

Vienna's Waiting

A teenage girl's
battle with pain.



georgia houston weston

Vienna's Waiting

Georgia Huston Weston

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I dedicate this book to anyone who is in pain.
You are not alone.

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Preface

It may seem self-centered for a seventeen-year-old girl to write a book that's all about herself. I know there are those who have suffered more – but this is my story. I'm writing it – digging as deep as I can and reliving my darkest experiences – because I feel with all my heart that this will help someone.

I'm not the only kid who's gone through this, and I know first-hand that the worst thing of all was feeling alone and lost.

If my story can help just one other kid, then I will be happy. If kids in pain can relate to what I went through, I will be satisfied. I need to let those kids know that they are not crazy.

They are not alone.

Chapter One

“Name and age, please?”

“Umm...” I close my eyes and grimace, turning my face up toward the ceiling. The fluorescent lights are glaring down on me. I can feel their dirty looks. I clench my fists so tightly my fingernails make marks in my palms as I tap the counter in rhythm.

“Miss?” The lady behind the desk, whose name tag identifies her as Sue, still doesn’t even look up from her computer.

Can she not hear the helplessness in my voice; the chattering of my teeth?

“Yeah, sorry umm... Georgia Huston. I’m fourteen.” I turn around to look out the glass door.

Where is my dad?

“Okay, G-e-o-r-g-i-a H-o-u-s-t-o-n, age fourteen...”

“No, it’s Huston, H-u-s-t-o-n.” If I had a dollar for every time someone made that mistake I could buy this hospital and run it the way I wanted to. I could get every doctor here to care about me and to heal me from this mysterious illness.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Miss Huston. Please have a seat and we will be with you as soon as possible.”

As soon as possible.

Those words mean absolutely nothing to me anymore. Before all of this happened, I probably could look past the vacant stare and the monotone voice; look past it to a promise that they meant. Now, I know the truth. The fact is, in half an hour there is going to be a shift change, seven p.m. exactly. When the shift change happens, Sue will log off her computer, push her chair in, grab her coat and purse, walk out, and never think about me again. She will walk off and live her life while I sit here in the waiting room, waiting. It’s not that Sue does it on purpose, or in spite. It’s just the way things are.

Sue #2 plops herself into the receptionist seat and logs into her com-

puter without even looking around the waiting room at the agonized faces, all yearning for medical attention.

I want to lie down, but there are armrests separating the long couch into individual seats. I would usually not want to press my face onto the plastic seat where ill strangers' butts have been, but at this point I don't care.

The world is spinning so fast that even though I'm sitting, I feel like I'm about to fall over. My heart is beating so fast I honestly think I am going to die, which of course makes it beat even faster. I feel blood rushing into my head, and I cannot focus on one thought at a time; it feels like a million incomplete thoughts are all coming in at once, and it is the most frustrating feeling in the world. My hands and feet are cramping at the same time, to the point where I cannot move them.

I look down at the paperwork on the clipboard.

- a) I cannot make out all the little symbols that make each word; everything is too blurry.
- b) Even if I could make out a word, the words combined wouldn't make any sense in my tornado mind right now.
- c) I can't even hold onto a pencil, much less write legibly.

I toss the clipboard onto the seat next to me. Even though I cannot read the questions on the standard medical forms, I know exactly what they are asking. Besides my name, address, and insurance information, I know that on the second to last page there is an outline of a body where I am supposed to mark where my pain is.

There is an outline of a person standing, looking straight ahead. I'm supposed to mark on the body where my pain is, but that image is not of someone going through pain. If the outlined person was feeling the way I am, its head would be dropped so low you couldn't even see its neck. It wouldn't be standing upright, it would be sitting, legs bent wide apart, head in hands, and shaking. Yes, it would be shaking uncontrollably; shaking out of pain, out of helplessness, and out of fear.

I know on the bottom of the last page there is a scale with faces ranging from smiling to crying, and that I'm supposed to mark where my pain lies. Hmm... look at my face, and you can tell me.

Where does my pain lie?

