

To Emily, for her unwavering patience while editing this book.

To Andrew, for standing by my side no matter how hard the
struggle

To my family and friends for providing me with more paper and
pens than I know what to do with.

Finally, to my mother. Thank you for teaching me that it's never
too late to follow your dreams.

Three Little Lies

Melissa Wolff

Chapter One

The train ran clumsily over the tracks, bouncing and jerking, slamming my head painfully against the fogged up glass. My eyes shot open upon impact and I immediately put my hand to my head, feeling for any blood. There was none, thankfully, just a goose egg that I was sure would bruise. I yawned, mouth wide, and glanced around the cart only to realize that I was the only one in a seat. There was no one next to me or around me. I leaned over and squinted to see through the doors; it didn't seem like there was anyone on the train at all. Glaring through the offending window, I realized that night had come and the train was blanketed in darkness. Only a slight hint of light caught the horizon.

What time is it? I stumbled up to a sitting position as my stomach growled. I reached for the bag next to me. My eyes were still heavy with sleep and I couldn't see what was in the bag. Instead, I dug my hand inside, feeling around until finally it clamped around my phone. Pulling it out, I pressed a button and instantly a bright glow pierced my eyes.

I blinked until my eyes adjusted and then looked down to read the time. It was six in the morning and I was nearly at the end of my trip. Thank God. Eight hours on a train was **not** my idea of fun. My body screamed in pain as I shifted in the seat. Trying to settle down, I looked out the window and was greeted by the train station. With a sigh, I began organizing my things. I couldn't wait

to get off the train and away from the badly cushioned seats.

“Next stop, Donahue, Virginia!” I heard over the loud speaker. The obnoxious sounding voice echoed off the deserted cart and verberated in my ears. I stuffed my phone in my back pocket for easy access later and as quickly as I could with my back throbbing, I hoisted my carry-all over my shoulder and grabbed my rolling luggage with the other hand.

I reached the door at the same time that the train hand did, nearly bumping into him. I looked up at him like I looked up to everyone else, with blatant curiosity. If people were allowed to stare at me, why wasn't I allowed to stare at them? The train hand smiled, stepping to the side to give me room. He was handsome in the lanky, too tall for his body type of way. His nose was thin and narrow, hooking at the very end, but his eyes were a piercing blue, a color only saw in cartoons.

“Evening ma'am,” he said as he tipped his hat for me. I snorted but nodded back before looking down and waiting for the train to finally stop. Moments later the doors opened and I stumbled out, trying to pull my luggage along with me. Much to my disdain, the wheel of my rolling luggage caught on the gap and my suitcase tumbled over, ripping apart and spilling clothes everywhere.

“I'll help you ma'am,” the train hand said as he collected my belongings and slipped them back through the rip. Then, to my surprise, he took out a roll of duct tape and placed three thick pieces over the tear, successfully keeping my clothes inside. “It's not perfect, ma'am, but it will get the job done while you look to get a new one.”

“Thanks,” I said. “I appreciate it.”

“My pleasure, ma'am,” he said. I took out a few dollar bills from my pocket.

“Have a good day.” I pressed the bills into his hand. Stuffing the bills in his pocket, he tipped his hat yet again.

“Thank you ma'am. You have a good day too.” The train hand jumped back into the cart as the horn blasted and it began to chug away.

Though still in the wee hours of the morning, the humidity was thick and assaulting. As I descended the steep steps of the train

Three Little Lies

deck, my t-shirt clung to my body and my jeans felt like they weighed a hundred pounds. If it was this hot this early in the morning, how hot would it be later on? I shuddered at the thought. *Great, I've landed in hell.*

I slung my duffle bag over my shoulder and used my free hand to pull my rolling luggage behind me. Through the heat, I glared at the crowd in front of me, searching for my sister. There were so many people in the crowd and, despite my height, I couldn't spot the top of my sister's head. People shuffled around, eyes focused on their cell phones in front of them, bumping into each other as they went. My head pounded and my pulse throbbed in my neck.

"Come on, Rebecca," I muttered. "Where the hell are you? Do you even **know** what it means to be on time?"

"Amber!" I turned at the sound of my name. "Amber over here!" My eyes locked on Rebecca standing on the far side of the train station stop, a tall lanky guy wearing plastic glasses standing next to her. Adjusting my grip on both my bags, I pushed my way through the rest of the crowd and stood in front of both of them. She also wore plastic glasses and her hair was pulled into a side pony tail, the humidity making it nothing but a nest of frizz. "Hey Amber! I missed you so much! How was your trip? Are you hungry?" Questions fired out of Rebecca's mouth at rocket speed and instead of answering them, I put my hand up in her face.

