



# *This Redeemer*

Book Three  
in the  
Sisters Redeemed Series

Jerusha Agen

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## *Chapter One*

*“For You are our Father,  
though Abraham does not know us,  
and Israel does not acknowledge us;  
You, O Lord, are our Father,  
our Redeemer from of old is Your name.”*

~Isaiah 63:16

Charlotte Davis closed her eyes. *Breathe.*

The tromp of footsteps on the stairs matched the  
pounding of her heart.

Tommy slammed into the apartment, smacking the  
door against the wall as he stumbled into the room.  
Patches of sweat darkened his T-shirt around his arms.

Charlotte pretended to concentrate on the bowl that  
sat in front of Phoebe at the table. Her hand shook as she  
poured cereal into the bowl. She smoothed her hand over  
Phoebe’s damp hair. Even little kids sweated in this heat  
wave.

Tommy teetered farther inside and put his hand on the back of the torn armchair to steady himself as his tilted cowboy hat finally fell off his head. “Not enough,” he slurred.

Charlotte swallowed. Normal drunk was bad enough. This was really, really drunk.

“We didn’t get enough.” He squinted at her through red eyes.

“Is there any left?”

He grunted a laugh. “We didn’t get nothin’. How’s there gonna be some left?”

“Our rent is due.”

He coughed and leaned harder on the armchair.

“Our rent, Tommy.” Her throat constricted, warning signals blaring in her brain. *Don’t push him*. She didn’t know what else to do. “For this apartment. We’re going to get kicked out if we don’t make the payment. And there isn’t any food left. What are we going to eat?”

He shook his head, drops of sweat falling off his forehead. “I’m ... so ... sick ... of your naggin’.” He punched out each word one at a time as he lifted his head to glare at her. “All you do is complain. I gotta do everything. I get the money to keep a roof over your head. You and your dumb kid, you just sit around all day.” He

shoved away from the armchair and stomped in her direction.

She instinctively moved to stand behind a chair, but he walked past her and went to the refrigerator. He swung open the door and looked inside. He slammed it shut, making her start.

“Where’s the beer?” He opened the empty cabinets, smacking the doors so hard she thought they’d pop off the hinges.

“Where’s the beer?” he yelled as he swung to face her.

Phoebe started whimpering and covered her face with her hands.

“You drank it all.” Charlotte didn’t meet his eyes.

Tommy shrieked, his full cheeks flushing bright red. “I told you to get me some.”

He hadn’t, but Charlotte couldn’t say that. “I didn’t have any money.” Maybe that would work.

He cursed and jerked open the bottom cabinets. “Can’t believe a word that comes outta your mouth. No wonder your momma hated you.”

*Don’t listen. Just get through.* Charlotte tuned out the insults Tommy kept shooting at her and looked at Phoebe instead.

Phoebe still covered her eyes, whimpering non-stop.

Charlotte was too far away to reach her, and who knew what Tommy would do if she tried to go to Phoebe now. What was he looking for?

“Where’s the money?” Tommy stood up straight, puffing a little.

Her breath left her body. How did he know? She was so careful. “What money?” She forced herself not to bite her lip.

*That’s your tell*, Momma always said.

Tommy stalked toward her, hot anger spitting from his eyes. “You don’t con me!”

She scurried around the table and faced him as she backed away.

“You con them other people. You don’t con me. You got it?”

Her leg bumped the armchair behind her, and she scooted around it, putting the chair between herself and Tommy. “I got it.” She softened her voice to pleading submission. “Really, I didn’t mean to con you, Tommy. It’s me, you know? Tommy? Baby?”

He stopped on the other side of the chair. The flash that had briefly given life to his dull green eyes vanished. “I know you keep extra cash somewhere. Where is it?”

They needed that. It was her only hope now that he kept getting worse. “I know you’re hurting, Tommy. We’ve all had it rough. I know you don’t really want to live like this.”

His mouth twisted. “What are you talkin’ about?” He let out a frustrated grunt. “Will you shut up that kid!” Not a question.

Phoebe swayed back and forth as she whimpered.

“It’s okay, baby girl.” That wasn’t going to be enough.

“You shut her up, or I will.”