Is there a face on the scale that has sweat pouring down its cheeks, its jaw clenched as it grinds its teeth, and its eyes closed because hav-

ing them open is just as scary as the endless darkness that it sees when it closes them? I don't see a face on the scale that illustrates where my pain lies. Sorry.

My dad rushes in from parking the car, scanning the waiting room. He finds me cowering in the corner. "Did you sign in?"

I nod, closing my eyes, crying. He hands me my three pacifiers throughout this whole experience; my Burt's Bees Chapstick, my stress ball, and my iPhone with the pink case.

I put my headphones in my ears and blast "Vienna" by Billy Joel. It's an old song that not many kids my age know, but I know that song by heart. I listen to that song on repeat for hours at a time. That song made me fall in love with music and got me attached to songs. I don't know what it is about that song. Maybe it's his cool, old fashioned voice or his smooth, effortless lyrics that mesh together so easily it melts my heart. To this day, hearing that song always makes me cry. Each line seems to signify something different about how I'm feeling. I can usually get lost in the song, but now I can't.

Now all I can think about is how I am going to die. I'm going to die right here, in the waiting room at the UCLA hospital. My story will be in the newspaper tomorrow: TEENAGE GIRL DIES DUE TO UNKNOWN ILLNESS.

How will people feel about my death?

Guilty; they will probably feel guilty. They should feel guilty, ignoring me out here like they always do.

I open my eyes just long enough to see the floor of the waiting room. When I close my eyes, the green checkered patterns are still engraved in my mind. I open them again to see my anxious dad pacing back and forth in the back of the room. That is by far the worst part about this, waiting.

Every tick of the clock and every janitor cart that rolls by sinks me farther and farther into my panic attack. I can't even recognize the song I'm listening to anymore. My body is beating to its own rhythm. I look over at the nurses with long fake nails, talking and chewing their gum.

Is that really more important than helping us out?

My body and mind build with frustration and anxiety.

Why isn't anyone helping me?

I hear a siren in the background.

Take me with you.

Blood rushes to my head; everything goes black.

I wake up in a wheelchair, but still in the waiting room.

Really?

I passed out in front of a bunch of doctors and they still don't take me in? They simply rolled me in the corner, but don't worry, they will be with me as soon as possible.

Another hour goes by, Billy Joel being my only companion. I don't care what anyone says, he is speaking directly to me.

*Slow down, you crazy child,
You're so ambitious for a juvenile
But then if you're so smart
Tell me why are you still so afraid?....*

Slow down, you crazy child. How can I slow down when my mind is racing so fast I can't even keep up with it? It doesn't matter how ambitious I am, I'm still stuck in an ER waiting room. If I'm so smart then why can't I control my own body? That, Billy, is why I am so afraid.

"Georgia Huston?"

My head shoots up as my dad rushes to help me up. He is always one step ahead of me. We follow the voice to a small room with the door cracked. The light is so bright it takes a while to get used to, especially with my splitting headache.

"Please have a seat," the little man in the scrubs says while he motions to the foldout chair, not looking up from his computer.

Big surprise.

He asks me for my age and some other basic questions. He sticks a thermometer in my mouth and starts to slide the blood pressure cuff over my left arm, but stops. "Excuse me, Miss. Can you please take off your sweatshirt?"

Are you kidding me? It's like ten degrees in here.

But, without saying a word I pull it off, trying not to mess up my hair too much.

My panic attack is gone, leaving me beyond drained and tired. It feels like I am in one of those horror movies where your body can't move but you can see, hear, and feel everything. That means I can see the reflection of the computer screen in the glasses of the man in the scrubs. I can hear the clicking of keys as he types my information into the hospital network. I can feel my arm hair being pulled as he pinches the wristband onto my arm.

"Okay, thank you, Miss Huston. If you'll have a seat in the waiting room, we will be with you as soon as possible."

Of course you will.

I want to go home so badly. The panic attack is over.

So why am I still here?

My dad forces me to stay to see a doctor. He wants answers. He wants his daughter's bizarre pain explained to him. He deserves that much.

Doesn't he?

I put my face up against the cold window, Billy in my ear, and I drift off to sleep.

"Paulina Jackson."

"Hannah Graver."