"First of all," I snarled. "Get the hell out of my face. Second of all, all I want to do is go back to the apartment and take a shower. I feel disgusting and I smell like crap. I'm exhausted. Have you ever tried sleeping on a train? Spoiler alert, it's not fun."

"Oh," Rebecca said, faltering. "Okay. We can go back to the apartment. I can make you something there if you want me to."

"Not necessary," I snapped. "I'm not a little kid. I can cook something if I want it. I don't need a baby sitter, no matter what Dad and Cheryl think." Cheryl was my stepmother and Rebecca's mother. She was a younger, skinnier version of my mother with feathered blonde hair. They were a thing for a while, married and had Rebecca. But then five years later he met my mother and they had some kind of fling. It was supposed to only be a fling...until I came along. My father decided he wanted to do the right thing for my

mother and divorced Cheryl divorced so he could be with my mother. But only a few months after I was born, he ‘suddenly’ realized that he loved Cheryl the whole time and decided to go back to her. Original, right? The hair was fake, of course, and fit perfectly with her orange colored tan and silicone breasts.

“Hey,” I looked up and glared at the guy next to Rebecca.

“I’m Jacob.” *Like I care.*

“Yeah, so?”

“I’m your sister’s boyfriend.”

“Where do I send the condolence card?” I muttered, rolling my eyes.

“Hey!” Jacob exclaimed but Rebecca put her hand up before he could say any more.

“Just leave it,” she murmured. Rolling my eyes, I shifted my luggage.

“Can we go? I really need to change.”

“Sure,” Rebecca said. She looked down. “Since the apartment is only a few blocks away...Jacob and I...we talked and we just figured the three of us could walk back together.” Walk? In this heat?

“Great. Amazing. Sounds like a plan. Whatever,” I said. “Let’s just hurry this up.” Jacob clamped his hand over my rolling luggage and I was about to snap at him when Rebecca shot me a look. Grumbling under my breath, I followed as Jacob and Rebecca started back to the apartment. Steam rose from the pavement and I wiped my brow with the back of my hand. Each step felt heavier the longer we walked.

As I followed behind them like some little puppy, I watched as Jacob took Rebecca’s hand and kissed her fingertips. She blushed and then laughed at something he whispered in her ear.

Perfect, loser love. I wonder if Jacob knows that he’s going to need the Jaws of Life to pry her legs open. Laughing at my own thought, I took my iPod out of my jeans pocket, stuck the ear buds in, and cranked up the volume, blocking out Rebecca’s pathetic attempts at flirting. Sweat trickled down my back and even without a mirror I knew that my shirt was nothing but a glove at this point, hugging my every curve.

Three Little Lies

Through my music I heard the distinct sound of a whistle next to me and I turned to see a guy smiling at me, his tongue practically hanging out of his mouth. I smirked at him and blew him a kiss. The guy's eyes widened and he turned, his hairy back assaulting my eyes. Rolling my eyes, I gagged and played with my iPod, shuffling the songs around.

I felt a hand grab at my arm and I was jerked around. Rebecca was standing there, facing me, her lips moving in a rapid pace. When she noticed that my ear buds were in and I couldn't hear her, she yanked them out, letting them fall, before putting her hands on her hips.

"You know, I've been trying to tell you about this town for ten minutes now and you haven't even heard a word I said. That's rude, Amber."

"How was I supposed to know that you were talking if I couldn't hear you to begin with?" I pointed out. Her face darkened.

"Well, why would you put your iPod on? That's just stupid."

"It sure is a hell of a lot better than listening to your pathetic baby talk." Rebecca hissed through her teeth. She marched up to me until we were only an inch apart.

"Listen to me," she hissed. "I told dad and mom that I would take care of you, keep you out of trouble this summer so you can get your head back on straight. I promised them that I could do this. Now it would be nice if you actually **worked** with me instead of digging your heels. I will **not** fail because of you."

"Hey, **you** were the one to promise Dad and Cheryl. That was your own stupidity," I said. "I don't want to be here and I told dad that I didn't want to be here. So why the hell would I work with you to help you when I don't have to? Why should this be a walk in the park for you when it's hell for me?"

"You little--"

"Ladies," Jacob said as he stepped in between us. "It's hot and I think that our tempers are getting the best of us. Look, here we are at the apartment. Why don't we all go in and relax. Let's get something cool into our systems and then sit and talk like adults. I'm sure there is some kind of compromise that we can all come to agree with." He squeezed Rebecca's shoulder and she smiled up at him. I cocked my head to the side.

