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Laying Low

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Лежать: to lie

Stand, sit, lie ... sit, lie, stand ...

I know I sound like a dog trainer on drugs, but bear with me just a little bit longer. You'll thank me some day. If you use the wrong stance verb in Russian, it's as if you were saying in English: My keys are standing on the counter. The response is likely to be: Вы откуда? (What country are you from?)

Today's stance verb is лежать (to lie). Some things always lie. Hair, for example, lies on your head — that is, когда не стоят дыбом (when it's not standing on end). Как заставить волосы лежать аккуратно? (How do you make your hair stay neatly in place?) ◙

Money, when not changing hands or working for you, also lies. Деньги лежат в банке, на счету, в кошельке, в ящике на кухне (The money is in the bank, in an account, in my wallet, in a drawer in the kitchen).

Most food that is not in packages lies. That is, you might say соль стоит на полке (the salt is on the shelf) because it's in a package or saltcellar. Or: кетчуп стоит около плиты (the ketchup is by the stove) because it's in a container. But хлеб, овощи и фрукты лежат на столе (bread, vegetables and fruit are on the table).

So it seems that if something doesn't have a base or an obvious top and bottom, it lies. Детские мячики лежат в углу (The kids' balls are in the corner).

Therefore, shadows also lie, even if they are on the ceiling. Or perhaps like balls, they lie because they are thrown (отброшены)? In any case: В саду было тихо, прохладно, и тёмные тени лежали на земле (It was quiet and cool in the garden, and dark shadows lay on the ground).

People who are sick or injured lie in hospitals or at home, even if they are not bedridden. Он лежит в больнице со сломанной рукой (He's in the hospital with a broken arm). Муж простудился, лежит дома (My husband caught a cold and is taking a sick day at home).

When viewed from above or afar, elements of a landscape — however massive — often lie. Перед нами лежало море (The sea lay below us). Even some tall structures on a high hill might lie in Russian, although in English they would stand: Небольшая крепость лежала на высоком и крутом берегу реки (A small fort stood — literally "lay" — on a high and steep river bank).

And if something isn't being used, isn't working or is in storage — it lies. It doesn't matter if the thing is placed horizontally, vertically or any which way. Лежат дома косметические спонжики, но пользоваться ими мне неудобно (I've got cosmetic sponges lying around at home, but I find them hard to use). Зимой наши велосипеды лежат в сарае (In the winter, we put away our bicycles in the shed).

Boxes (коробки) are tricky. Most of the time they seem to lie: Коробка спичек лежит на столе (The matchbox is on the table).

But when they are placed upright (on the short side) or on top of one another, Russian speakers say that they stand: Коробки стояли почти до потолка (The boxes were piled up nearly to the ceiling).

See how important this is?

Or are you thinking: Why can't we just let sleeping dogs lie?

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