"Adam Faper."

Another hour goes by. Maybe two.

"Leah Boomer."

"Georgia Huston."

I hear it, but I don't wake up all the way. My sleeping hours have been on such an odd schedule I can't really control how I end my dreams anymore to wake up.

The next thing I know, I'm being wheeled into another bright room – no, a bright hallway. My vision is blurry; my eyes are so puffy and watery.

Wait, does this mean I'm going to be seeing a doctor?

Now I'm being lifted by a very strong nurse and gently laid down onto a bed. I open my eyes as my dad places my three pacifiers next to me on the white sheets. This can't be right, this isn't a room; this is just a hallway. Tons of people are rushing by me; I don't feel very comfortable here. I'm in everyone's way – a scared girl on a random bed in a busy hallway.

Every time I hear squeaky footsteps pressing into the hard, cold hallway floor, I look up. I look up to see mothers crying, sick children sleeping, and fathers pacing.

I go back in and out of sleep, losing track of time. I wake up just long enough to get hopeful as a doctor walks in my direction, and just long enough to be tormented as he walks past.

After what seems like forever, a doctor finally comes for me; only me.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Thirteen. Where is the pain?" he says, obviously only half interested. He is looking down at his clipboard.

“My back and leg,” I say helplessly. Maybe he will be the one; the one to know what’s going on.

Dr. Thirteen, be my hero.

“Which leg?” he asks, scribbling on his clipboard.

“Right,” I answer. Thinking about it makes it hurt worse.

“What part of your back?” Another scribble.

“Lower back, always lower.”

“Any previous injuries that could have caused this?”

“No.”

“On a scale of one to ten, one being no pain and ten being the worst, where is your pain?”

“Twelve.”

“Okay, tell me if this hurts.”

Dr. Thirteen has me lie down and starts to feel my right leg, watching my face for any signs of discomfort. I don’t show much. When he goes to my back, again I don’t feel as much pain as I should be with a finger probing my most sensitive spots. That’s the thing, the pain is not really determined by the pressure I put on my leg or someone poking my back; it’s more on the inside.

“Okay, Miss Huston, I’m going to order some X-rays, and then we will have a look.”

Yeah, good luck with that.

“No need,” my dad says politely as he places an intimidating stack of big manila envelopes on the hospital bed.

“What’s this?”

Oh, Dr. Thirteen... meet Jimmy Huston; a.k.a. Mr. Prepared.

“Her MRIs, bone scans – latest X-ray was taken last week so I don’t think there’s a need for another today.”

You tell him, Dad!

Dr. Thirteen takes a few of the X-rays out of the envelope and examines them. “I want to take some from a different angle.”

“What are you expecting to find?” my dad asks, not rudely, just trying to get information.

“I’m not sure. That’s why we’re going to take a look.”

Oh, naïve Dr. Thirteen. You’re right; this X-ray machine is a very special one, way different from all the others. The others are out to get me, hiding the problem on purpose. This one, this one will find it.

I get wheeled up to the X-ray room. “Any chance you might be pregnant?”

“No.”

They have me get into a paper-thin “gown” that I have to hold shut. I walk to the cold, dark room in just my socks. The X-ray technician is cute – this is really embarrassing. I regret not putting on makeup.

It doesn’t hurt to get X-rays, everyone knows that, but what hurts are the positions they put you in for the X-rays. The room is so cold I’m shivering, but I know I need to stay still.

“Okay. If you go back to your bed, we’ll get these processed and to Dr. Thirteen as soon as possible,” the cute technician says. He probably doesn’t think I’m cute at all.

Who would?

How do I get back to my bed? I turned left, right? I don’t remember passing this painting or this security desk. This nurses station seems familiar, but they all look the same. Everything here looks the same.

I’m lost.

I can’t ask anyone where I belong because there’s no room number they can direct me to.

Can you help me find the bed in the hallway with the white walls and nurses?

They would look at me like I was crazy.

But I am crazy, remember?

I’m feeling pain that no doctor can find, not even the best ones in the state. Unless my pain is more advanced than any research or machine in today’s state-of-the-art medicine, I must be crazy.

