



Book Two
in the
Sisters Redeemed Series

*This
Shadow*

Jerusha Agen

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Chapter One

*“Christ leads me through no darker rooms
than He went through before.”*

– Richard Baxter (“Lord, It Belongs Not to My Care”)

A girl’s scream stopped Oriana Sanders mid-sentence.

“What was—” her sister, Nye, started to ask, but Oriana had already bolted for the door out of the dance studio.

Oriana ran across the small parking lot to the kids who clustered around something she couldn’t see. She reached the outside of the ring the kids formed and looked over their heads.

Juan Castro and Dez Jennings stood in the middle, swinging at each other.

Oriana barely had time to register that they were fighting before Dez swung his leg and knocked the bigger boy off his feet.

In a split second, Dez was on the blacktop behind Juan, his arm wrapped tightly around the heavy boy’s neck.

“Dez, stop!” Oriana pushed through the kids to reach the boys. She pulled on Dez’s arm.

He stared down at Juan with a strange vacancy in his bloodshot eyes. His grip didn’t loosen, though Juan kicked and

squirmed.

“Dez, listen to me.” Oriana tried to pull Juan from the hold just as a man’s tanned hand appeared behind Dez and grabbed the boy by the back of his shirt, yanking him away.

Oriana’s breath came back in a rush when normal color flooded Juan’s cheeks.

He panted and put a hand to his throat.

“Are you okay?”

Juan nodded.

Oriana stood and looked to see who their rescuer was.

“Nicanor?”

She had only seen Nicanor Pessoa once, at a distance, but his chiseled features and wavy black hair were not things a woman forgot. Now she found herself caught by his eyes—a stunning electric blue that had no business being among his dark, Argentine features.

His eyebrow arched slightly above one of those eyes, as if surprised she knew his name.

Heat rushed to her cheeks. She felt like she had just admitted to stalking him on Facebook, though she knew he wasn’t actually on there since she had checked. She opened her mouth to say something, but his gaze dropped to the boy he held.

Dez grunted and squirmed in Nicanor’s grip.

Oriana crouched in front of Dez, trying to push aside the questions that swirled in her mind about Nicanor’s sudden

appearance. She met the boy's glare straight-on. "I thought you meant it, Dez."

A startled lift of the eyebrows betrayed his tough-guy scowl.

She waited.

"What?" he finally muttered.

"You told me you weren't going to let your temper control you anymore. Remember?"

He looked down. "Nothing controls me." He jerked again, but the effort was hopeless.

"Then do you want to tell me why you were fighting with Juan?"

His jaw muscles clenched beneath his dark skin.

Stifling a sigh, she stood. "I want you to get in the van and stay there until we leave." She looked at Nicanor. "I think it's okay to let him go now."

Nicanor's eyebrow went up again, reminding her so much of Dez that she had to squelch a smile.

To reassure him, she spoke to Dez. "Can Mr. Pessoa let you go? Will you get in the van?"

Dez nodded, glaring at the blacktop.

Oriana gave Nicanor a small smile, and the stoic man slowly relaxed his grip.

Dez jerked away, flashing Nicanor a sneer before he turned and swaggered to the van as if he had just been named rapper of the year.

“He forgot his cap.” LaTisha picked up the fallen cap from the blacktop and looked at Oriana with her big, long-lashed eyes. “Should I give it to him?”

“I’d rather you stay with me until we all go home. I’ll hang on to it for him.” Oriana took the cap LaTisha handed her and went back to where Juan still sat on the ground.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah.” He stood up as if he had forgotten he could, looking shaken but healthy.

“What was the fight about, Juan?”

His gaze dropped.

Oriana looked at the other kids, who immediately applied themselves to the job of avoiding her gaze. She knew better than to expect an answer, but she couldn’t help hoping. She swallowed her disappointment and reminded herself to look on the bright side. Building trust with these kids was just going to take a little longer.

“Nicanor?”

Oriana turned to see her sister approach the silent rescuer. Nye didn’t look nearly as surprised to see her old friend as Oriana had been. She was the picture of grace and confidence, as usual.

Oriana couldn’t ignore the little twinge she felt when Nicanor’s dark expression lightened slightly as he looked at Nye.

Honestly. Nye was very happily married, so Oriana

certainly had no reason to be jealous, if that's what her odd reaction meant.

"You came." Nye smiled at Nicanor. "Did you think about it?"

His head tilted in the smallest hint of a nod.

