



A RIVERVIEW MYSTERY

TODAY I'LL SEE HER

MICHELE PARIZA WACEK

Today I'll See Her

A Riverview/Redemption Novella

Books and series by Michele Pariza Wacek

Riverview Mysteries

(standalone Psychological Thrillers)

These stories take place in Riverview, which is near Redemption.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/rm_tish

Secrets of Redemption series

(Psychological Thrillers)

The flagship series that started it all.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/rd_tish

Mysteries of Redemption

(Psychological Thrillers)

A spin-off from the Secrets of Redemption series.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/mr_tish

Charlie Kingsley Mysteries

(Cozy Mysteries)

See all of Charlie's adventures here.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/ck_tish

Redemption Detective Agency

(Cozy Mysteries)

A spin-off from the Charlie Kingsley series.

https://MPWNovels.com/r/da_tish

Today I'll See Her
A Riverview/Redemption Novella
by Michele Pariza Wacek

Today I'll See Her © 2021
by Michele Pariza Wacek.

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any manner or by any means, electronically or mechanically, including photocopying, recording, retrieval system, without prior written permission from the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in a review. For more information, contact

Michele Pariza Wacek,
PO Box 10430 Prescott, AZ 86304.
info@LoveBasedPublishing.com.
ISBN 978-1-945363-42-9

.
.

For my family, for always believing in me.

Today I'll See Her

Today is the day.

My heart skipped a beat as I climbed the steps in front of the diner.

Today is the day I'll finally see my Tina.

I pulled open the door and stepped into the restaurant, my eyes quickly zeroing in on the booth in the back.

It was empty.

"I'll take that booth, Betty," I said to the older waitress. She was plump, with a cap of tight, iron-gray curls and tired eyes, and she always smelled like coffee and fried food. She wore a navy-blue tee-shirt with "Mayfield Family Restaurant" printed in white, blocky letters on the back.

She sighed. "Of course you will."

I quickly headed to the back, not wanting to chance anyone else stealing it.

It was actually Tina's booth, not mine.

And I wanted everything to be perfect for her.

"Do you want the usual?" Betty asked as I slid into the red vinyl seat. She had followed me over and was standing expectantly.

"Two tomato soups, one milk, and a cup of coffee," I said. "With extra crackers. And an extra small glass with ice and lemons."

She sighed again. "In other words, the usual."

I made a face. "Don't forget the extra crackers. Especially the oyster ones."

She turned to go. "I won't."

"And don't be so negative," I called out to her retreating back. "Tina doesn't like negativity."

She didn't reply, but her shoulders moved up and down as if she were sighing again.

Really. What I had to deal with. Of course, Tina was worth every second.

The waitress returned with the drinks, setting the coffee in front of me and a glass of milk across from me. She left the additional glass with ice and lemons in the middle of the table.

As I waited for Betty to bring the soups, I dug into my purse for my silver flask. My hands shook, and my knee bounced up and down on its own accord as I twisted open the cap and took a quick slug. As soon as the

vodka hit my system, I could feel my body relax. I replaced the cap, slipped it into my purse, and grabbed a handful of napkins from the napkin dispenser to scrub the table. Even though the wooden veneer looked clean, you could never really tell. It was better to be safe than sorry.

That was what he had always said.

Even though it had been years since I heard that deep, menacing voice, it still made me shiver. I shoved the crumbled napkins in the corner and concentrated on doctoring my coffee with cream and sugar.

Betty returned with the two bowls of soup and two silverware bundles wound tightly in napkins. She put one in front of me and the other across the table. There was a time when she only brought one. Boy, did she catch merry hell from me.

I gave her a tiny nod of thanks before tearing open one of the packages of crackers.

Tina would be here soon, but I always tried to force myself to eat a few bites while I waited for her. I knew I would be too excited once she arrived, and I was never in the right frame of mind after leaving to eat.

I wasn't hungry now either, but I knew I had to keep my strength up.

My eyes never left the front door as I shoveled in soup and crackers. I even took a few sips of Tina's milk. She wouldn't mind. She never drank much of it anyway, and it would be good for me. Plus, I always ended up finishing her glass, anyhow. I might as well get a head start.

I never touched her soup, though. That was for Tina only.

As I ate, I kept waiting for her to appear. Any minute now.

Any minute.

The big clock near the side of the door continued to tick, the hands slowly moving closer to 2:15. She would definitely be here by 2:15. I had hoped she would arrive early. There was a time when she would. She always hated being late. "C'mon, mom," she would say. "We have to get going."

I was the one who was chronically late, always running in five minutes after everyone else, full of apologies and explanations. But no more. I had turned over a new leaf.

Tina would be so pleased with me. I could hardly wait to see her surprised expression when she realized I was the one there first, waiting for her!

Yes, it would be wonderful.

It wouldn't be long now.

The minutes continued to tick by. An older couple finished their meal and got up to pay. A middle-aged construction worker stopped in for takeout. A woman with frizzy hair and red-framed glasses ordered coffee and water as she worked on her laptop.

Every time the diner door opened, I craned my neck, eagerly searched for Tina. And each time she didn't appear, I sunk back down in my seat.

Any minute now. Any. Minute.

The moment the hands of the clock struck 2:15, the door opened. I sat straight up in my booth. This was it! Tina was here! Right on time.