After what seems like an eternity of wandering around long hallways into dead ends and DO NOT ENTER signs, I find my dad.

A little later, Dr. Thirteen comes back with matching manila envelopes. My dad and I make hopeful eye contact.

“Well,” Dr. Thirteen starts, “we took X-rays of both your mid to lower back and your right thigh. I’m afraid we didn’t see anything unusual. I’m sorry.”

Didn’t see anything unusual; what isn’t unusual about this?

Mom’s waiting up, as she always is. No matter where I go or who I’m with, Mom’s always waiting up.

She can see from our expressions and our multiplying manila envelope stack that nothing’s new. Without saying a word I crawl onto my mattress and pull my blanket over my head. Also silent, my mom crawls onto my sister’s mattress next to me and holds me.

Our sleeping arrangements have been a little unorthodox lately. My mattress has been moved out into the middle of the living room. My sis-

ter is sleeping in my parents' bed. Her mattress is also in the living room, right next to mine. My dad sleeps in his bed, but my mom sleeps on my sister's, next to mine in the living room. I'm guessing houses don't usually function like that. I know ours never did.

Ours was nothing like this. We were two loving parents, two beautiful, straight "A" athletic daughters, and two crazy dogs.

How could our normal, great life turn so upside down?

I know how. I ruined it.

I ruined it by getting this pain.

Chapter Two

Notre Dame, my dream high school. I had wanted to go there my whole life and, because it is a private school, it was really hard to get in. I worked my butt off to try to get in there. I called people from my past and what was at the time my present. I asked them to write letters of recommendation for me. It was embarrassing, and I felt like I was being a bother, but I did it anyway. I needed to get in.

The letters people wrote were beautiful, and I still have them. I was called *impressive, intelligent, confident, centered, outgoing, focused, loving, real*, etc. I never really knew how much people thought of me until those letters. I never noticed the pride in their eyes when they introduced me to someone from their lives, or the support they gave me when I was struggling. The most humbling part that I took from all of those letters was that these were all well-liked, accomplished adults saying such nice things about me. They took time out of their lives to help me out and, at the same time, made me realize how lucky I was. I felt honored and pleased with myself.

Having those closest to me sum me up was a very interesting experience. The kind words made me smile, and the hopefulness of the letters got me excited. I was thrilled because everyone had such high expectations for me and my future, but that also made me nervous.

My dear friend Gay wrote:

...Even though this young woman has many talents that lead to almost endless possibilities for her future, the most important is that she is a truly lovely, kind, generous person. I've seen her relate to a 90-year-old man and a small child, kittens and dogs, kids her own age. She seems to have a special way with each. While every school wants talented, bright students like Georgia Huston, they really need great souls who will be a joy to teach

and who will appreciate what they are given. Georgia is the kind of person who will not only take and absorb, but also will create and give back...

Confidence boost?

Yeah, I would think so.

I had always been an athlete, ever since kindergarten, despite my serious asthma. My mom signed me up for T-Ball, and that was it. I played year round, alternating between soccer, basketball, and baseball. At age 12, I was the only girl to “graduate” from Sherman Oaks Little League. I wasn’t just the only girl on the team for most of those years, I was the only girl in my league.

I would play a soccer tournament in Santa Barbara, three games a day, and then race across town for basketball practice or baseball try-outs. I worked hard on my all-star teams, private lessons with professional players, tournament teams, and even off-season. It was a lot, but I loved it. I became an expert at holding my nose in stinky park bathrooms and skillful at changing uniforms in a moving car filled with the rest of my family.

Besides being an athlete, I was a great student. Ever since elementary school I had been a mediocre test taker, but my creativity shined through my reports and essays. I wasn’t a bookworm like my younger sister, Veronica, but I did well.

I was also a performer. I’d been in my school choir throughout elementary school and, when I moved up to Millikan Middle School, I got into the Performing Arts Academy, where I took dance. I was in the chorus and several school musicals and was immersed in that world for a while.