"I'm sorry, when did this become any of your business?" I asked. "I don't remember asking a loser like you to get involved with my life."

"Amber!" she hissed. "That's it, I'm done with you."

Rebecca grabbed my arm and dragged me around to the back of a building. Stairs led to the second floor, where her apartment was. On the first floor was her very own diner. She pushed me up the stairs as I stumbled, grabbing onto the railing for support. Once on the landing of the second floor, Rebecca opened the door and practically threw me into the apartment which was blissfully cool. Jacob entered a minute later, carrying my luggage, and put it to the side as he followed my sister into the kitchen. I slumped down onto the love seat and pulled up one of the legs of my jeans. I ran my fingers over the wooden leg facing me. It was smooth as silk and shone against the bright sun.

Pulling at the pieces of velcro that held it in place, I pulled off my wooden leg and rested it against the chair next to me. I wiped the bottom of my amputated leg, getting rid of any sweat that accumulated there, and let the cool air hit it. When I was finished, I let my head drop and closed my eyes, resting after the long day.

* * *

"Amber!" My eyes snapped open and I looked around wildly. Cold sweat beaded my forehead and my hands were shaking. My wooden leg wasn't next to me but my sister and Jacob were. Jacob held crutches and handed them to me as our eyes met.

"Thanks," I muttered, forgetting for a moment that I didn't like him. "Why are you screaming at me?"

"Because you were screaming yourself," Rebecca said. "You must have fallen asleep and you started crying out." I sat up straighter. *Not this again* I thought. *The doctor said the pills would take care of it.*

"How bad?" I asked. "What did I say?"

"I couldn't understand you," Rebecca admitted. "But it sounded pretty bad. Is everything okay?"

"It's fine," I said sharply. There was no way that I was

Three Little Lies

going to tell Rebecca about the dream. "I'm fine."

"There's no reason to be so angry Amber," Jacob said.

"Your sister is just trying to help."

"I said I'm fine," I snapped. "She's not trying to help as much as trying to get on our father's good side. She was **always** the goody two shoes...daddy's little princess. If her perfect reputation wasn't at stake, she wouldn't give a damn about me."

"Amber," Rebecca said. It sounded more like a plea.

"Amber stop this...come on."

"Rebecca just shut up," I said. "I don't want to deal with you right now, okay?" Using the crutches, I stood up and faced my sister. "Where is my room?" Rebecca's head was down and she was gnawing on the edge of her thumb. It was her one nervous habit. "Rebecca?"

"It's the room on the left," Jacob said, answering for her.

"Dinner is in an hour, don't fall asleep again." His voice was noticeably cooler and his eyes lost their spark.

"I won't," I responded with the same flat tone. Using the crutches, I slowly made my way to the room and closed the door. Once it was locked, I slid down until my behind met the floor, and let the door hold my head. Out of the corner of my eye I saw my wooden leg next to the nightstand by the bed. My hand tightened around the handle of my crutch and I swung at the leg, knocking it to the ground.

Staying perfectly still, I listened to the noise outside of my room; a combination of murmured words and clanking dishes. It was only a matter of time before she would call our father to tell him how horrible I was and how I was ruining her perfect life. *Too freaking bad* I thought. *This is what happens when you send me away like some common criminal.* It was Cheryl's idea to send me to live with Rebecca and I knew it was because she didn't want to deal with me. She didn't want her name tarnished once her society friends found out what her step daughter was up to. So her solution? Convince my father to send me hours away...too far to cause any more damage. What could I say? My father was weak and he agreed almost instantly. Before I knew it I was on a bus heading to Virginia.

Well, he'll be regretting it as soon as Rebecca calls him.

And I promise it will only get worse from here.

* * *

“Are you settling in alright?” Rebecca asked as she took a bite of her burger. Ketchup trickled down her finger and she licked it up with the tip of her tongue.

“Sure,” I said. “I’m fine.”

“Do you need anything?”

“No.”

“Do you want anything?”

“No.” Rebecca sighed, twirling her hair around her finger.

“I’m trying here, Amber,” Rebecca said. “I get it, you don’t want to be here. But you’re not going away and I’m not going to let you slide by like Mom and Dad did. I actually want to help you.” Help me? She wanted to help me? That was a joke. Rebecca didn’t do anything for me...not if she didn’t get anything in return. Rebecca was in it for herself; always had been and always would be.

“Well, I’m so sorry that this is such a burden on you,” I said, my voice dripping with sarcasm. “I’m sorry I’m making you try oh so hard. It must be such work for you to be nice to a bastard sister you never wanted.”

