

Cancer: Tenacity

Marsha winced, stifled a sound in her throat, and sat back down on the bed. "It hurts," she grimaced.

"Yes, it does, but the longer you keep from using your leg, the harder it will be to walk again." Dr. Miller looked stern.

Marsha thought he was very unsympathetic. She had been in an accident some weeks before, but was healing nicely now, except for her leg. It was still swollen, and the torn ligaments and muscles protested every time she moved. The doctor had wanted her to stand on that leg for the last few days, but the pain seemed unbearable and she kept refusing to try.

"I can't, Doctor," Marsha whined. "It hurts!"

"Very well, it's up to you," said the doctor, "but you're going to be discharged in a few days. We need this bed for patients who are really sick. Do you expect your mother to carry you around the house when you get home?" He strode out of the room.

Marsha began to cry softly. That doctor was so mean. It was all very well for him to talk — *he* didn't hurt. And what did he have to bring that up about Mother for? She had been in the accident, too, and although not hurt, she was badly shaken up and worried about Marsha, and these weeks had not been easy for her. And of course she couldn't carry Marsha around the house!

Marsha stopped crying and lay still for a time, staring at the ceiling and thinking. Then she sat up. "All right," she said loudly, "I'll show that doctor!"

Gingerly she eased herself out of bed and moaned as she stood on the bad leg. It really did hurt, and for a moment everything around her seemed to turn gray. She clutched the nightstand and waited for the

sensation to go away. She took one step, then another, and although the pain did not decrease, there was relief every time she lifted the injured leg and stood on the other. "Well," she thought, "all I have to do is keep thinking how good it will feel to step on the left foot after getting off the right. That's something, anyhow."

Marsha made her halting way around the room several times, and finally sank back in bed, exhausted from the pain. She fell asleep almost immediately, and didn't waken until lunch. In the afternoon she tried again, and though the pain did not seem less severe, she found the going a little easier. She told no one about her exploits. It did not occur to her mother that Marsha might already be walking, and Dr. Miller, who looked in for only a minute, said nothing further about it.

The next morning after breakfast, when the nurse had gone, Marsha got out of bed again. The pain was almost as bad, but Marsha reasoned that that was because she had kept the weight off her leg all night, so she stood on it firmly. Again there was the sensation of "grayness," and again Marsha sweated it out and then started her round of the room. Gradually the pain did seem to lessen, and she was not so exhausted as the day before. When she tried in the afternoon, the pain was less, and next morning, although still unpleasant, Marsha found that walking was much more bearable.

She was up and about several times during the day, but only when she was alone, and as far as she knew, no one was aware of what she was doing. That evening, when her mother was visiting, Dr. Miller came into the room. "We're going to discharge Marsha tomorrow, Mrs. Fulton. I imagine you'll want to rent a wheelchair."

"Yes," sighed Marsha's mother, "and I'll have to

make the couch up into a bed, too. It is going to be rather difficult until Marsha can walk."

Marsha calmly pulled back her blanket and stood up. "What do you want a wheelchair for, and why can't I sleep upstairs in my own bed?" she asked, walking across the room and looking casually out of the window.

Dr. Miller tried to suppress a grin, and Mrs. Fulton stared. "She's *walking*," she said to the doctor incredulously.

"Yes, she is. She's really kept at it these last few days, and I know how badly it hurt there for a while."

Marsha wheeled around. "How did you know?" she demanded.

"My dear," Dr. Miller said gently, "we *do* have to keep track of what our patients are doing. It would have been very bad for you to walk when you weren't supposed to. But once it was time, you had to start, and we're proud of your persistent efforts. They paid off, too, didn't they?"

Marsha smiled. "Yes, they did. I guess if something is worth while enough to do at all, it's important to get started and stick with it, no matter how hard it is. Thank's for goading me into it, Doctor."

Marsha's mother, surprised, asked, "Were you using a form of therapy I didn't know about, Dr. Miller?"

"Yes, I was, and I'm afraid that for a while there Marsha thought I was a pretty hard-hearted, unfeeling brute. But as you see, we obtained some excellent results."

Next day Marsha slowly but steadily climbed the stairs to her own room. In another week, she knew, she would be running up and down as she had before the accident. How awful it would be, she thought, if she still had those first painful steps ahead of her.