

When Feathers Fly by Janet E. Pratt

Digging my heels into the slick Arizona mud, I leaned into the thick cotton rope looped around my backside and grasped the rope above the knot in front. I threw my weight backward and pulled. The dead ostrich tied to the other end didn't budge. I glared over at my husband, Ramie (to whom I was not speaking), also attached to the bird and discovered he was responsible for my lack of progress. He was still adjusting his rope.



A perfectly logical reason exists for being harnessed, with the man I love, to a dead ostrich. We raised them. Live ones, obviously. Unfortunately, this one had died during the night, and we needed to get it out of the pen. That was what started the fight.

Early that morning Ramie went out to feed the stock. As I sat at the table, planning my day, I heard the back door slam and he came into the kitchen.

"We've got a dead bird out by the trough in the yearling pen."

"Oh no! Who is it?"

"I think it's Tweety. I don't have time to move her right now. I'll do it when I get home tonight."

"You can't leave her there all day! That's disgusting. Are Tovis, Weiser and Eek supposed to walk over her corpse all day to get a drink? You know I don't like to leave dead birds where the others can see them. It's bad for morale!"

Unsympathetic to the fragile ostrich psyche and, by the look on his face, beginning to question my own, he responded, "I have to go to work. I'll take care of it when I get home!"

Time for my trump card. "Forget it. The kids and I will take care of it, just like everything else."

The farm wasn't carrying itself yet, so Ramie had to work in town. I was responsible for the day-to-day running of the operation—everything from handling the 8-foot tall, 300-pound birds to repairing water pipes and fencing until he could take care of them on a weekend. It was a sore spot, and I pushed it hard.

Without another word he spun on his heel and slammed out the back door. I knew he intended to move the bird, and we had wasted so much time bickering that now he would be late.

I called his employers, who were very understanding about ranch-related emergencies, and explained the situation. Then I sat down to wait with my back to the door.

Fifteen minutes later my husband returned. I stared out the window with my arms folded across my chest. Hearing his feet shift back and forth on the wood floor, I knew what was coming.

"I'm sorry I acted like a jerk," he began.

I didn't turn around.

"I just didn't want to be late because we need every penny right now."

I turned and looked him in the eye. "You need me to help you move the bird, don't you?"

He looked embarrassed, then got down on one knee. "I need you for lots of things, but, yes, right now, I need you to help me move the bird. Please."

I rolled my eyes, heaved a long-suffering sigh and put on my mud boots. With my nose in the air and not a glance in his direction, I clomped regally to the pen. The bird really wasn't the issue. There were other things we needed to talk out, but we hadn't taken time to do it.

Consequently, feathers flew at the first excuse. So there we were, fighting each other and a dead ostrich. If the deed was to be done, we needed to work together. Counting to three, we both leaned into the ropes and dragged the bird out of the pen. Once she was out in the open, the deceased was hoisted into the back of the truck, and my husband hauled her away.

Immediately afterward, as I showered off the dead bird smell, it occurred to me that the principles of handling conflicts in a marriage are a lot like the mechanics of dealing with a dead ostrich.

Deal with problems immediately. A marriage should be a place of refreshment for the husband and wife; the Song of Solomon uses imagery of a garden and a fountain.

Just as Tweety's remains prevented the other birds from getting to the water to quench their thirst, a conflict keeps a couple from drawing the sustenance they need from each other. Don't let a problem lie around and stink up your marriage.

Get problems out in the open—together. I couldn't drag the bird alone, and neither could Ramie. When we started pulling together, we were able to get the bird out where she could be properly taken care of.

Ask for help if necessary. Sometimes, once a problem is "out there," it turns out to be too heavy for a couple to handle alone. It may seem offensive to expose anyone else to it, but if you can't carry it alone, seek godly counsel. A spiritually mature person or couple may be willing to get some of the smell on them to enable you to remove the issue from your marriage. They can always wash themselves in the Word.

Once a conflict is dealt with, it's dead. Haul it away. There needs to be forgiveness, restoration and forgetfulness. Don't tie yourself to dead issues and drag them through your marriage.

And now, if you'll excuse me, I hear my husband's truck in the driveway. I think we need to talk.

Janet Pratt retired from her glamorous career as an ostrich farmer to pursue full-time writing. She and her family recently moved to Sandy, Utah.

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