in those countless losses of his from the very beginning! Anyone beautiful Yelena had loved for fifty years was worth her weight in gold. She did love him, she did! "He was so pleased with his victory over poor Niko," she let drop. That word, "poor," cost her dearly. The sly dog, he had let himself be eaten so often in this game of cat and mouse that toward the end he risked losing the ways of the hunter. Even more amazing, though, was his long-suffering patience. To come to the house of someone who belongs to another every day for six years and, without giving yourself away, lose to a conceited fool time and again - you'll agree, not everyone is capable of that. I figured in my head: in six years they must have played about fifteen hundred matches. The openings varied, naturally, however by all accounts up to a specific moment he always mirrored the moves of his opponent, passing it off as his aberration, or "stubbornness," as Kostas assumed, but in actual fact by degrees accustoming the latter to the idea that he would go on like that forever. In this sea of matches the four knights opening must have come up more than once (after all, Kostas himself admitted as much!), but, amazingly, Niko passed up his chance over and over again. He had no right to take the risk! And he suggested his astonishing bet, of course, not before the start of their decisive match but after, when their knights, White and Black, were rushing at each other, foaming at the mouth, and everything became immediately clear, and both weapons shot soundlessly, so that a little later, at dawn, the echo could reverberate at White Cliffs. But then why, we ask ourselves, having born his cross and reached the threshold of bliss, didn't he take that last step? That riddle, I'm afraid, is beyond me.

My story is drawing to a close. I'm looking back over the first pages and I can't shake a certain ambivalence: if the main, love-chess, sujet has been written more or less straightforwardly and convincingly, then everything leading up to it seems to fall short: a strange intonation creeps into the description of the household arrangement, sentences are at times heavy and airless, the humor, as they say, of the Evil One. What's to be done? Art imitating life never rings true.

I cannot part with my reader on this sad note. The match has been played, the pieces are returning to their starting positions. What are we to do? I roamed aimlessly in the rain and thought about my beautiful Greek lady. I also felt like sacrificing something for her, if not my life then... then... I

went to Kuznetsky Bridge Street, scouted around among the black market dealers, and the next day had in hand, for a mere 500 percent markup, a paperback of ambiguous color with an equally ambiguous sketch depicting either a breaking adipose heart or a time bomb toward which the foxfire of passion was inexorably stealing up a safety fuse. It was Stendhal. I sent the grandmother the book, having inserted a bookmark. She would open Stendhal and surely turn immediately to the sentence underlined in red: "A woman can be won, like a chess match.."

Having come to a full stop, I surveyed the field of battle one last time. Suddenly a shock ran through me. What blindness! All it took for White to escape checkmate was to play: 15. Rfcl Rg8+ 16. Kfl Bg2+ 17. Kel. Kostas could have saved himself! My poor hero - your dream nearly burst, like a balloon. But the story has already been written. I'm happy I gave you this illusion, albeit at the expense of my own mistake.

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