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A Room of One's Own in the Water Castle

There is a place where the world loosens its grip on you. Where the urgency of days — their noise, their demands, their small tyrannies — falls away, and something older, quieter begins to breathe again. For some, that place is a studio or a library. For others, it is a residency: a temporary home where time stretches, where the work gathers its own gravity, and where the artist becomes, for a brief moment, both exile and sovereign.

Virginia Woolf once said that a writer needs “a room of one's own.” But perhaps a residency is more than just a room. It is an ecosystem, a fragile little universe where life bends itself toward art. To enter a residency is to step out of one narrative and into another — one where your only currency is time, your only map the pathways between your mind and the page.

Imagine, for a moment, that this residency is a castle deep in the forest. The air here is heavier, richer, laced with damp moss and echoes of rain. Water surrounds you on all sides, as if the world itself has drawn a boundary and whispered: *This is yours. Go inside.*

The castle carries its history in silence. You walk its corridors and feel the weight of centuries pressing against the stone. You sense the ghosts of those who came before — monks copying manuscripts, exiled poets, wandering philosophers — all seeking the same thing: solitude that is not loneliness, distance that sharpens the gaze, silence that deepens the voice.

Residencies have existed in spirit long before we gave them a name. The medieval patronage systems, Renaissance courts, and secluded monasteries — they were all early experiments in one radical idea:

that creativity needs shelter. That thought, like seed, cannot bloom in constant wind. In the 20th century, the idea began to take shape more intentionally. From Yaddo in upstate New York to the castles of Central Europe, spaces emerged where artists could be both untethered and held, alone yet profoundly connected.

There is a paradox here: residencies isolate us to bring us closer — to the work, to ourselves, to one another. The castle separates you from the world, and yet within its walls you find a new community. You sit together at long tables, passing bread and stories, your conversations drifting from the trivial to the transcendent. There is no need to justify what you do; here, art is assumed. And because it is assumed, you can finally stop defending it and simply live inside it.

For translators, residencies carry a particular kind of magic. Translation is an act of listening — of holding one voice inside your chest while coaxing another into being. At home, the noise of life often drowns this fragile dialogue. But here, inside the hush of the castle, you can hear the writer more clearly. The syntax of another world begins to breathe through you; the silences between words become as meaningful as the words themselves. You realize that translation, too, is a form of residence — living inside someone else's house of language, then carefully rebuilding it stone by stone in your own.

I came to this residency with a mission — to seek out the stories that deserve to travel, to cross borders, and to find new homes in other languages. I have four weeks within these walls, and I hope to choose four books — one each week — that I will carry from Polish into Ukrainian. I spend my days reading, listening, searching for voices that might speak to Ukrainian readers with intimacy and

power. When I find them, I translate a few pages, hoping to enchant Ukrainian publishers, to make them fall in love as I do.

This work is slow, deliberate, and full of wonder. It is also, in its quiet way, an act of resistance against division. Every book chosen here is a promise — that someone, somewhere, will hear a voice they would not have heard otherwise. That across languages, across histories, across distances, we can find one another in the pages of a book.

This is how we build bridges: through sentences, through listening, through care. Inside this castle, I am surrounded by conservators who restore the past, by a pianist who threads together two continents with music, and by translators who dissolve borders with words. Together, we create a fragile, luminous constellation of human presence, each of us carrying something across — whether memory, melody, or meaning.

And yet residencies are never only about the work. They are about permission. Permission to step away from the endless currents of obligation and to enter a deeper current, one where time thickens and widens. In a culture that demands speed, output, and constant visibility, residencies insist on slowness. They protect the fragile, invisible part of the creative process: the waiting, the wandering, the rewriting, the failure. They remind us that art, unlike the world, refuses to be hurried.

The castle becomes a mirror. Outside, it stands apart, surrounded by water, self-contained, dignified in its isolation. Inside, it shelters a living, breathing experiment in connection — between past and present, self and other, silence and speech. And so does the artist: withdrawn, yes, but only to open toward something larger. To create is to turn inward so that one might emerge transformed.

Eventually, you leave. The gates close behind you, the forest thins, and the roads return. The noise of the world rushes back, but something inside has shifted. You carry the place with you — the echoes of footsteps on stone, the slow mornings by the window, the knowledge that, for a while, you lived inside a world entirely shaped by possibility.

Residencies exist because art cannot survive in constant exposure, nor in absolute exile. They offer us a rare gift: a room within the world, yet slightly apart from it. A place where the imagination can breathe, where the self is both unbound and grounded, where creation becomes inevitable simply because, for once, there is nothing else.

In the end, what remains is not only the work you made, but the reminder that such spaces must exist — these small, fiercely protected islands of time and silence. Because without them, much of what is beautiful, unsettling, and enduring in our world might never be written, never be translated, never come into being at all.

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