I held my breath as I waited. But it wasn't Tina, after all. An elderly woman, her hair freshly permed and set, walked in instead.

I crumbled again. Where was she? Why wasn't she here yet?

Was it possible she'd be late just to spite me? Make up for years of my never being on time to save my life?

That must be it. I would just have to be patient.

Even though I had only eaten soup, crackers, milk, and coffee, my stomach felt bloated, as if I had stuffed myself at Thanksgiving dinner. With shaking hands, I pulled the small glass of ice toward me. I dug the flask out of my purse again, except this time, I dumped the contents into the glass, squeezing the lemon for a little extra flavor.

I sipped my drink as I watched and waited.

Any time.

I was there for nearly an hour before Betty returned to the table. She had been watching me from across the room, but she knew not to approach until my glass was empty. "Can I get you anything else?"

"No," I said clearly and firmly as I dug through my purse for my wallet. I didn't want her to see the tears pricking at the corner of my eyes. I was so sure today would be the day.

Why didn't Tina come? Had something happened to her?

I dropped a couple of bills on the table as I slid out of the booth, leaving Betty to clear the dishes. There had been a time when she asked if I wanted to take Tina's soup with me, but after I burst into tears, she never asked again.

I paid my bill and slowly walked out, adjusting my huge sunglasses so no one would see the disappointment and despair in my eyes.

Maybe tomorrow would be better.

Actually, it would be.

Tomorrow would be the day. I was sure of it.
I just had to wait until then to see my precious Tina.

Today is the day.

My heart skipped a beat as I climbed the steps in front of the diner.

Today is the day I'll finally see my Tina.

I pulled open the door and stepped into the restaurant, my eyes quickly zeroing in on the booth in the back.

It was empty.

I looked around for Betty, but she was nowhere to be found. Nor were any other waitresses. All I saw was a tall, stooped-over man with thinning gray hair who was finishing up a sandwich and the same frizzy-haired, red-glasses-wearing girl from yesterday working on her computer again, a cup of coffee at her elbow.

I made my way to the booth, slid inside, and started pulling napkins out of the dispenser.

"What can I get you?" a voice asked at my side. A young woman stood with fingers poised over an order pad. She wore the diner's signature navy-blue tee shirt and small nametag. I noticed the color brought out the blue in her eyes. Her hair, which was pulled back into a ponytail, was blonde with dark roots. Her face was thin and narrow with high cheekbones and a pointed chin. She cocked her head as she waited for me to answer, and there was something about the movement that jolted me. She looked familiar, although I was sure I hadn't seen her waitressing before. Maybe I had run into her on the way in or out and just didn't realize it.

"I'm Chris, by the way," she said.

I frowned. Why was she telling me her name? I didn't have time to chitchat. I had things to do. Tina would be here soon. "Could I get two bowls of tomato soup, extra crackers, a glass of milk, a cup of coffee, and a glass of ice with lemons?"

She was busy writing it all down. "So, I take it you're waiting for someone?"

"Yes," I said. "She'll be here soon, so please hurry."

Chris took the hint and disappeared. I went back to scrubbing down the table. What I really wanted was to take a drink from my flask, but Chris might be back any minute.

A cup of coffee appeared at my elbow, but it wasn't Chris who brought it. "And we have the usual," Betty said as she deposited the milk and glass of ice on the table.

"Thank you," I said, reaching for the cream and sugar.

By the time she brought the soup, the table was clean, the coffee was doctored, and I had enough vodka in my system to keep me settled. I tore open the crackers and started to eat.

"Who are you waiting for?"

Chris was back, standing by my side. I gave her the side-eye. Why was she being so nosy? It was none of her business.

"Someone important," I said.

"It must be," Chris said. "You show up every day even if they don't."

I froze, my spoon halfway to my mouth. She saw my shocked expression and gave me a sheepish smile. "Waitress talk, you know?"

I relaxed. Of course. Especially that busybody Betty.

"So, why do you keep coming, if they don't?"

I looked down at my soup, feeling the tears prickle against the back of my eyes. "It's complicated," I said. "But today will be different. She'll be here today."

"I hope you're right," Chris said. "Why is today different?"

Because she can't be mad at me forever.

"It just is," I muttered, stabbing my spoon into my soup. I wished Chris would leave. What if Tina peered into the window and saw me talking to her and decided not to join me? "I don't want to keep you from your work," I said.

Chris laughed, a musical sound. "What work? There's no one here."

That wasn't exactly true, as the frizzy-haired girl was still hunched over her computer, tapping madly away. She didn't look like she needed anything, though.

"Where do you live?" Chris asked.

"Why are you asking me so many questions?" I blurted out. Couldn't she see I wanted to be left alone to wait for Tina?

Chris gave me that sheepish smile again. "Sorry. My bad. I've always asked too many questions, even as a little girl."

Something inside me seemed to soften despite myself. Tina used to drive me crazy asking question after question. "That's okay," I found myself saying. "My daughter was like that, too."

Chris cocked her head again. "Oh, you have a daughter? What's she like?"

I dropped my gaze to the soup again, feeling those ever-present tears pricking again. "I don't know," I said. "I haven't seen her in a while."