“Amber, your sister loves you,” Jacob chimed in. “She was telling me all about you...you and her. You guys were attached at the hip when you were younger. Don’t let things change now.” I nearly choked on the lettuce I was chewing. Attached at the hip? Was he delusional? The closest I got to Rebecca was the thick wall between the two of us when I visited my father. She never tried to spend time with me; never asked me to do anything with her. She treated me like the dirt stuck in the crack of her favorite pair of sneakers.

“That’s funny,” I said to Jacob. “I guess I blocked those years out. I didn’t realize we were so close, Rebecca.” Her ears burned and if Jacob noticed it, he didn’t say anything. He took a swig of his bottle of beer, smacking his lips as he swallowed.

“So tomorrow,” Rebecca said, not so subtly changing the subject. “I figured you’ll spend the morning with me, helping out

Three Little Lies

around the diner, and then Jacob can take you to the meeting.”

“Meeting?” I asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“You know, the mandatory Alateen meeting Dad set up for you. The one you have to go to.” Right. The addict meeting for teenagers. One stop shop for dropping off all your loser children so you didn’t have to deal with them for a few hours.

“Jacob doesn’t have to take me to the meeting,” I said sharply.

“I don’t mind doing it.” I snapped my head at my sister’s boyfriend.

“I don’t remember asking your opinion,” I snarled before focusing my eyes on Rebecca. “I don’t need some babysitter bringing me to and from the place. The meetings are bad enough, okay?” I shoved two forkfuls of lettuce in my mouth, zeroing in on the sound of crunching as I chewed.

“Fine,” she said. “But what if you get lost?”

“Uh, there’s something called GPS,” I said after I swallowed. The lettuce felt like mush sliding down my throat. “It’s on every single phone. I’m fifteen, Rebecca, not five. I think I can get there and back without my oh-so-caring older sister or her boyfriend holding my hand.” Not wavering for a minute, Rebecca smiled and nodded.

“So it’s settled then, you’ll go by yourself,” she said. “But I expect you to come back right afterwards. Don’t start wandering around over here. And anyway, I’m going to need your help for the dinner crowd.”

“Sounds like fun.” I pushed my empty plate to the center of the table, placing the fork on top of it. “I’m finished eating. Can I please be excused?”

“Sure, where are you going?” I shrugged, standing up and stretching. *Anywhere far away from here.*

“Outside to get some air,” I said. “Maybe around the block or something. I don’t know.”

“Keep your phone with you so I can call if I need to.” Rolling my eyes, I saluted my sister and stomped out the door.

“Why don’t you put a leash and collar on me instead,” I muttered. “At least then you’ll be able to keep ahold on me for as long as you want.” As I stepped on the sidewalk, my body jerked

and I landed with a sharp thud on my ass. Gravel cut into my palm and blood trickled out, staining my fingers.

"I'm so sorry." I looked up to see a guy standing there, staring at me, worry etched all over his face. "Here let me help you up." He grabbed my arm but I yanked it away, slamming my elbow painfully onto the concrete. Biting back a curse, I cradled my arm and stared at the urchin in front of me. "Oh God. God I can't believe you hit your elbow too. Do you need a doctor? Maybe a hospital? Here, let me help."

"I'm not some bird with a broken wing, dammit," I hissed. "I'm fine. My arm is fine." He took a step closer and I stepped back. "Get the hell away from me you damn klutz." The guy frowned as he stared at me.

"I'm really sorry I—"

"I know, you didn't mean it," I said, cutting him off. "You already said all that crap." I waved my fingers in the air. "I'm still alive, so you can go now." He didn't move; he kept staring at me, his eyes wide and his chin tight. *Oh God please don't tell me he's going to cry. I'll deck him if he sheds one single tear.* "Well, what are you waiting for? I said go."

"My name is Ethan. Ethan Hunter."

"That's good. Do you want a medal for it? A cookie maybe? Or better yet, a gold star?" No matter what I was saying, this guy wasn't budging. Using my good leg for balance, I stood up. I was nose to nose with the guy and if possible, his eyes widened even more.

"Do you have a name?" he asked. I could smell the peppermint from the gum he was popping. I rolled my eyes; was this guy serious?

"Everyone has a name," I pointed out. "So really, that question is kind of moot."

"Well, what's your name?"

"None of your business," I said.

"Are you new around here? I mean this is a pretty small town and I know almost everyone but I don't recognize you."

"I don't live here," I told him. "I'm visiting my sister for the summer."

"Oh that sounds like fun."