The summer after sixth grade, I was a member of the cast of the touring “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,” at the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood. I was in the children’s chorus, and I was on stage the whole show, even more than the leads. I was sitting with a group of other kids on the side of the stage, in costume, singing and dancing along with the stars. It was an amazing experience that I wouldn’t trade for the world. Some people work their whole lives to perform on a stage like that. It was never my dream before then, and it especially hasn’t been my dream since. That is not my calling, but I loved every minute of it.

I did that show for two weeks, twelve performances, and got paid more than I could have imagined.

During those same two weeks, my baseball team was in the playoffs. We won the championship of our league, undefeated and merciless. That meant that we moved on to the Tournament of Champions, a tournament of all the champion teams in the San Fernando Valley competing against each other. After school I would race across town to various fields and play in my baseball games, and then I would race into downtown Hollywood to perform at night. We ended up dominating that tournament and winning the whole thing. My name is still on a billboard at the Little League.

When I was in eighth grade, I was practicing basketball in my backyard. We had a hoop and a pretty big area to run around in. I was alone, shooting and doing lay-ups. I was running, doing a lay-up, when I rolled my right ankle and fell. I screamed for someone to help me. My sister Veronica came out and then immediately got my mom. I couldn’t move for a long time. I’d had injuries throughout my life; everyone knows that’s part of being an athlete. I’d had sprains and stitches, but nothing like this. I knew this one was different.

My dad was out of town, so my mom and sister did their best to get me into the car, ice pack in hand. We knew how long an ER would take, so we tried a Child Urgent Care place. They took me in right away and had me X-rayed.

It turned out I’d torn a couple of ligaments in my ankle. They put a brace on it and gave me crutches. That was the first time I was told to use crutches. They took a while to get used to.

The man I’ll call Doctor One told me to stay home from school the next day, so I did. By that afternoon I was feeling a lot better, so I told my mom I wanted to go on a walk. She told me that probably wasn’t a good idea on the crutches, but I insisted. So, she saddled up our twin huskies and we were off. It was great to get out of the house, and it was a beautiful day. My mom kept telling me that we should probably head back, but I kept saying I wanted to go farther.

We got pretty far from the house, and I was absolutely exhausted. We started back, but I didn’t make it. I’d pushed myself too much. I sat on a stranger’s lawn with my dogs, Spot and Striker, while my mom ran back to get the car.

At school I got teased for getting hurt playing a sport by myself, but hey, you only need yourself to hurt yourself. I couldn’t dance for a couple of weeks or play sports, but I still went to all the dance classes

and sports games to support my friends. In addition to the crutches, I was put in a special therapeutic boot that I could pump up to add pressure. Also, for the first time, I had to go to physical therapy. I didn't like my physical therapist that much, but my sports doctor, Dr. Two, sent me there; so I went. It was long and rough, but I healed and got right back into the swing of things.

*Dear Georgia Huston and Parents,
Congratulations! I am pleased to inform you that you
have been accepted as a member of Notre Dame's Class
of 2012. Notre Dame is a school that offers...*

I made it.

Chapter Three

Notre Dame was the most amazing school I had ever seen. I'd gone to public schools my whole life, and they are quite different. This place had sensor-motion faucets, touch-screen computer white-boards, and in the cafeteria you used your fingerprint to access your money account. I didn't go in knowing many people, but I made plenty of new friends. It was awesome.

By this point I had dropped basketball and moved from baseball to softball. I planned on playing soccer and softball in high school. My friend Marisa and I tried out for the soccer team freshman year. That tryout was quite a wake-up call; this wasn't AYSO anymore. These girls were serious and really, really good.

I didn't feel very confident. There were a lot of people trying out and not a lot of spots, but that Friday my name was on the list. Marisa and I were on the Junior Varsity Notre Dame soccer team. I was on top of the world.

The next nine weeks were the most physically challenging weeks I had ever faced. I pushed myself harder than I had ever before. It was serious physical conditioning, and like I said, this was no little kid league. After school we did wind sprints up and down the football field, we jump-roped, did weight training, long distance two-mile runs, everything. On those two-mile runs, we had to clock in under a certain time or we had to do extra step-ups on the bleachers after practice. I never had to do that, even with my asthma.