"Oh, that's too bad," Chris said. "Have you tried giving her a call? I bet she'd love to hear from you."

I glanced over to the spot across from me and the untouched bowl of soup. *She couldn't stay mad forever, right?*

I looked over at Chris, who was still smiling at me. Maybe she was scaring Tina away.

"If your friend doesn't show up, I can sit with you," Chris said. "I'm sure no one would mind. It's time for my break, anyway. I'm new here to town. Just moved from Redemption. I'd love a new friend."

At the mention of Redemption, my entire body felt like it seized up. My chest tightened, and I couldn't breathe. I wanted to tell Chris to go away, but I couldn't make my lips move.

"I wanted to leave Redemption sooner, but I couldn't," Chris continued, seemingly oblivious to my struggles. "I was stuck there. For years. Just like the rumors say. Do you believe that Redemption is haunted? I'm not sure I do, although a lot of weird things *have* happened there. Including my not being able to leave no matter how hard I tried. Riverview is much nicer, don't you think?"

I finally got my mouth to move. "I really would like to be alone," I said, trying to interject a frosty tone into my voice. "If you don't mind. I'm sure you have other things to do."

Chris's eyes widened and her lips made a little matching O. "Oh, of course. I'll leave you to your lunch."

"Thanks," I muttered and turned my attention back to my soup. Even though I hadn't eaten nearly enough, my appetite had vanished. I put the spoon down and focused on the clock.

Any minute, I told myself. Any minute, Tina would be here.

The usual pep talk.

But deep down, I knew she wasn't coming. I had missed my chance.

I pulled the glass of ice toward me, even though it wasn't past 2:15 yet.

What did it matter? Chris had ruined it for me. Stupid Chris. Why did she have to keep bothering me? Couldn't she tell I wanted to be alone?

And why would she bring up Redemption? Everyone knew that town was bad news. Even talking about it was bad luck.

What an idiot.

Hopefully, she wouldn't be working tomorrow. Because I was sure tomorrow would be the day Tina would appear.

Today is the day.

My heart skipped a beat as I climbed the steps in front of the diner.

Today is the day I'll finally see my Tina.

I pulled open the door and stepped into the restaurant, my eyes quickly zeroing in on the booth in the back.

And my heart dropped to the floor.

Someone was sitting in our booth. *Our booth!* She looked like a grandmother with teased, white, permed hair, and a soft, plump face etched with wrinkles. She wore round, silver-rimmed glasses.

"There's not going to be a problem is there, Sissy?" A voice asked in my ear. It was Betty. Her coffee-laced breath wafted across my face, and I could smell the splattered grease on her shirt.

I was shaking so hard, I could barely respond. "Why is *she* in my booth?"

"Is there going to be a problem, Sissy?" Betty repeated.

"But, it's *my* booth!"

"It's not your booth. It's the restaurant's booth," Betty said softly. "If you can't control yourself, you can't eat here today."

"But, I have to be here," I said, alarmed. "Today is the day. I can't miss it."

"Then promise me you'll control yourself," Betty said.

I looked wildly around the diner, already terrified Tina had come and gone. Two construction workers sat at a table near the front finishing up cheeseburgers and fries. Another man wearing a wrinkled tee-shirt with huge bags under his eyes sat nursing a cup of coffee.

No Tina in sight. Not that she would be here yet. But today was going to be the day!

I stared at the old woman again. She had an entire sandwich and salad in front of her, like she had just gotten her meal, and was barely touching it.

At that rate, there was no way she would be done by 2:15.

"I'll sit over there," I said ungraciously, pointing to a table near MY booth.

Betty nodded and walked over with me. "I wasn't here when she came in," she said quietly, almost like an apology. "I did ask if she would be willing to move, but she wanted that table." Betty shrugged, her expression clearly stating, "What can you do?"

I didn't answer. I was too upset.

Once I was safely seated, Betty hurried away to fetch my food and drinks, even though I realized she hadn't asked me what I wanted. I was trembling so much, I could barely unscrew the cap on my flask. The first swig did nothing for me, so I took two more before the comforting heat began filling my belly. My hands steadier, I replaced the cap and started pulling the napkins out of the dispenser just as Betty delivered my drinks.

"Are you okay?" Chris slid into the chair next to mine.

I did a double take. I hadn't even seen her in the diner, and suddenly, she was sitting next to me? She was going to chase Tina away again. Although at least this time, she left Tina's spot directly across from me empty.

"Aren't you supposed to be working?" I asked suspiciously.

She smiled that open, self-conscious smile. "Probably. But we all thought you might need a friend."

I dropped my gaze and scrubbed at the table. "I don't have any friends."

"I could be your friend," Chris said.

I paused. Did I want a friend? I did, and I didn't. There was no question I was lonely. Bitterly lonely. Someone to talk to, to hang out with, would be such a healing balm to the pain in my soul.

But friends were complicated. They wanted you to share things with them. Things that were better left unsaid.

Besides, I didn't want to be distracted. Tina would be here soon.

"I'm okay," I said. "I won't be alone soon."

"Yes, I know, your friend. I'd love to hear more about her, if you'd like to tell me."

I didn't want to tell her. What if Tina came in and heard me talking about her and got upset? No, it was better to not say anything.

Luckily, Betty saved me from answering as she delivered my soup and extra crackers. "You doing okay?" she asked.

