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Be My Russian Valentine

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

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Pixabay

Пупсик: kewpie doll, baby doll, cutie

February in Russia is the start of the great Month of Love.

First we have День святого Валентина (Valentine's Day), a holiday much reviled by Russian officialdom as being "чуждый нашей традиции" (alien to our tradition) and much beloved by many non-official Russians as a chance to shake off the cold and darkness of mid-winter to celebrate romance.

The flowers aren't even wilted when it's another love fest, this time День защитника Отечества (Defender of the Fatherland Day), aka Men's Day, on Feb. 23. On this day women fete the men in their lives — even more than usual, if that's possible.

And then the tables are turned on March 8, Международный женский день (International Women's Day), a rather dreadful Soviet holiday that morphed into a mix of Mother's Day, Sweetheart's Day, Secretary's Day, and Grandmother's Day all wrapped into one big bouquet of outrageously expensive flowers.

And then, before you know it, it's spring.

To get you in shape for this marathon of romance, I thought it might be useful to go through a basic primer of Russian endearments.

Because when it comes to love, the Russian language is just spectacular.

The first thing you have to master is a variety of endings to add to your beloved's name. Think –ка, –ик or –ек, -енька, -ечка, –уля, –ушка, -ишка, just to name a few basic endings. You can also mix and match. So your boyfriend Александр (Alexander) is Саша, Сашенька, Сашуня, Сашуля, Сашуленька and so on. And your girlfriend Елена (Yelena) is Лена, Леночка, Ленуся, Ленок, Алёна, Алёнка, Алёнушка, Алёночка, and sometimes even Лёля, Лёлечка, Елюша, or Елюся.

Once you've got that down, it's time to move on to magical Russian world of endearments, where somehow being called a paw or a crocodile can make your head spin and your knees

turn to jelly.

First there are the general expressions of love, devotion, admiration and so on. You might call your significant other Радость моя (My Joy); Родной/Родная (darling — one very dear to your heart — and offshoots Роднулик, Роднуличка; Любимый/Любимая (Beloved); Любовь моя (My Love); Милый/Милая (Sweetheart) and offshoots Милашка, Миланя; Дорогой/Дорогая (Dear) and Дорогуша; Хороший/Хорошая (Goodie), which means both good and beautiful, and offshoots like Хорошенькая, which is generally Gorgeous; Чудесный/Чудесная (Marvelous) and Чудо (Miracle); Умный/Умная (Smartie) and offshoots Умница, Умничка; Счастье мое (My Happiness); Обаяшка (Charmer).

Then there are words of love that invoke body parts and other precious treasures. But in a nice way. So far no one calls their sweetheart "My Little Spleen." But your beloved might be Душа моя (My Soul), Сердце моё or Сердечко (My Heart); Драгоценный (Precious); or Бриллиантовая (Diamond).

Or you can take the high, high, high road and compare your beloved to a summer's day (or cloud) and heavenly beings: Божественная (Divine); Ангел or Ангелочек (Angel); Аполлон (Apollo); Небесная (Heavenly); Царевна or Царица (My Queen); Лучик (Sunray); Облачко (Little Cloud); Солнце or Солнышко (Sunny, Sunshine).

Fruits and berries. They're sweet and soft and delicious — get it? Just like your main squeeze. You can call your husband Персик (Peach) or Сладость, Сладкий (Sweetness, Sweetie). Your wife might be Вишенка (Cherry) or Клубничка (Strawberry).

You might also highlight one of your beloved's most charming features. If hubby has a soft, cozy belly, he might be Карапузик (Chubbykins), Пузик or Пузатик (Tubby). If your wife has a smile that lights up the room, she can be Улыбашка (Smiley).

But the best words of endearment are baby animals. First of all, Лапочка (Little Paw) because there is nothing sweeter than a soft, little, pink and furry baby animal paw. Then a lot of cats for both men and women: Киса, Киска, Кисуля, or Котик (Kitty cat) or Котёнок and Котёночек (Kitten). You can also call your honey Мурзилка, Мурзик, Мурка, or Мурлыка, names dreamed up by a Russian translator for Canadian fictional beings called Brownies. Think: cute, elf-like, cuddly creatures.

Bunnies. Oh, everyone is a bunny wabbit: Заинька, Зайка, Зайчонок. My favorite bunny endearment is Зая — someone so soft and sweet you can't end with a consonant at all.

Your significant other might also be Ослик (Baby Donkey); Слонёнок (Baby Elephant); Тигр, Тигрулик, Тигрёныш (big and little Tigers); Голубка, Голубочек, Голубушка (varieties of Pigeons, who coo so pleasingly); Мышонок, Мышоночек (Little Mouse); Лисёнок, Лисёночек, Лиска, Лисонька (Foxy); or even Крокодильчик (Little Crocodile), Бегемотик (Little Rhino), and Дракошечка (Little Dragon).

Or just Пушистик (Fuzzy).

When you run out of animals, you can just use a combination of letters that just sound soft and fuzzy and sweet even if they don't mean anything, like Барабусик.

If you want, you can add sweet rhyming additions to the already sweetie-pie nicknames. Сергей is Серёжа or Серёжа-Ёжик (Sergei-Hedgehog) or just plain Ёжик (Hedgehog). Андрей is Андрюшка or Андрюшка-душка (Andrei-sweetheart, literally "soul"). Людмила is Люся and then Люся-дорогуша (dearest Lyusya). Дарья is Даша and in moments of tenderness — Дашечка-лапочка (Dasha my little soft paw). You get the idea.

This is, of course, only an introduction to the extraordinary art of Russian sweet nothings. You've got your whole, sweet, adorable, itsy-bitsy, fuzzy-wuzzy life of sweetness ahead. *Michele A. Berdy is a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, author of "The Russian Word's Worth," a collection of her columns. Follow her on Twitter @MicheleBerdy.*

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