"You'll do it?" Nye's smile widened.

"Yes. For now."

Not trying to eavesdrop, Oriana couldn't help overhearing the oddly cryptic conversation.

"Wonderful. Thank you." Nye's voice was calm, but as she turned to walk to Oriana, the gleam in her eyes betrayed that she was considerably more excited than she was letting on.

"Everything okay?" Nye stopped by Oriana.

"I think so." Oriana tried to guess which topic Nye was referring to—the exotic heartthrob behind her or the unruly middle schoolers.

"Do you know what started it?"

Ah. The kids. Oriana made herself focus on her sister. "I have a pretty good idea." She lowered her voice. "They won't tell me, of course."

Nye looked at the children, who were regrouping into little cliques of two or three. "African-American versus Hispanic?"

Oriana smiled. Bless her sister's politically-correct heart. "Something like that." She spotted a glance from Nicanor and tried to catch his gaze. "Thanks for your help. I'm really glad you were here."

A small jerk of his chin was her only answer.

“I’ll have to start advertising that Nye’s Dance Studio has its own bouncer.” Nye turned her twinkling gaze on Oriana as she laughed.

Hearing her sister laugh and joke after so many years watching her grieve the loss of her fiancé was enough to distract Oriana from Nicanor’s lack of response. She was looking at a miracle in Nye’s smile, and she wasn’t going to let being ignored by a gorgeous tango dancer spoil the moment.

Nye caught Oriana’s look. “I know. It’s good to see me smile again.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever get used to it.”

“Our God is great.”

Oriana’s heart swelled at the statement from her sister who was once so bitter at God. “You can say that again.” Oriana’s gaze fell on Nicanor behind Nye as he turned and headed toward the studio.

“Sorry.”

Oriana looked at her sister, realizing too late that she had been caught watching.

“I should have introduced you. I felt bad I didn’t get to at the wedding.”

“He does seem to skedaddle whenever I’m around.”

“It’s not you.”

“Not like it matters at all, of course.” Oriana waved her hand dismissively. “I’ve scared off cuter guys than him,” she

lied.

“Miss Sanders? Are we going now?”

Nye squished her lips together, only partially holding back a laughing smile as Oriana turned to see eleven-year-old Maria at her side.

Had the little girl heard that? Tossing Nye a mortified look, Oriana tried to pretend nothing was amiss. “Yes, sweetie, we’re going now. Okay, kids,” she called to the others, “everyone in the van!”

Oriana glanced at Nye. “Are we still welcome here in the future?”

Nye swept back a renegade strand of blonde hair from her bun and tucked it behind her ear. “You know the answer to that. With me at least.” She tossed a pointed gaze at the studio where Nicanor had gone, her eyes twinkling.

Oriana wrinkled her nose at her sister. “Thanks.” She glanced at the thin sweater Nye wore. “Now get inside before you freeze to death.”

She followed the group of kids as they trudged to the van, glad she already had her jacket on when the commotion started. Fall was quickly turning into winter.

She tried to resist a last look over her shoulder at the studio. If only she could stay and find out what Nicanor was doing here. Seemed strange he would just suddenly show up like that. And she had no idea what the cryptic little conversation between him and her sister meant. She’d have to

call Nye as soon as she got home tonight.

Putting such thoughts on hold, she focused on counting her kids and planning what she would say to them about their behavior.

Something touched her hand. Startled, she looked down to see Maria gently grasp her hand with small fingers. Joy surged through Oriana and put energy in her step as she closed her hand around the little girl's. Praise the Lord that just when things started to look dark, He always sent a burst of light.



Nicanor heard Nye enter the dance studio, but he couldn't pull his eyes away from the window, watching as Oriana disappeared into the van.

"She'll be fine." Nye quietly stopped beside him.

He turned away from the glass. Nye's blonde dancer beauty was such a startling contrast to her sister. It seemed strange that Oriana was a brunette. When Nye used to speak of her younger sibling years before, he had always pictured a sweet little imp with blonde flowing hair like the older sister who spoke so lovingly of her. That image had not prepared him for the moment at Nye's wedding two months ago when he saw the real Oriana—a vibrant woman with thick waves of brown hair and so much spirit in her dark eyes that he couldn't look at them for long. If her name hadn't been listed in the wedding program, he would never have guessed the woman standing up as Nye's maid of honor was her little sister. She was as pretty

as Nye but had an open, lively face and an obvious passion for life—a crackling energy that was nothing like Nye’s quiet elegance and private, controlled ways.