I gritted my teeth as I glanced at the old woman. There was a little smile on her face as she chewed her sandwich. It looked like she had only taken a couple of bites.

Why did she have to eat so slowly? Why couldn't she take her meal to go? Then, she could eat it as slowly as she wanted at her house.

"We're good," Chris said.

Betty shot me a hard look. I gave her a tiny nod. She frowned, but left.

I didn't want to eat, but I picked up my spoon. I tried to watch the door, the clock, and the old woman, but it was making me feel anxious. I was so worried I would miss Tina.

"I'm glad to see you eat," Chris said. "You look like you could gain a few pounds."

I looked at the soup. She was right. I needed to eat. I dipped my spoon again.

"I used to love tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches," Chris said. "That was my favorite meal."

A smile touched my lips. "I used to make that for my family."

"That must have been wonderful."

This doesn't taste anything like the way my mother made it. Can't you follow a recipe?

I cringed, and forced a smile. "It was. Sometimes."

Chris cocked her head. "Sometimes?"

I tried to explain. "I'm not very good at following a recipe in the kitchen. I'm one of those who likes to experiment, you know? Anyway, my husband wasn't as ... adventurous as I was when it came to food."

A shadow passed over her face. "He didn't like your soup?"

"It wasn't like that," I rushed to comfort her. I didn't enjoy seeing the worried expression on her face. "It was fine. Over the years, I got better at following recipes."

She seemed to shrink in her chair. "My father used to get angry, as well."

I put my spoon down, wanting to reach out and comfort her. "I'm sure he meant well," I said. "He was probably just really stressed with work and trying to be a good provider."

"Probably," she said, but her face was still pale.

I felt like I should say something more. Let her know it wasn't her fault. That she was a little girl, and someone should have protected her.

But, before I could figure out the words, something caught my eye.

It was the grandmother, still eating very slowly. Except she wasn't eating anymore.

She was smiling.

And her lips were moving.

I stood up straight, trying to get a closer look.

Yes, her lips were definitely moving. But no one was there. She was alone at the table.

Was she talking?

Was she talking to Tina?

How could this be? Was Tina here, and I missed her?

I jumped out of my seat so fast, I knocked the chair over, and hurried over to the grandmother.

"Who are you talking to?" I demanded, my eyes frantically searching the booth.

The grandmother looked at me confused. "I'm sorry. Are you talking to me?"

"Yes!" I was shaking. "Who are you talking to?"

The grandmother shrunk back against the booth. "I wasn't talking to anyone."

"Yes, yes, you were. I saw your lips move. I saw you talking to someone. Was it Tina? Were you talking to Tina?"

The grandmother looked both bewildered and scared at the same time. "I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're talking about. Who's Tina?"

"Sissy!" Betty was at my elbow. "You promised me you weren't going to cause any trouble." Her voice was stern. "I'm so very sorry," she said to the grandmother. Was there a tinge of "I told you so," in her voice?

"But, you don't understand," I said. "She was talking to someone."

"I really wasn't," the grandmother said.

"Sissy," Betty's voice sounded plaintive. "You can't do this. We talked about this. You can't disturb the other guests. We're not going to be able to serve you anymore if you do this."

"But ..."

Betty's hand was on my arm, and she started gently tugging me away. "We all want to help you. We really do. We're on your side. But my manager isn't. You have to behave. Otherwise, we're really not going to be able to serve you anymore. Is that what you want?"

What? Not let me in? No, no, no. How else would I wait for Tina?

"But ..." I tried to protest.

"Honestly, it's best if you just go home and come back tomorrow," Betty said.

My body had started shaking uncontrollably. What if Tina came, and I wasn't here? It wasn't yet 2:15! I didn't think I could bear leaving.

But, I knew I had to. As much as I didn't want to leave, as much as I wanted to keep asking the grandmother who she was speaking to, I knew I didn't have much choice.

"Don't worry," Chris whispered in my other ear. "Tomorrow will be a better day. You'll see her tomorrow."

Tomorrow! I took a quick peek at Chris, who was smiling at me encouragingly. She was so close, I could smell her shampoo and soap. It was such a fresh, innocent, sweet smell ... something like Ivory soap. It calmed me down and made me feel better.

Chris was right. Tina would be here tomorrow. The grandmother would be gone, I would get my booth back, and it would all work out.

I just had to count down the hours.

Today is the day.

My heart skipped a beat as I climbed the steps in front of the diner.

Today is the day I'll finally see my Tina.

I pulled open the door and stepped into the restaurant, my eyes quickly zeroing in on the booth in the back.

It was empty.

I made a beeline for it, not even bothering to look around to see if anyone else was there.

My booth. This was a good sign. Tina would definitely come today.

Betty brought my drinks as I finished cleaning the table, and my soup arrived shortly after I doctored my coffee. Everything was going smoothly. I could hardly contain my excitement. Today would surely be the day!

Chris slid into the booth across from me, bring with her that sweet, innocent smell of Ivory soap. It was completely out of place with the usual greasy diner smells.

"Don't worry," she whispered as my mouth opened to protest. "I'll leave room for her here." She scrunched herself into the corner, patting the seat next to her as if to show it was open.

I wasn't sure how to handle it. Chris was so nice yesterday. I didn't want to hurt her feelings.

