

# AVOID REAL DIVA

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GIANTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Oh No

No, no, I couldn't be pregnant! If I were married, out of college, heavy into my own career, well-established, and financially secure, then it might not be a bad thing. But at sixteen going on seventeen, I was a junior in high school. I lived with my mom, dad, and younger sister. I had nowhere to put a kid.

I felt physically sick. I knew I was supposed to have morning sickness and all, but I was devastated. I had no idea what I was going to do. I knew I wouldn't be the first teen mom, but I didn't want to follow down that gloomy path. Having a kid at a young age wasn't the end of the world, but I had such a bright future ahead. Being somebody's

mom right now would ruin it. But what other choice did I have?

I couldn't have an abortion. My religion and beliefs wouldn't allow it. I'd never be able to live with myself. I thought about Hagen Cruz. Not only was this going to mess up my world, it would mess up my handsome boyfriend's world even more. I looked across the football field to try to find him. He'd just played horribly in our first playoff game, which we lost. He'd been so unstable over the last few weeks. This local gang, the Bones, was putting a lot of pressure on him. Although the lead guy, Loco, was in jail, word was out that the other members still had it out for Hagen. That was what led him into my arms for comfort, and one kiss led to much more. Pretty much every day during the last two months we went further than we should have.

"They'll get them next year," Victoria House said as she came and put her arms around me. "Keep Hagen encouraged."

I heard what she was saying, but she had tears in her eyes. The cheerleaders were taking this just as hard as the players. We all wanted to go to state.

“Come on. Coach Pat wants everyone to get on the bus. If you’re going to go talk to Hagen, you better do it. You’ll make him feel better,” Victoria teased, winking my way.

But I was looking at my guy, and he wasn’t looking happy at all. Hagen was sitting on the bench on the sideline rocking back and forth, kicking his helmet, digging his heels into the dirt. I didn’t have much time to tell him, and, honestly, I didn’t want to bring him down even more.

Victoria went over to Skylar and Ariel. Vanessa was hugged up with her boyfriend, Emerson, the new kicker on the team who had been our savior in past games. However, with this game, we got so blown out by the Ridgeland Raiders, a team we’d played earlier in the year on this same yucky field, that his long kicks weren’t good enough.

Vanessa was smiling from ear to ear. I didn’t know how to say “Vanessa, I need to talk to you,” but I needed to figure it out. She was the coolest of all my girlfriends, and I thought she could understand my predicament, get me through this without freaking out on me, and help me figure it all out. Staring at her happy face, I couldn’t

bring myself to bother her. She was so in love, so up under Emerson.

We didn't have much time because we girls had to get on the bus that was going to take us to Columbus, Georgia. Our cheerleading team had made it to the finals as an automatic qualifier for the high school competition, but as yucky as I felt, competing at state was definitely something I was not looking forward to. It would take my all to win, and right now I had nothing in me. So I realized I did need to bother Vanessa. Someone had to help me. I kept trying to catch Vanessa's eye. I needed to make her see that I needed to talk. Finally she did.

"What is wrong with you, Yaris?" Vanessa said, clearly put out that I'd snatched her away from her precious Emerson. "You're standing there looking pitiful. Okay, we lost the game. I know it's bad. All of the cheerleaders are over there with their guys, but your guy is by himself. Why aren't you with him? Hagen is taking this hard from what Emerson said. Everybody is saying he lost the game. You need to go talk to Hagen. I feel bad for him. Go cheer him up with your charm."

Looking down, I uttered, “I can’t encourage him. I don’t know what to say.”

Frowning at me like I was loony, Vanessa uttered, “Just tell him he had a great season, and next year we’ll get them. Make up something. Shoot, guys just want to have their egos stroked. For sure you can’t be somber and all that. You have to be upbeat if you are going to cheer him up. If you’re sad, he’s going to stay sad. Pull yourself together. Actually, I need to go talk to the rest of our girls and tell them to do the same thing. Our boys are just juniors. We will be in the state playoffs next year, and we’ll win state.”

Vanessa was going on and on in her tough-girl way. I mean, that was why I really loved her. She hardly let anything get to her. Honestly, I wished I was more like her.