The curl of Tommy’s lips sent a surge of fear through Charlotte’s veins. She risked coming out from behind the chair to go to her daughter. Charlotte stood beside Phoebe as she put her arms around the little girl and held Phoebe’s head against her. “Shhh, baby girl,” Charlotte whispered. “You have to stop.”

“Gimme the money.”

Charlotte tried not to jump at Tommy’s voice, suddenly so near. She stared at the top of Phoebe’s head. If he drank that up now, they wouldn’t have anything. She had to save the money for them. He’d see that when he slept it off. “There isn’t any.”

He grabbed her arm and launched her away from Phoebe. “I told you to shut up!”

Phoebe shrieked as Tommy smacked her little face.

Charlotte ran back to the table and forced herself between them, shoving her hand into Tommy’s chest. “It’s in the freezer, Tommy!” she shouted up at him. “The money’s in the freezer!”

He grabbed her arms, squeezing hard as his red eyes burned a hole in her. “I oughtta kill you right now.”

She held her breath and stared at the crazed fury in his eyes. Did he mean it this time?

He let her go.

She didn’t dare move as he went to the freezer and took out the wad of cash. He shoved the bills in his back jeans pocket and headed for the door.

He stopped, turned back, and pointed at her. “You’re lucky I don’t kill you.”

She closed her eyes as the door slammed shut behind him. *Breathe. Keep breathing.* They had survived.

Phoebe’s sobbing broke through Charlotte’s relief.

The trembling started, turning Charlotte’s knees wobbly as she lifted Phoebe into her arms. Phoebe’s long limbs hung to Charlotte’s knees, but the girl was so skinny Charlotte had no more trouble carrying her now

than when she was five. “He’s gone, baby girl,” Charlotte whispered in her daughter’s ear as Phoebe squeezed her neck. “Momma’s here.”

But what good would that do the next time? Sobs racked Phoebe’s body as Charlotte held her close, Charlotte’s own hands trembling on Phoebe’s back. The blow to her baby girl’s face stung like a stab in Charlotte’s heart. She was used to taking what she got, but Tommy had never laid a hand on Phoebe. No one had.

And no one was going to again.

Charlotte clenched her jaw. She had to get Phoebe out, away from here, away from Tommy. The wild idea started Charlotte’s heart fluttering. How? Where could they go?

Something green on the floor caught her eye.

“I have to put you down, baby girl.” Charlotte kissed Phoebe’s wet cheek. “Just for a second.” She gently set Phoebe in the armchair then went to see if the green thing was what she thought.

The money. Must have fallen out of Tommy’s pocket when he left.

Charlotte picked up the thick wad of bills—the most money she’d ever had in her life. Maybe it would be enough to get them somewhere safer. But she’d have to



figure out a way to get more money wherever they went. Too bad she hadn't thought more about this before. She could have planned for it.

*You get out, Charlie.* Momma's raspy voice echoed in Charlotte's memory. *You get away from that man and go to your daddy. I found him.*

A dying woman's confession. Or was it supposed to be a gift? Charlotte didn't see it that way when her mother pressed the paper with some guy's name and address on it into Charlotte's hand. Charlotte hadn't known her daddy was lost. Just dead. Finding out he was alive didn't help anything. Just meant he had left her and Momma alone all those years, letting them rot. He never cared about his own daughter enough to take her out of the pigsty she lived in and get her away from her no-good momma. Charlotte had almost thrown the paper away, but she had stuffed it in the back of her underwear drawer instead.

"I'll be right back, baby girl." Charlotte brushed her hand over Phoebe's hair and headed for the bedroom. She dug for the paper, letting out a breath when she felt its crumpled edge. She took it out and stared at the name and address, scratched out by Momma's shaky hand. Charlotte bit her lip. She should have just enough money to get there by bus. She hoped.

The daddy she never knew was the last person in the world she wanted to see, but she had to do it for Phoebe. Tommy didn't know a thing about Charlotte's daddy being alive, so it was the one place he'd never think to look. If she was smart about how they got there, maybe he wouldn't be able to follow them. Maybe.

Phoebe's sobs drifted into the bedroom.

Charlotte didn't have any choice. She opened another drawer and grabbed Phoebe's two outfits, stuffing them in a shopping bag. She just had to hope her deadbeat daddy would be their ticket out.