But there was Tina to consider.

Would Tina want to sit next to Chris? She didn't know Chris. What if she decided not to come into the restaurant at all?

But Chris smiled encouragingly at me. "It will be fine," she said. "She won't mind."

"How can you be sure?"

Chris leaned closer to me, as if she were sharing a secret. "I've been thinking about this a lot," she said. "And I think your friend is maybe just a little nervous about being alone with you."

My eyes widened. "No," I tried to say, my protest crowding into my throat so thick and fast, I couldn't even talk. But Chris waved her hand to quiet me.

"I don't mean it in a bad way," she said. "I'm sure she wants to see you, but she's just nervous or scared. If she wasn't, don't you think she'd have come by now?"

The protests died in my throat, turning into a greasy lump. I blinked back a sudden wave of tears. Chris looked alarmed.

"There, there. I'm not trying to upset you," Chris said. "I'm just trying to help, is all."

"I know," I said. "It's just ... it's hard."

"Of course it is," she said soothingly. "You know, it might help if you talked about it. Do you have any idea why she might be nervous about seeing you?"

I couldn't look at her, couldn't meet her warm, caring eyes. Such a clear blue. They reminded me a little of Tina's.

She couldn't be Tina, of course. Tina was much younger. She had just turned ten.

"I don't think she's forgiven me yet," I muttered as I started tearing a napkin into little pieces.

"Why do you think she hasn't forgiven you?"

I focused on shredding my napkin into tinier and tinier pieces. How could I tell her? I couldn't tell anyone, especially someone who had Tina's eyes.

Yet ... maybe Chris was right. Maybe it was time to do something completely different. And maybe, maybe by telling someone who reminded me of my daughter, I could break whatever curse was on us. Maybe then, I would finally see my daughter.

It was worth a shot. What did I have to lose?

It wasn't like I hadn't already paid the price for it. Many, many prices.

"Because," I said, then swallowed. I still couldn't look at her, but I could feel her compassionate, caring eyes on me. I tried again.

"Because I killed her."

* * *

Today is the day.

My heart skipped a beat as I climbed the steps in front of the diner.

Today is the day I'll finally be free!

In front of me, Ned opened the door, allowing Tina to skip her way through. The door was already closing by the time I reached it, so I had to pull it open for myself.

It doesn't matter, I told myself. This will all be over very soon.

"Go ahead and seat yourself," one of the waitresses called out. Her coal-black hair could only have come out of a bottle and was in desperate need of a trim.

Ned led us to a booth in the back. There were only a handful of customers, most of whom appeared to be finishing their meal and completely ignoring us.

Good. The less witnesses, the better.

"Can I get you something to drink?" The waitress with the bad dye job had followed us to the booth and was handing us menus. "Aunt May's Diner" was written across the front, and there was a homey, comforting-looking elderly woman with curly white hair and glasses holding a freshly baked pie pictured below.

"Two coffees and a milk," Ned said, without looking at me.

I stayed quiet, even though I would have preferred something cold. A Diet Coke, perhaps. But Ned didn't believe in soda. He thought it was a waste of good money.

"Oh, they have tomato soup," Ned said. "Perfect. That will be nice and light. Won't spoil our dinner."

The real reason it was "perfect" was that Ned was cheap. The truth was, he hadn't wanted to stop at all. We were on a road trip to see Mount Rushmore, and he wanted to drive straight through to dinner, never mind how the rest of us felt about it.

I had packed a cooler of snacks and drinks and made sure Tina was fed, so she was fine. Ned hadn't been happy about that. Eating in the car was a big no-no, as he hated a messy car. But Tina was his little princess, so after a stern warning to NOT spill even one crumb, he allowed it.

Under normal circumstances, I would have been starving, as I hadn't had anything since breakfast.

But not today.

Today, I was too nervous to be hungry.

Ned hadn't eaten, either, and shortly after 1:00 pm, I could see he was starting to get tired and unfocused. He kept rubbing his eyes, muttering to himself and fiddling with the radio. I tried not to let him see me cringe away from him, hoping he didn't take his exhaustion out on me.

Finally, he announced we would be stopping for a quick bite, which would also give us a chance to take a break and stretch our legs.

"I know how much you want to get out of the car," he said, as if this was all about our needs. "And we can get a snack, as well."

"Ice cream!" Tina called from the backseat.

"Okay, you can have ice cream," he answered.

If I hadn't been so startled and nervous that my plan was about to unfold even sooner than I thought, I might have spotted the danger sooner. I might have realized it would have been better to wait until dinner, when there would have been alcohol involved ... when I could have made sure Tina was sitting next to me.

Instead, Tina sat next to Ned. Because of the ice cream.

Ned asked her what kind she wanted. Chocolate, of course. With sprinkles. By the time the waitress returned with our drinks, he was ready with our order: tomato soup with extra crackers for the adults and chocolate ice cream with sprinkles for Tina.

"Make sure you clean the table," he ordered as he slid out of the booth. "It won't take long for the waitress to bring our food."

I was counting on that.

"I want to come, too," Tina said, following Ned out of the booth.

My hand jerked as I pulled napkins out of the dispenser, tearing one. If I had to take Tina to the bathroom, I was going to miss my chance. "Tina, can you wait until your father returns ..." I started to say, feeling a little desperate.