I was in the best shape of my life, but I also made so many more friends. I was a part of something and felt a strong sense of community among those girls. Also, during the training season, Marisa and I were playing on another park team and practicing with a club team. We had a lot on our plates, but loved every second of it.

I was going to the mall after school, football games on Fridays, and movies on the weekends. I was so happy and living the teenage life to

the fullest. Boys were flirting with me, dresses started fitting me the way they were supposed to, and I was having slumber parties with friends. It was a whole new world.

I will never forget the first night I had this new kind of pain. It was different. I was at soccer practice at the Van Nuys-Sherman Oaks park. It was after dark and really cold. We were all in sweats and jackets, shivering our way through a drill, when a pain shot up the outside of my right leg. I kept playing, but after a while I had to stop. My coach was very understanding, and the girls were sympathetic. They knew I wouldn't quit unless I really had to.

The pain stopped that night and for a couple of days after. We thought it had vanished just as mysteriously as it had come, but it started bothering me again the next week. To this day, the only way I can really describe the feeling is that it was like a lightning bolt shooting up my leg.

That pain really restricted me, and soon after that my lower back started bothering me. This felt different though; it was more concentrated and felt like a constant pressure in the middle of my lower spine. It was actually really low, almost to my butt.

My mom stayed up late with me, icing my leg and massaging my back, but none of it seemed to do any good. I had a follow up appointment with Dr. Two to discuss my ankle, so my dad mentioned the leg pain I'd been complaining about. Dr. Two was concerned by this, so she ordered an MRI, my first of many.

They gave me a little locker and had me change into one of their great "gowns." I walked into the room and confronted a monster machine. I stared that little tube down.

Will I fit in there?

They had me put in earplugs and lie down. I had no idea what to expect, so I closed my eyes as they rolled me into the machine; my whole body was inside.

That machine makes the loudest noise ever, and it's right in your ears and all around you so it's a million times worse. I thought I could just sleep through the half hour MRI, but there's no way I could get used to the noise, because not only was it loud, it kept changing rhythms to keep me on my toes. When I decided to be adventurous I opened my eyes, only to immediately regret it. My nose was not even an inch away from the top; I was so close to the ceiling of the machine that my eyes couldn't even focus. That was my first and last time ever really feeling claustro-

phobic in those; I got used to it pretty fast after that.

That Friday we went back to Dr. Two's office. Her waiting room always took forever, even though there were not usually a lot of people in there; and it had the most boring channels on the TV so there wasn't anything to entertain you.

My dad and I walked into our assigned room, and right away I noticed something was different. There was a mini-model of a spine on the counter.

She left it in here from her last patient.

"Dr. Two will be with you as soon as possible."

"Okay, thank you," I said with a smile. This was before I knew what that really meant. This was before I lost faith.

A little later the doctor came in with my first set of manila envelopes.

"Hi Georgia, how are you?" she said, pinning the MRIs onto the wall.

"I'm still having the pain. Yesterday was really bad. Did you find anything?"

"Yes, we did."

I couldn't decide if this was good news or bad news. It was good because they found something so we could treat it and I would get better; it was bad because – well, they found something.

"On a scale of one to ten, where do you think your pain is?"

"Twelve."

"Do you know what a herniated disc is?" she asked, looking back and forth between me and my dad. He was standing next to the window. That's him, always standing.

"Georgia's cousin had a herniated disc," my dad mentioned.

I hadn't even thought about that. My cousin Talia is a couple of years older than me, and she had surgery for a herniated disc not too long before. I'd never really asked her what exactly it was though.

"Well that's odd because it's not really hereditary," the doctor started, picking up the little model of a spine. She pointed at the bone areas. "These are vertebrae in the spine..."

Then she pointed at the sac-like ovals in between each vertebra. "These are intervertebral discs. They are soft and cushion each vertebra."

Her hand moved down the spine to a discolored, deformed disc. "This is a herniated disc. Notice the color and shape of the others, and then notice this one. Part of the disc is bulging out. The MRI showed that you have a herniated disc on your L5, which is in your lower back, right

where your pain is. The part of the disc that is bulging out and slipping is compressing a nerve root and causing the pain in your right leg.” She pointed at the MRI. “See, these are your other discs, all evenly colored and built. This one is your L5, do you understand?”