Was this what freedom looked like? Charlotte held Phoebe's hand in hers as they stared at the fancy house, surrounded by the most perfect yard she'd ever seen up close. The soft green grass, not crunchy and brown like Texas grass, was trimmed exactly to the edge of the clean brick path that led to the front door. The bushes that lined the house were neatly shaped, like somebody had threatened them with a beating if they dared put a leaf out of place. A cool breeze drifted under the large trees in the yard, chilling Charlotte's shoulders, left bare by her knit tank-top.

Or maybe this place was giving her a chill. The one-story house wasn't huge like mansions she'd seen on TV, but the brick walls, arched windows, and grand entrance were unlike any place she'd been in. If she played it right, they were about to get inside this one.

She gave Phoebe's hand a squeeze as she started forward, a bitter taste seeping into her mouth. So this was how the man who abandoned her lived. The contrast between this place and the crummy apartments her mother had kept her in made Charlotte sick.

Charlotte stopped in front of the large, wooden door. Just meant this guy had more to lose. He'd be quick to pay her whatever she wanted to get out of his life fast. And he could definitely afford to pay.

Charlotte took a deep breath and pressed the doorbell button. A chime sounded in the house, drifting to where Charlotte waited. "It'll be okay, baby girl," she whispered, hoping it was true.

The door pulled slowly open, and a man looked at her with brown eyes so like hers she thought she might have been staring in a mirror. "Can I help you?"

She opened her mouth to speak but closed it again. His nose was just like hers, his chin, the too-tall forehead.

"Miss? Are you all right?"

He had the nerve to ask her that. “Are you Marcus Sanders?” The answer was obvious, but she wanted to hear him admit it.

“Yes.”

“I’m your daughter.”

## About the Author

Jerusha Agen is a lifelong lover of story--a passion that has led her to a B.A. in English and a highly varied career. A member of American Christian Fiction Writers, Jerusha is the author of the *Sisters Redeemed Series*, which includes the titles *This Dance*, *This Shadow*, and *This Redeemer*. She also co-authored *The Heart Seekers Series* novella collection and the e-book *A Ruby Christmas* from Write Integrity Press.



Jerusha relishes snowy Midwest winters spent with her two large, furry dogs and two small, furry cats.

Visit Jerusha's website at [www.JerushaAgen.com](http://www.JerushaAgen.com). Follow Jerusha on Twitter @SDGwords, Facebook (Jerusha Agen – SDG Words), and Pinterest.

# Other Books by Jerusha Agen



## *This Dance*

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No love, no pain. No God, no games.

A tragedy three years ago destroyed Nye's rise to the top of the dancing world as an upcoming tango star, and in the process destroyed her reason for living, too. She survived the pain and built a new life resembling nothing like the one she left behind, determined never to hurt again.

Nye's emotional walls hold up perfectly until she meets a handsome lawyer and an elderly landowner. They seem harmless, but one awakens feelings she doesn't want and the other makes her face the God she can't forgive. Will these two men help Nye dance again?



## *This Shadow*

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Sisters Redeemed Series**

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from most local booksellers.**

She's famous for her upbeat outlook.  
Then the world goes black.

Oriana Sanders is always happy. And why shouldn't she be? She enjoys a close

relationship with God and a purpose-filled career teaching troubled kids. She even has the potential for romance in her sister's friend, Nicanor, whose dark good looks and brooding manner make him an intriguing project for Oriana.

Oriana's attempts to reach Nicanor with the joy of the Lord are brought to a halt when a confrontation with her student's drug-dealing brother ends in tragedy. Facing darkness she has never known, can Oriana learn to forgive the unforgivable and find her way through the shadows to the light?

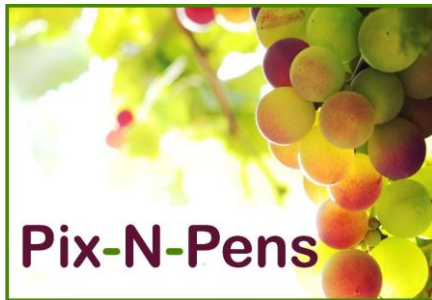
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