

**FALLEN ANGEL:
PENANCE**

Sean P. Martin

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my beautiful wife Sarah.
You put up with a lot of husbandly negligence while I was
working on this novel, with hardly a complaint.
I know how lucky I am to have you.

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Credit for the cover has to go where it is due. I may have manipulated the images, but it would not have been possible without the community on DeviantArt.com. The stock images provided by horse_stock, dracoartstock and kebellestock were exactly what I needed, and I am grateful to them for allowing others to use their images. I would also be remiss if I left out antiretrovirus and mousiestock (also on Deviantart), and ink.black.sky, who created the cover for Purgatory.

Credit for the writing is all mine, as is blame for any mistakes you may find.

Finally, credit must also go to everyone who read Purgatory and showed an interest in reading more of Cassiel's story.

You are the reason I continue to write, and I hope you continue to enjoy my work.

Penance: Chapter 1

I woke in prison. Well, technically it was called a 'rehabilitation community', but a prison is what it was. I rolled over, taking in my surroundings. Concrete walls completely lacking in any decoration or personal touches returned my stare. Today was the hundred and eighty-first day of my sentence. Six months I'd spent here, after what had happened with Santino and Richard Henderson. Six months of looking at the same walls, same faces, same everything day after day.

I wasn't actually a 'guest' of the facility; I'd just taken a live-in position as a rehabilitation counselor. I worked seven days a week with child sex-offenders, a kind of self-imposed penance for my actions. The job had been secured through Angela, the daughter of my now-deceased friend Michael. She'd spent some time trying to work through my issues with me, not very successfully, and had used her contacts through the

homeless shelter in which she worked to get me employed here as something of a last resort. I was somewhat surprised by her patience; I'd been pretty insufferable for the first couple of months after, and, truth be told, I still wasn't that pleasant to be around.

Thinking of Angela reminded me that today was visiting day. Our inmates still had family and friends that stood by them despite their proclivities, and today was the day when these love-blinded fools could spend time with their 'wrongly convicted' kin. If you detect a trace of sarcasm there, you're on the money. Despite working with these people daily, I still couldn't see them as any more than animals. Don't get me wrong; individually, some of the men here were almost normal, and I was able to interact, converse and even share an occasional joke with them. I could never forget, though, the reason they were here, and deep down my sense of loathing never went away.

I glanced at my watch and saw I had an hour before the first of the visitors would arrive. That gave me twenty minutes to get ready. For once, I'd overslept, untroubled by the memories which had haunted me. If I wasn't careful, I could still hear Henderson's mumbled protestations of innocence, and my voice telling Santino to end Henderson's miserable existence. I'd learned to avoid the kitchen after the sounds of someone cutting up meat had triggered an attack.

I showered, dressed in my standard plain black tee-shirt and jeans, ran fingers through my hair to style it, and headed to the commissary for breakfast. My hair was still damp, and left wet marks on the shoulders of my tee-shirt. I hadn't cut it since... well, in a long time.

Breakfast this morning consisted of scrambled eggs, washed down with strong, bitter coffee. I nodded a greeting to my fellow counselors and the Prison Officers present and chowed down. I knew the other guys by name, but not much else about them; I liked to keep to myself. The commissary was separate from the prisoners' wings, but shared the same décor as the rest of the facility. The only difference was that we weren't locked in.

When breakfast was concluded, I trudged off to the visiting area. Every door I approached I had to swipe my security card. I also smiled cheesily at the cameras, but that was not strictly required.

The visiting area was almost identical to everywhere else, except that it was painted a slightly more vomit-colored shade of green. Apparently the color served to facilitate emotional well-being, or some crap like that. Personally, I just thought that they'd gotten a cheap deal on the paint.

I nodded to Jack, one of the guards, and took my position by the door, waiting for the first visitors to come in. My role today was to escort them into the visiting

room and supervise (read: listen in on) the visits. Every Sunday was the same: there would be hugs, tears and boring conversations about what Uncle Albert was doing and how Aunt Fanny had lost her false teeth. Thanks to my Gift, I knew that half of it was lies. I'd pretty much switched off after the first month.

Today was no different. Escort groups of visitors through, remind them of the rules (even if they'd been coming here longer than I had), and stand around waiting for their time to come to an end. Then, repeat ad nauseam. By three o'clock I was counting down the minutes. Visiting hours finished at exactly four, and I couldn't wait to herd these people out and go back to my nice comfortable cell. Somewhere deep inside, my subconscious was reminding me that I'd come here out of choice, to make penance for what I'd done. I ignored it.

At three-thirty, I ushered the last lot of visitors in, gave them the spiel and wandered around mentally counting the ticks of the clock. Right at the far end of the room was a guy I hadn't met yet. He looked to be about forty-five, which probably meant he was closer to thirty (prison has a tendency to age people), and his visitor was an attractive brunette in her early thirties. She had a plain gold wedding ring on, and great legs. Must have been his wife. I felt sorry for her. They're always the last

to know that hubby's not interested in anyone post-puberty.

"Who's the new guy?" I asked Jack.

"Don't know," he replied. "Transferred in last night. Apparently they were a little too rough on him over in gen pop."

Now that I looked closer, I could see that the new guy *had* taken a bit of a beating. Both of his eyes were swollen, and his mouth moved in a funny way when he talked. I shrugged. I found it very hard to feel pity for these animals, after what they did to children. It did seem a little odd that he'd been put in general population, though. Pedos were normally sent straight here, as they had an unfortunate tendency to become 'accident prone' (sometimes fatally) if kept around other prisoners. Must've been a clerical error or something.

I sidled closer, trying to catch their conversation.

"I don't know," he said. His voice had that thin panic-laden tremor you often hear in first-time inmates. The brunette leaned forward and whispered something I couldn't catch. He sat back, a hurt expression on his face.