But Ned surprised me. "You stay here. I can take her. Come on, Tina. Sissy, get this table cleaned."

He didn't wait for me to answer, just turned and walked with Tina to the bathrooms, leaving me sitting there blinking at him, my hand full of napkins.

I went to work, scrubbing the table with one hand, while the other slipped into my pocket, playing with the edges of a tiny plastic bag filled with rat poison.

My plan was simple. If Ned didn't leave on his own to go to the bathroom and wash his hands, then I would distract him by spilling his drink on him. In the commotion, I would sprinkle the rat poison on his food.

If Tina needed distracting, I had crayons and a coloring book with me, and I could even accidentally knock them on the floor if I had to.

My reasoning for doing it at the restaurant was because I figured they'd have rat poison there. Obviously, they wouldn't want rats. If I did it at home, everyone would know I did it. But in a restaurant? Everyone would assume it was some sort of terrible mistake.

Looking back, however, I could clearly see the many flaws in that plan. I should have killed him at home. I could have claimed Battered Woman Syndrome, and it likely would have stuck. Because I was psychologically damaged. After years of mental and physical abuse, I could no longer think straight.

Hence, my thinking poisoning my husband in a restaurant was a good idea.

The waitress brought the soups shortly after Ned and Tina went to the bathroom. I quickly opened up the little plastic bag and dumped the contents into the soup, then gave it a quick stir.

Tina ran back first, startling me. I still had the spoon in the soup.

"Yummy, tomato soup," she said. "Why are you stirring daddy's soup?"

"Just getting it ready for him, darling," I said. I wondered if I should pull the spoon out and try and clean it, but it was too late now. Tina saw it and might say something. I would have to think fast for a reason.

I left it at the side of the bowl and reached for the crackers, tearing one of the packets open. Maybe if I set it up for him—add the crackers, like I would do at home—he would just assume it normal.

My attention was torn between the crackers and making sure I had a ready excuse, which meant I wasn't paying attention to Tina.

Something I have regretted every single day since, and will continue to regret until the day I die.

Before I even realized she had done it, she picked up the spoon and stuck it in her mouth.

"Mmmn," she said. "It's good." She dipped it for another bite.

I screamed. "No!" I slapped the spoon away from her. "No, you can't eat that. Spit it up. Spit it up!"

Tina shrank away from me. "Mommy, you're scaring me."

Frantic, I threw myself over the table. I had to make her throw up. Maybe there was enough time. Even though in my heart I knew there wasn't. I had specifically looked for rat poison with strychnine in it, knowing it would be fast and unstoppable.

But I had to try.

"What in the devil is going on?" Ned was standing by the table, watching me lunge at Tina, who scrunched herself as far away as she could from me. "Sissy, what are you doing?"

"Ned," I panted. "You have to get her to throw up."

Ned looked bewildered. "Why? Tina, what did you eat?"

"I just had some of your soup," she said.

"My soup?" His confusion deepened.

I was on my knees, stretching across the table, my hands fruitlessly grabbing for Tina. At some point, I spilled my coffee, and the dark liquid spread across the table. I was leaning in it, the coffee like blood against my skin. "Ned! There's no time. Grab her. She has to throw up!"

"Why does she have to throw up?" Ned asked.

"What's going on?" The waitress had returned, holding Tina's ice cream. "Is there a problem?"

"My daughter," I yelled. "Call 9-1-1. Tell them to hurry."

Tina had begun to cry. "Mommy, I don't feel so well."

"9-1-1?" Ned was mystified. "I don't understand. Did she eat something other than my soup? Or ...?" His face darkened as understanding began to dawn. "Sissy," he hissed, grabbing my arm and painfully yanking me back. "What did you do?"

"Call 9-1-1," I screamed. "Do it now, before it's too ..."

I never got the word "late" out of my mouth. At that moment, Tina's eyes rolled up in her sockets, and she started convulsing. Vomit spewed from her mouth.

"Oh my God," the waitress screamed, dropping her ice cream. "What's happening?"

Sobbing, snot streaking down my face, I began crawling across the table to my dying daughter. Ned stood there, frozen, watching the two of us, his eyes blank with shock.

"What have you done?" he said again. But this time, it was more quietly, his voice full of despair.

Today is the day.

My heart skipped a beat as I climbed the steps in front of the diner.

Today is the day I'll finally see my Tina.

I pulled open the door and stepped into the restaurant, my eyes quickly zeroing in on the booth in the back.

It was empty.

As I hurried over to it, I searched the restaurant, looking for Chris. She had disappeared yesterday. At some point as I was reliving my personal hell, she must have gotten up and left. I looked for there then, but wasn't able to find her.

I wondered if something had happened, and she had been called away unexpectedly. Maybe she tried to tell me, but couldn't get my attention while I was lost in the memory.

By the time I realized she was gone, it was after 2:15.

The same time my daughter had drawn her last breath.

It was no use waiting around anymore, so I paid my bill and left, hoping Chris would be back tomorrow.

There was something about her, something about the way she cocked her head. Something about those dark-blue eyes that reminded me of Tina. I could almost feel a sense of my daughter when she gazed at me, hanging on my every word.