I nodded; my mind was blank. I heard what she was saying, but wasn’t really listening. It was a lot to take in.

“Talia is not genetically related. She is technically a stepcousin, so even if it was hereditary that wouldn’t really be the case here,” my dad informed the doctor.

Even though Talia is my step cousin, she has been in my life since I was two. She is my family.

“Okay,” Dr. Two smiled. “Then I guess it’s just an incredible coincidence because this is extremely rare for children. What happened with Talia?”

“She had back surgery at fifteen. Is Georgia going to need surgery?”

My dad’s facial expression changed dramatically. Spinal surgery is not something to take lightly.

“That is an option,” she said, pausing just long enough for me to feel the tension in the room. “We could have her start physical therapy and see how that works before we start seriously considering surgery. That’s another option.”

My dad turned and looked out the window. “Can we let you know later? I want to talk with my wife about this.”

“Of course. Georgia, do you have any questions? You’ve been really quiet.”

She looked at me, putting down the model of a spine. But now it wasn’t just a spine. It was my spine; a spine with a problem.

She was right, I hadn’t really said anything. I guess I was just taking it all in. I didn’t have any questions at the time, but I did have one request.

“I want to change physical therapists.”

Dr. Two laughed. “Yes, we can do that. So, if you don’t have any questions, can I speak with your dad alone?”

I was surprised.

It’s my body.

But I agreed and went out into the boring waiting room. I went to the water fountain and took a sip of the cold water. I felt it run down my throat, immediately relaxing me, and took a deep breath.

Herniated disc.

I wondered what they were talking about in there.

Risks?

A few minutes later my dad popped his head through the door and called me in. I put down the magazine and followed him into the second room on the right. Dr. Two was waiting for us.

“Hey Georgia, have a seat,” she said, motioning. I did. “Okay, so I talked to your dad...”

Oh really, is that why I left?

“...and we decided that it would be best if we give you some medication to help with the injury. I know you’re already on Singular for your asthma, but this won’t interfere with that at all.”

She scribbled something down and handed it to my dad, then looked back at me.

“It’s a type of steroid that I want you to take twice a day for two weeks and then come in for your next appointment.”

“Steroids? Will I get buff?” I asked, concerned.

She laughed.

“No it will just help with the swelling. I gave your dad the number of a physical therapist who will take good care of you.”

The doctor maintained strong eye contact with me.

“Now with the pill, you might get what some people call ‘roid rage.’ Have you heard of that?”

I was confused. “Rage? Like I’m going to be aggressive?”

“Not necessarily, but possibly. I think you will just become extremely emotional and irritable. I’m telling you this ahead of time, so hopefully you will be able to notice the way you are acting, and change it to save your poor parents.”

“I’ll be fine,” I said.

I think I would have more control over myself than a little pill.

I couldn’t.

That little pill had so much power over me it was eye opening. That was the first time I’d taken anything stronger than an aspirin, and I wasn’t prepared for what I was in for. Neither were my parents.

I was a wreck. Everything that was said to me was taken the wrong way and thrown back into the innocent speaker’s face.

I remember one night my parents took me out for pizza, just the three of us; I don’t remember where Veronica was. We went to a new place on Ventura Boulevard, and I just started bawling for no reason in the middle of the restaurant. No matter what my parents said, or how much I rationalized in my head, I couldn’t stop crying.

So I learned how powerful a little pill could be, my first of many.

Pages 18-307 are not shown in this sample.

An intensely personal journey of anguish, solitude, and despair...

At 14, Georgia was on top of the world. Her life as a teenager was filled with hope and promise, until a mysterious pain developed in her back and leg.

When doctors failed to help, she spiraled into hopelessness.

This book chronicles her feelings during that dark period of her life, and follows her inspirational journey back to health and happiness.

At 17, Georgia Huston becomes the founder of the Teen Pain Help Foundation.



All proceeds go to the
Teen Pain Help Foundation
(www.teenpainhelp.org)