

Why My Boots and I Are So Worn Out

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Сапоги каши просят: boot with gaping holes

This spring weather is wild. There's no greater joy than bundling up in four layers of fleece and wading through knee-deep snow at the very end of March. The dogs are happy — nothing like a half meter of fresh snow to cheer a canine's heart — but the human beings are not.

The snow, icy mud and реагенты (de-icing agents) that the city insists are used в допустимых нормах (within acceptable limits) — despite the fact that they bleach your doormats, burn your dog's paws, and sear holes in your \$300, guaranteed-waterproof boots — take a real toll on winter outerwear. I'd like to ritually burn my winter duds when spring finally arrives, but by then there might be nothing left of them.

To describe your tattered clothes, you can go neutral with a word like изношенный (worn), which can be applied to anything from a car motor to a pair of pants. Мои штаны просто изношенные до дыр (My pants are so worn they have holes in them). Or you can just go with

дранный or рваный (holey, torn). Хожу в этих драных штанах уже шесть месяцев (I've been wearing these torn-up pants for six months now).

You might pull some prefixes out of your weather-stained linguistic pocket. The prefix вы-, which denotes an action done to completion, is very useful in this context. Манжеты куртки вытертые (The cuffs on my jacket are threadbare). Also useful is the prefix за-, which conveys the sense of an action done to excess. Тебе не холодно в этих затрёпанных штанах? (Aren't you cold in those frayed pants?) And let's not forget the prefix из- or ис-, which describes an action done to exhaustion. Я как бомж в истасканной курке и истоптанных ботинках (I look like a bum in this beat-up jacket and worn down boots).

If this is the 10th winter you've worn the same old ушанка (fur hat with earflaps), you might take a higher linguistic road with the word ветхий (old and dilapidated). In spiritual discussions, ветхий has the meaning of ancient, as in Ветхий Завет (The Old Testament). In sartorial descriptions, it means threadbare or scruffy, as in ветхая от старости шапка (fur hat ragged with age).

If you can still joke, you might aim for irony: Мои ботинки потеряли товарный вид (My boots don't look like they came straight out of the box.)

Finally, you can use the fabulous phrase сапоги каши просят (literally, my boots are asking for porridge), as if your boots were flapping open like a hungry child opening his mouth wide for a spoonful of oatmeal. От этих "экологически не вредных" реагентов мои сапоги просят каши (My boots have gaping holes in them from the "ecologically safe" de-icing agents.)

Or you can forget how you look and contemplate the higher meaning of our anomalous weather. My personal theory is that we're living through the Russian version of День Сурка (Groundhog Day), and we'll just keep reliving winter until we change our evil ways.

Writer Dmitry Bykov is more pointed in his accusations. After considering the weather in Moscow and Kiev, he wrote: Прогноз погоды нынче мутен / В природе всё не по уму / Весны не будет там, где Путин / Или подобные ему (While weather forecasters are disputing / It's clear nature has lost her mind / There will be no spring where there is Putin / Or others of his kind).

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