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You Gotta Russian Problem With Me?

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Претензия: pretension (sometimes)

One summer▣on my college break I worked at a gas station, and one of the unexpected▣pleasures was sitting around with the mechanics on quiet evenings listening to▣their shop talk about the stubborn carburetor, the nastiest customer and the rusted▣nut that just wouldn't budge off the bolt.

Translators▣talk shop, too. Only for us, a rusted nut is a word that is easy to understand and▣use in one language and miserable to convey gracefully in another.

My rusted▣nut of the week is
претензия. You wouldn't think the word would be a problem.
Претензия comes from Latin via French▣and shares some meanings with the English version of the word, pretension. For example, it's easy to translate человек с большими претензиями (a very pretentious person).▣Or a person or work of art with pretensions to some kind of grandeur: В▣шестидесятые годы я был начинающим литератором с огромными претензиями (In the▣1960s I was a novice writer with

enormous literary pretensions.)

In these contexts, both
претензия and pretension are claims to some honor or merit, either
deserved or not. In English this is where pretension stayed put and did not budge, while the Russian претензия took the notion of a “claim” and ran with it. And that means a bit of torture for the translator.

Let’s start with commerce, where
претензия is what you submit to a company when the car
you just got serviced conks out on the highway between Moscow and Samara.
В течение
двух недель заказчик имеет право предъявить претензии по качеству выполненных работ (The client has two weeks to submit a claim about the quality of the work.)

But often претензия is not a formal claim for compensation but a more general complaint. This can refer to car manufacturers: У меня есть претензии к качеству сборки, комплектующим, уровню сервиса, гарантии и т. д. (I’ve got complaints about the quality of the assembly work, the spare parts, the quality of service, the warranty, etc.)
Or
it can refer to the face you see in the mirror:
В последнее время у
неё очень много претензий к своей внешности (Recently she has been very unhappy with her appearance.)

In other contexts
претензия might be a demand: Поскольку сроки авторского права
истекли, то вряд ли суд сможет удовлетворить претензии истца (Since the copyright has expired, the court is not likely to grant the claimant’s demands.)

Or you might change the grammar to translate
претензия: Есть претензии к фильму?
(Did you like the film?)
Откуда такие претензии к Чехову? (What do people have against
Chekhov?)

In slangier contexts,
претензия might be translated as a problem, reservation, concern or
issue: У тебя есть ко мне
претензии? (Do you have a problem with me?)
Он не имел претензии к авиалинии
это гостиница потеряла чемодан (He didn’t have an issue with the airline company — it was the hotel that lost his suitcase.) Мне понравился спектакль, но у
меня претензии к
режиссёру (I liked the production, but I have some reservations about the director.)

Претензия plays a starring role in a common exchange after an argument. After you and your neighbor are done flinging mutual accusations over noise — your dog, his kids — and you agree to let it go, one of you says: Претензии есть? (Are we good?) And the other replies:

Претензий нет (We're cool.)

Претензии есть?

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