All of my friends have been through so much. Skylar lost her mom a couple years ago. Her dad remarried, and at first she didn’t like her stepmom, but, thankfully, now they’re close. Ariel was getting friendly with Ryder, a black middle linebacker on our team, and both his mom and her dad didn’t like it. But that was only

half of her drama. Her aunt had been accused of killing her husband, but she was released of all wrongdoing. Half-sisters Vanessa and Victoria both lived with their dad, but Vanessa hated living with Victoria's mom. Vanessa had gotten really down and depressed a few weeks back. She'd made some bad choices that landed her in the hospital. Ever since then she wanted a new start on life. Victoria was caught up in a horrible storm. She was with our tight end, Stone Bush, and his dad's band at a concert, and the stage collapsed, killing some folks.

My friends didn't know I was going through my own personal turmoil. A part of me wanted to talk to Vanessa so she could help me out, but hearing her order that I should be tough, I figured maybe it wasn't a good idea to let her in on my dilemma. I certainly didn't want anyone to know what was going on with me before I was ready to tell all. We were all so tight, but my life right now was so messed up that I couldn't expect anybody that knew the truth to keep it a secret.

"So you hear me? You going to go talk to him before we get on the bus?" Vanessa asked.

I just nodded and walked toward Hagen. I didn't know a lot about football, but I did know that the two long touchdowns were caught on his watch. He was a defensive back, and all season long he'd been getting interceptions that made people stay away from his side of the field. However, the Ridgeland Raiders were tough cats. These wild players from the hood had his number. They were throwing the ball in his direction. He'd even tried running the ball back on special teams, but he'd fumbled, allowing the other team to get the ball back and run it in ten yards for a touchdown. Hagen's game was off from that point on. Even our home crowd, which had loved him throughout the season, was booing him.

"Oh my gosh, Yaris, there you are!" Hagen looked up and said in an excited tone. He came over and pulled me close.

I was shaking, but so was he. I wanted to give him comfort; he was my best friend. We'd been able to tell each other everything, and at that moment, he needed me more than I needed him, so I just listened as he vented.

"I lost the game for us, baby. Dang it, I lost the game!" Hagen fumed as his eyes teared up.



I'd seen him scared about the Bones before. I'd seen him upset about football before. But I'd never seen him cry before. I had to take Vanessa's advice. I had to help him be strong. I had to lie if that was what it would take for him to toughen up.

"It was not just your fault, Hagen. Seriously," I told him. When he shook his head and tried to look away, I persisted. "There were ten other guys on the field at one time. Our quarterback sucked. He didn't have any completions, and Ryder let some long runs blow past him too."

"Yeah, but I missed three big plays that cost us seven points each time. That's why we lost. Now we're out of the playoffs. Everybody's looking at me like it's my fault. Scouts were here tonight, and all I wanted to do was get an opportunity to make a better life for myself so I don't have to depend on my family, ya know? I couldn't even do that right. Do you have to go to that cheer thing tonight? Can't you ride back on the bus with me? I just want to fool around in the back with you and forget about all this."

When he started sliding his hands a little too far down my back, I moved away. We were

still on the football field sidelines, people were watching us, and I didn't need his hands on me at all.

"Why you pulling away from me?" Hagen huffed, getting upset. "I need you to make me feel good!"

Tired of being pushed, I snapped back, "I can't make you feel good. I need you to be there for me. It's not all about you, Hagen! Goodness gracious."

"What's wrong with you?"

"I'm pregnant!" I shouted loudly, like I was standing on top of a mountain and wanted the world to hear.

"Yaris! Yaris, what's wrong?" Hagen said. "You're not saying anything."

Oh thank goodness. I'd only imagined I'd told him. Thankfully, I hadn't spilled the beans right there in front of everyone. This was not the time or the place to disclose life-altering information.

I took Hagen's hand and said, "I'm cool, sorry. It's just been such a long day. You did a great job. Don't doubt yourself. I've got to go get on our bus, but know I'm thinking about you."

I leaned in for a kiss, and he obliged, until one of his coaches hit him on the shoulder pad and told him to move his tail to the locker room.

My coach motioned for me to get moving to our charter bus as well. The only good thing about the evening was that I got to sit in a plush seat alone. Though I didn't want to make the journey to Columbus and would have rather sat with Hagen, at least I didn't have to have the night be all about him. And at least I could stretch out. I felt horrible.

As I leaned back to try and relax, all I could do was think about my current lot in life. What were my folks gonna say? This was not a good time for us to bring in another mouth to feed. We were strapped for cash. My mom was working overtime for Stone's family as a housekeeper to help make ends meet because my dad's restaurant wasn't profitable. I'd burden my parents for sure if they had to help me raise a baby.

My sister, Maria, was two years younger than me. I was about to turn seventeen in December, and she was about to have her *quinceañera* at the end of this month right before Turkey Day.