She had wanted to be my friend, but initially, I had pushed her away.

I was hoping she would give me a second chance.

"Here you go," Betty said, placing my coffee, milk, and a glass of ice with a lemon on the table. "I'll be back with your soup. And extra crackers."

"Where's Chris?" I asked.

Betty had been about to leave, but she immediately paused and turned to face me. "Chris?" Her expression was guarded.

"Yeah. Chris. The new waitress."

Betty's face puckered, like she had sucked on a lemon. "There's no Chris working here."

"Of course there is," I said. "I've been talking to her. She's new. Just moved here from Redemption."

Betty took a careful step toward me, her eyes never leaving my face. "We haven't hired a new waitress in months," Betty said, speaking very slowly, like I was a particularly dim child. "Almost a year ago. And there's no one here named 'Chris.'"

"But there has to be," I said, beginning to feel more agitated. "I've been talking to her all week."

Betty kept staring at me. "Do you need me to call someone? Are you okay?"

No Chris? How could this be? She was here! I knew she was here. I saw her. I had *smelled* her. The fresh, innocent Ivory soap.

She had to be real.

"Is this about your husband?"

I blinked stupidly at Betty. "Husband?"

She looked embarrassed. "Former husband, I mean. It was in the papers. He died earlier this week."

I was having trouble putting all the pieces together. "How do you know about my husband?"

Betty's expression turned sad. "Honey, we know all about you. Your trial, your sentence, it was all in the paper. You knew that, right?"

I felt flustered. Everyone knew? How could that be? I looked nothing like that young, haunted, abused mother from years ago. Prison had changed me in ways that made me unrecognizable even to myself when I looked in the mirror.

Betty leaned closer. "Look, I'm sure the bastard deserved it. Everyone knew it. It was such terrible luck what happened with your daughter, Christina. It was probably that horrible town. Redemption. Weird things happen there, you know. Mark my words. My cousin lives there, and he's seen some things, let me tell you. But at least your former husband got what he deserved. He's gone now, so good riddance."

I nodded, still trying to put all the pieces together. Ned was dead. And there was no Chris. My mind was a whirling mess, like a bunch of trapped mice were running around frantically trying to get out. All I wanted was a drink.

Betty gave me a concerned look. "Are you going to be okay? Do you need me to call someone?"

"I'm fine," I said. I still didn't understand what had just happened or what was going on, but I needed a drink, and if I didn't tell Betty I was fine,

she would never leave me alone to get it. I forced myself to smile. "This week has been a bit of a shock," I said. I wasn't sure if that was the right thing to say, but Betty gave me an understanding nod, so it must have made sense to her.

"I'll get your soup," she said and walked away.

The moment she was gone, I seized my flask out of my purse and uncapped it. My hands were shaking so much, I almost spilled the contents, but I finally unscrewed it and got it to my mouth.

As soon as the vodka hit my bloodstream, I could feel myself start to relax as my mind quieted.

My only job was to wait for Chris. Everything else, whatever it was that Betty was talking about, I didn't have to worry about.

All I had to focus on was Chris.

Once she was here, everything would be fine.

I just had to wait.

Because today was the day I would finally see my Chris.

Author's Note

Ready to continue your journey through Riverview, Wisconsin? You've got your choice of 4 psychological suspense standalones to choose from.

[*The Stolen Twin*](#)—As a child, Kit's twin sister Cat disappeared, never to be heard from again. Until one Halloween night. But is it really Cat?

[*The Taking*](#)—Twenty-four years ago, five-year-old Tori walked into her newborn brother's room in the middle of the night and discovered a figure abducting him. Except his lifeless body was still in the crib. Or was it?

[*Mirror Image*](#)—A serial killer is targeting young men. A serial killer who appears to be Linda's sister Elizabeth. But it can't be Elizabeth, she's dead. Right?

[*The Third Nanny*](#)—Everyone has something to hide. Including the nanny.

You can also check out exclusive bonus content including deleted scenes and short stories, like *Mine—No good deed goes unpublished*. [Here's the link.](#)

The bonus content reveals hints, clues, and sneak peeks you won't get just by reading the books, so you'll definitely want to take a look. You're going to discover a side of Riverview and Redemption that is only available here.

If you enjoyed *Today I'll See Her*, it would be wonderful if you would take a few minutes to leave a review and rating on [Goodreads](#) or [Bookbub](#). (Feel free to follow me on any of those platforms as well.) I thank you and other readers will thank you (as your reviews will help other readers find my books.)

All my books are interconnected and are a part of the Riverview/Redemption world. You can learn more on at [MPWNovels.com](#), along with lots of other fun things such as short stories, deleted scenes, giveaways, recipes, puzzles and more.

I've also included a sneak peek of *The Stolen Twin*, just turn the page to get started.

The Stolen Twin Chapter 1

My life has been dominated by two dreams.

In the first, I see my twin sister Cat at seven, the last time I ever saw her. She is all pink and golden – hair hanging in yellow ringlets, dancing blue eyes, rosy cheeks. She is beautiful, my sister. Light, sweet, charming. My opposite.

My father is pulling her as she sits in a little red wagon, laughing and waving. They're in a wild, grassy field. Birds are twittering, crickets chirping. A butterfly flits by. Gently swaying grasses and colorful wildflowers brush against her, stroking her soft skin, loving her. She laughs and caresses their long, flowing stems.

