

Taking It Slow, Russian-Style

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

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Still from a cartoon "Ice Age."

Плестись: to wend

You'd think I'd be used to Moscow winters by now. And although I love the snow, by mid-February I start running out of energy. I'm like a big balloon with a slow leak, deflating and falling behind in everything.

In this state, creativity comes slowly. So I have languidly taken my time looking into how to be late in Russian.

These are important words, since being late is a Moscow thing. There's traffic, or a metro so packed you have to wait for three trains before you can squeeze on, or — let's be real — an alarm clock you slept through because it's still pitch black at 8 a.m.

If you're late, a good word to use is

задержаться (to be detained), which is nicely unspecific. After all, at

their✘airport when they announce “

Самолёт

задерживается на три

часа” (The plane will✘be three hours late) you don’t know if it’s because they are waiting for a✘spare part or because the pilot is sitting in traffic.

Sometimes задерживаться is to stay for a while — Поехали на

неделю, задержались на

лето (We went for✘a week and stayed for the summer). But sometimes people or things don’t stick✘around for as long as you’d like.

Ваня наш нигде подолгу не задерживался (Our Vanya never stayed in any✘place for long.)

Деньги никогда не задерживались у моего

бывшего мужа (With my ex – money never stuck around for long.)

Another✘all-purpose word is

запаздывать (to be late). Запаздывает зарплата — уже три

месяца без денег! (Our salaries are being held up — we✘haven’t been paid in three months.)

Язык всегда запаздывает — сначала явление, потом его название (Language always lags behind — ✘first a phenomenon appears, then the name for it.)

If you✘don’t like those words, there’s

отставать, which describes all kinds of ways of

getting✘behind, such as taking your time when you shouldn’t. Moms and Dads are always✘shouting to their kids:

Ребята, не отставать, нас ждут люди! (Come on, kids, don’t

dawdle!✘People are waiting for us!) Inanimate objects can also run late:

Часы на

кухне отстают на

десять минут (The clock in the kitchen is slow✘by ten minutes.) As can musicians:

Скрипач

отставал от оркестра (The violinist got behind the orchestra.) Or countries: Мы всё

больше отстаём от

развитых стран по

продолжительности жизни (We are lagging further and further✘behind the developed countries in longevity.) Sometimes you can just be behind✘in everything:

Вот видите, как

вы отстали от

жизни! (Look how behind✘the times you are!)

But my new✘favorite word for lingering and lagging is

плестись. When the word is used with

a person, it means✘to take your time going somewhere, often due to impediments:

В один

вечер, когда снег уже подтаял и

на дорогах была жидкая, грязная каша, я

плелась к дому (I wended my way home one evening when the snow had melted and

the roads were covered with thin, filthy, porridge-like slush.) Or fatigue:

Я позади всех

плёлся, потому что

измотался за день (I trudged behind everyone because I was worn out for the day.)

You can also lag behind everyone —

плестись

в хвосте: Жизнь — это скоростная трасса, если можешь — обгоняй, не можешь —

плетись в

хвосте (Life is a superhighway. Pass if you can. But if you can't —you bring up the rear.)

In February I'm definitely bringing up the rear.

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