“She knows how to handle those kids.” Nye watched him.

“She teaches them?”

Nye nodded. “She’s a Language Arts teacher at Lincoln Middle School, and she’s in charge of the afterschool program for at-risk sixth graders. It’s in the roughest part of Harper, which is worse than you might think for a city this size. She started bringing the kids here for lessons three weeks ago.”

“Do they often fight?”

“Oh, no.” Nye’s eyes widened. “This was the first time anything like that happened. Well, they squabble a little, but I hadn’t seen anything physical before. I’m glad you showed up when you did.”

Lucky that he had. No one as naively cheerful as Oriana appeared to be could handle a group of street kids. “Of course.” Oriana was in over her pretty head. He saw that black kid’s bloodshot eyes. Oriana had no idea what her students were into.

“Maybe you should help her then.”

Nicanor jerked to meet her blue-eyed gaze.

She smiled. “You think she’s in over her head, so why don’t you help her?”

He stared at her. Nye had always been perceptive, but he didn’t think of her as a mind reader.

She laughed. “Have you forgotten how much time we’ve spent together? Dante isn’t the only one who learned how to interpret your silences, you know.”

His gut twisted at Dante’s name. She could use it so easily now. Even smiling as she said it. Smiling at him. He whipped away and headed for the open doorway that he could see led to the dance floor.

“Wait a minute.”

“I’ll help you get ready for your class.”

“My next class isn’t for twenty minutes yet. And you haven’t even been here ten. You don’t have to start working right away.” Nye caught up with him as he entered the room and began to pick up the dance shoes the children must have used.

She stopped in the doorway and watched him. “It will be wonderful having you here. I can really use another instructor.”

“The studio is doing well, then.”

“Yes, God’s really blessing it.”

Nicanor hoped so. Nye deserved to be blessed.

“What do you want me to tell Terry if he calls?”

Nicanor rubbed at a mark on one of the small shoes with his thumb. “He isn’t my agent anymore.”

“Oh.” Nye’s tone was cautious, but Nicanor knew she wouldn’t press. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

He picked up another pair of shoes and looked at her.

“Show me where these go?”

She smiled. “Sure. Then we’ll look at the schedule and see which classes you’d like to teach.”

She was so different. The Nye he knew in New York was not the same woman who stood before him now. He didn’t understand the change. Perhaps finding someone else. Her new husband must make her happy. He wondered if this new love was enough to make up for what had happened, for what he had done.

Nicanor paused at the doorway when he reached Nye, and she looked at him for a moment.

Then she smiled again, that new happy smile. “Thanks for coming, Nicanor.”

If only he could tell her. Her smile just made his pain worse, twisting like a knife in his open wound when she didn’t know the extent of his guilt. When she didn’t know that she should hate him. At least for the moment, she could keep smiling.

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.

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This Dance

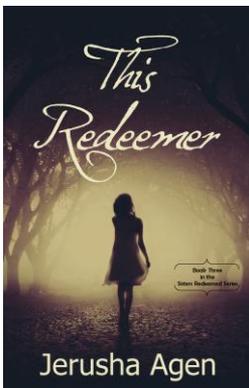
**Book One in the
Sisters Redeemed Series**

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from most local booksellers.**

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 Redeemer

**Book Three in the
Sisters Redeemed Series**

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Barnes & Noble, and by special order
from most local booksellers.**

Not all prisons have bars.

Charlotte Davis should know—she's lived in one for years. She can handle getting slapped around by her boyfriend,

Tommy, and even being forced to do things she would never choose, but when Tommy turns on her 10-year-old daughter, Charlotte must try to escape. With nowhere else to turn, Charlotte runs to the stranger her dying mother believed would help her.

Looking only for shelter or cash, Charlotte finds a family she longs to call her own and a gentle man she could learn to love. But if Tommy catches up with Charlotte, these strangers could learn the truth about her. Will they send her back to Tommy? Or can a Father's love set her free?

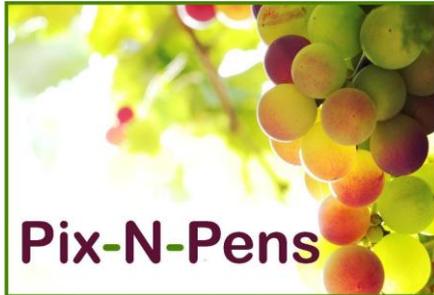
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