But there is more in this field than plants, insects and birds. Fairies live here too – although they usually hide when people walk by with their heavy crushing footsteps, unnatural smells and callous voices. My father, plowing through with bent back and plodding footsteps, sends them cringing and scurrying away as well.

But then they hear the tinkling sound of my sister's laughter.

Peeking from behind brown-eyed Susan's and pebbles, they see Cat in the wagon, clutching a dandelion in her fist, rubbing the yellow petals against her face. She astonishes them, seduces them, hypnotizes them. They've never seen anything like her before. Gradually, they creep out and move closer. Cat virtually sparkles in the sunlight, bright and shining. As she catches sight of the fairies, she laughs and blows them kisses.

The fairies, now completely under her spell, swarm over to her, nuzzling her face, soft arms, slender neck. She smiles, touching them back – fingers grazing over delicate wings not much more substantial than a cobweb.

More fairies emerge as my father guides her deeper into the field. The grasses become thicker, taller. The fairies cling to the blades, reaching their tiny hands out to caress Cat as she drifts by.

Finally, the queen herself comes forward, tall and majestic. She wears a dress made from white tulips and daffodils, sparkling with dewdrops. Her long, silky, golden hair is entwined with white daisies. Large green eyes peer out from under her mass of hair. Her face is cold, all sharp angles and pale skin, but beautiful.

"This is the one," the queen says, her voice like breaking glass.

Cat looks up, fairies tangled in her hair. She blinks as her gaze meets that of the queen's. They stare at each other, each mesmerized by the other. Then, slowly, the queen reaches down and gathers my sister into her arms. The fairies dart out of the way, hovering above them like a cloud of gnats. The queen turns, Cat cuddled in her arms, and they disappear, vanishing into the thick grass.

My father pulls the wagon a few seconds longer before realizing something is wrong. Seeing Cat missing, he drops to the ground and begins searching fruitlessly through the grass. "Cat," he yells over and over. "Cat, come back. Come back!"

Nothing answers him, not even a chirp from a bird. He cries her name over and over, begging her to come back, while the fairies croon over their newest prize.

My second dream is completely opposite - much like the difference between Cat and me. It begins with me and my parents in the car. We're going to Milwaukee to visit my grandparents, but suddenly my parents take a detour. We drive down an old country road filled with potholes and thirsty cracks. My chest begins to take on a familiar heaviness.

We're at a church, a white country church with a tall steeple and an elaborate stained glass etching of Mary and Jesus in the manger. A bell rings, deep and melodious. I'm having trouble breathing.

We walk to the graveyard behind the church, my parents in front of me, talking quietly, ignoring me (as usual). The bell continues to ring, the sound growing louder, echoing in the stillness. I stumble, trying desperately to breathe, to draw air through lungs now shrunken into a tight ball of twine. I need my inhaler, but don't know where it is.

My parents continue to ignore me. I gasp and start to fall, but now I'm floating, floating, toward the graveyard. All I can hear is the tolling of the bell. I can't breathe at all. My lungs burn, a bright fireball in my chest. This is it, I realize. This is the end. This is where I die.

I wake then, gasping and reaching for my inhaler. As uncomfortable as it is, I prefer it to the hot tears and heavy sick feeling that follows the fairy dream. Cat is the chosen one. I'm the disappointment.

These were the dreams that dominated my life. If I had other ones, I never remembered them. Only these two. I never told a soul about my dreams - they were my penance, my burden, my personal hell.

Until the day Cat came back, turning my life into something worse than any nightmare I ever could have imagined.

Want to keep reading? Grab your copy of ***The Stolen Twin*** [here](#).

Books and series by Michele Pariza Wacek

Riverview Mysteries

(standalone Psychological Thrillers)

These stories take place in Riverview, which is near Redemption.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/rm_tish

Secrets of Redemption series

(Psychological Thrillers)

The flagship series that started it all.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/rd_tish

Mysteries of Redemption

(Psychological Thrillers)

A spin-off from the Secrets of Redemption series.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/mr_tish

Charlie Kingsley Mysteries

(Cozy Mysteries)

See all of Charlie's adventures here.

https://MPWnovels.com/r/ck_tish

Redemption Detective Agency

(Cozy Mysteries)

A spin-off from the Charlie Kingsley series.

https://MPWNovels.com/r/da_tish

About Michele



A USA Today Bestselling, award-winning author, Michele taught herself to read at 3 years old because she wanted to write stories so badly. It took some time (and some detours) but she does spend much of her time writing stories now. Mystery stories, to be exact. They're clean and twisty, and range from psychological thrillers to cozies, with a dash of romance and supernatural thrown into the mix. If that wasn't enough, she posts lots of fun things on her blog, including short stories, puzzles, recipes and more, at MPWNovels.com.

Michele grew up in Wisconsin, (hence why all her books take place there), and still visits regularly, but she herself escaped the cold and now lives in the mountains of Prescott, Arizona with her husband and southern squirrel hunter Cassie.

When she's not writing, she's usually reading, hanging out with her dog, or watching the Food Network and imagining she's an awesome cook. (Spoiler alert, she's not. Luckily for the whole family, Mr. PW is in charge of the cooking.)