"No. I really don't know. This whole thing's a mistake. I shouldn't even be here, you know that."

Ah, there it was. The whole 'I'm innocent' thing. Everyone tried it, often repeating it to anyone who'd listen until they almost believed it themselves. New guys

were the worst. If it was their first conviction (note I didn't say offense - there's no way most of these sickos got caught the first time they tried something), they'd shout down the walls with their false protestations of innocence. He continued talking.

"I never even met him before, let alone did...that... to him. You have to believe me."

From the way she slid her chair back and shook her head, it looked like she didn't. Tears burning tracks down her cheeks, she stumbled to the exit. Jack offered her a gentlemanly hand, dirty old man that he is, and escorted her out.

No, there was no way that she believed her husband was innocent. I did. Actually, the moment he'd told her he didn't touch his alleged victim, I'd known he was telling the truth. Now, what was I to do with that knowledge? That was the question.

I didn't have much chance to think about it until well after four. One of the mothers had decided she'd had enough of something, and launched a full-scale assault on her son. Walter 'Wally' Greene was in his forties, overweight and looked like he'd never done anything more strenuous than opening a can of soup in his life. His mom was a good twenty years older, thirty pounds heavier, and smacked him around like she'd been a professional boxer.

Jack, myself and the others ran over as fast as we could and separated them. The rest of the prisoners and visitors just sat, enjoying the show I suppose. Mom got one final smack in, breaking Wally's nose, and was then bodily removed and escorted from the room. I got the job of making sure Wally wasn't too badly injured, and taking him to the infirmary to get patched up.

"Come on, Wally, get up." I told him in my most sympathetic voice. "We need to get you seen to."

Wally sat on the floor where he'd fallen, rubbing under his nose and looking at the blood on his fingers like he had no idea where it came from. He was serving a ten-year stretch for grooming young boys he'd met on the internet. According to his conviction report, he hadn't actually had the chance to do the nasty with any of them before one of the boys mentioned something to his foster mother. Thank Heaven for small mercies, I suppose.

I helped Wally to his feet, and led him by the elbow. I was allowed to escort the 'low risk' prisoners solo, which worked out to probably eighty percent of the people in here. Big tough guys that they were, most of them wouldn't try anything on anyone over thirteen. Through the doors I walked, swiping my ID card and gently tugging Wally along as if he were a small child.

The layout here was pretty confusing at first. The cells were housed in semi-separate wings, laid out in a

circle and only connected to the central area, which held the commissary, prison kitchen, infirmary, library, and exercise yard. As I said earlier, pretty much every place looked the same as any other, so you had to learn to read the signs. As I'd been here six months I didn't have to worry about getting lost any more. Most of the time.

"She hit me," Wally said wonderingly.

"Yep."

"She really hit me."

"Yeah. What'd you do?"

Curiosity has always been something I've struggled with. It's a good thing I'm not a cat, or I would've well and truly used up my allocation of lives by now.

We arrived at the infirmary before Wally could answer. Once again I swiped my card, the door opened and we entered. This room was pretty much exactly like a hospital room, except the single bed had restraints, and the medicines were all in the room, albeit in locked steel cabinets. The keys were only held by the medical staff, and the pharmaceuticals here were the only ones allowed in the facility. All the hassle involved in getting something as simple as an aspirin made dealing with a headache, headache inducing.

Doc Smith was on today, as he usually was on Sundays. He was an older man, early sixties, completely bald, with a well-kept Errol Flynn moustache. He had

been working here since the facility opened, and was one of the few here (myself included) who treated all the inmates with respect and courtesy.

“Mr. Greene,” he said. “What can I do for you today?”

“My nose,” Wally told him. The blood had stopped gushing by now, but it was still obvious what the source of his problem was.

Doc Smith treated the wound, checked the break and pronounced it clean, then allowed me to take Wally back to his cell. Once that was done, I checked my watch: ten after four. I was officially off-duty. My brain reminded me about the new guy, and his honest claim of innocence. He’d arrived here injured, so I wondered if Doctor Smith would be able to give me any information on him. I trekked back to the infirmary to find out.

Since his wife passed away, Martin Smith had found a lot of excuses to spend time here; he said it helped take his mind off things. He and his wife had never had children, but he and I had developed a relationship which was similar to that of parent and child in many ways. He reminded me a lot of Michael, and I gave him someone to talk to. We’d whiled away many afternoons and evenings, playing chess, discussing books or just talking.

“Doc,” I greeted him.

“Cassiel. I didn’t expect to see you again so soon.” This was said with a grin.

I cut to the chase. “The new guy, the one who came in yesterday. What do you know about him?”

Martin looked at me closely. It wasn’t like me to take an interest in our inmates, and he had to be careful about any information that he revealed.

“Why do you want to know?”

I told him the truth (as if I had a choice): that I had reason to believe the guy was innocent, and I was curious about his case.

Martin looked at me carefully for a good thirty seconds, weighing his words.

“His name is David Staines. I don’t know the details of his case, but you can guess.”

I nodded.

The doctor continued. “All I can tell you is that he was transferred here last night, after ‘mistakenly’ being sent over to General, where he met with an ‘accident’. He’s being held in custody until his trial concludes.”

I could hear the air quotes in his words. He also knew something was up.

We chatted for another half hour. Fortunately, our infirmary was rarely needed, the prisoners being disinclined toward physical violence, and we were able to talk without interruption. I left just before five, and

went over to the commissary for dinner, my mind turning everything over.

That night, as I tried vainly to get to sleep, I kept hearing Staines' voice, overlaid with Henderson's "I didn't do it." Maybe now I was finally going to get the chance to atone for my sin.