Three Little Lies

“Clearly you don’t know my sister. If you met her, you would know that this was anything but fun.” I didn’t know why I was talking to him. He was annoying and rude. Who went up to a total stranger and started talking to them? Especially after they just knocked the same stranger down not once but twice, slicing her open like a rag doll? I dropped my eyes and took a step away from him. “Now if you don’t mind...” I fished around my pocket before producing a pack of cigarettes and a pack of matches. Balancing a cigarette between my lips, I swiped a match and cupped my hands, bringing the cigarette in. The burning glow at the end of my mouth contrasted with the darkening sky.

“Cigarettes will kill you, you know,” he said.

“Life can kill you,” I retorted. “I think I’ll take my chances over here.” Ethan shrugged, batting away the smoke around us.

“It’s your funeral,” he muttered. *Yes it is.* “See you around, I guess. And again, I’m sorry.” I watched as he disappeared around the corner, and then leaned back against the brick wall. Finally. Clearly he didn’t know how to take a hint. Above me I heard the back door to the apartment open and footsteps on the deck.

“Dammit,” I muttered, snubbing the cigarette out on the wall. I tucked the butt inside my pocket; I would have to get rid of it later.

“Amber are you down there?” Rebecca’s voice pierced through the darkness.

“Yeah I’m here,” I said, praying that she didn’t smell the smoke from where she was.

“It’s getting dark out and I don’t like you being out here alone. Come inside.”

“I’ll be right there,” I said and slid the pack of cigarettes, along with the lighter, snugly in my back pocket. With a sigh, I ascended the steps.

Chapter Two

The single fan in the cafeteria of the community center whirred pitifully, pushing the hot air around the room. My leg stuck painfully to the plastic chair as I looked around. There were about a dozen of us in the room, all sitting in a circle. Marci, the leader, sat in between a boy whose eyes were so sunken in I could barely see them, and a girl who kept tugging at the ends of her hair, chewing at her bottom lip. I sat back in my seat and adjusted my shorts. My wooden leg was bothering me and I shifted but it didn't help. The heat was causing unwanted friction between my skin and the top of the prosthetic and the only way I could stop that was if I took the prosthetic off, using crutches instead. But crutches caused more staring than the leg did.

“Welcome everyone to another meeting here today. It looks like we have a couple of new members. Would any of you like to stand up and tell us about yourself?” The others looked around the room, too polite to push us. *They probably don't want to hear any more about us than we want to share. This isn't circle time, after all.* “Anyone?” Still there was silence and someone coughed awkwardly. “Okay then, why don't we just get started? Who wants to speak first?”

“I will.” I glanced over to see a kid with spiked hair and a muscle shirt move up to the edge of his chair. “For those of you who don't know me, my name is Bailey and I started with this

Three Little Lies

group a little over two months ago.” Bailey looked at Marci and she nodded in encouragement.

“Keep going,” Marci said. “We’re all listening.” I snickered into my hand. *All we need are marshmallows and a camp fire.*

“Well, see yesterday I went to a party at my friend’s house. Her parents have this giant liquor cabinet and my friend, well... she knows where the key is. Her parents were out of town so she swiped the key from their room and it was a free for all, you know? Anyone could drink anything and she didn’t care.” Bailey ran his hand through his spiked hair. The rest of us were silent as we waited for Bailey to continue. “I have to tell you all that I did not have one single drink last night aside from water and pop. There it was, all this liquor and I didn’t want to touch a single drop of it. Just the look of all the bottles there, filled and waiting, made me sick. So instead, I left and went to spend time with my cousin at the park.” Everyone clapped and Marci got up from her chair. She walked over to Bailey and pulled him up into a hug.

“I’m so proud of you,” Marci said. “You showed great judgment and it looks like you’ve really made some positive changes.”

“I have,” Bailey admitted. “I want to be better...for my brother, you know? I want to be the type of guy he looks up to. I don’t want to be the screw up anymore.”

“That is a great goal,” Marci said when she sat down. She gave Bailey one last smile before picking up her clip board and flipping through the pages. Her eyes darted up and locked onto mine. “It’s Amber right?” I nodded. “Well, Amber, why don’t you tell us a little about yourself?”

“I would rather not,” I said. “I’m not really into this mushy, spill all my feelings, type of thing.”

“Well, you have to tell us something, Amber,” Marci said. Her eyes narrowed. “It’s the rule at these meetings. Everyone has to say one thing at every meeting. It doesn’t matter what you say, you just have to say something.”

“Fine,” I said. I pushed my lips into a thin line. “You really want me to say something?”

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

