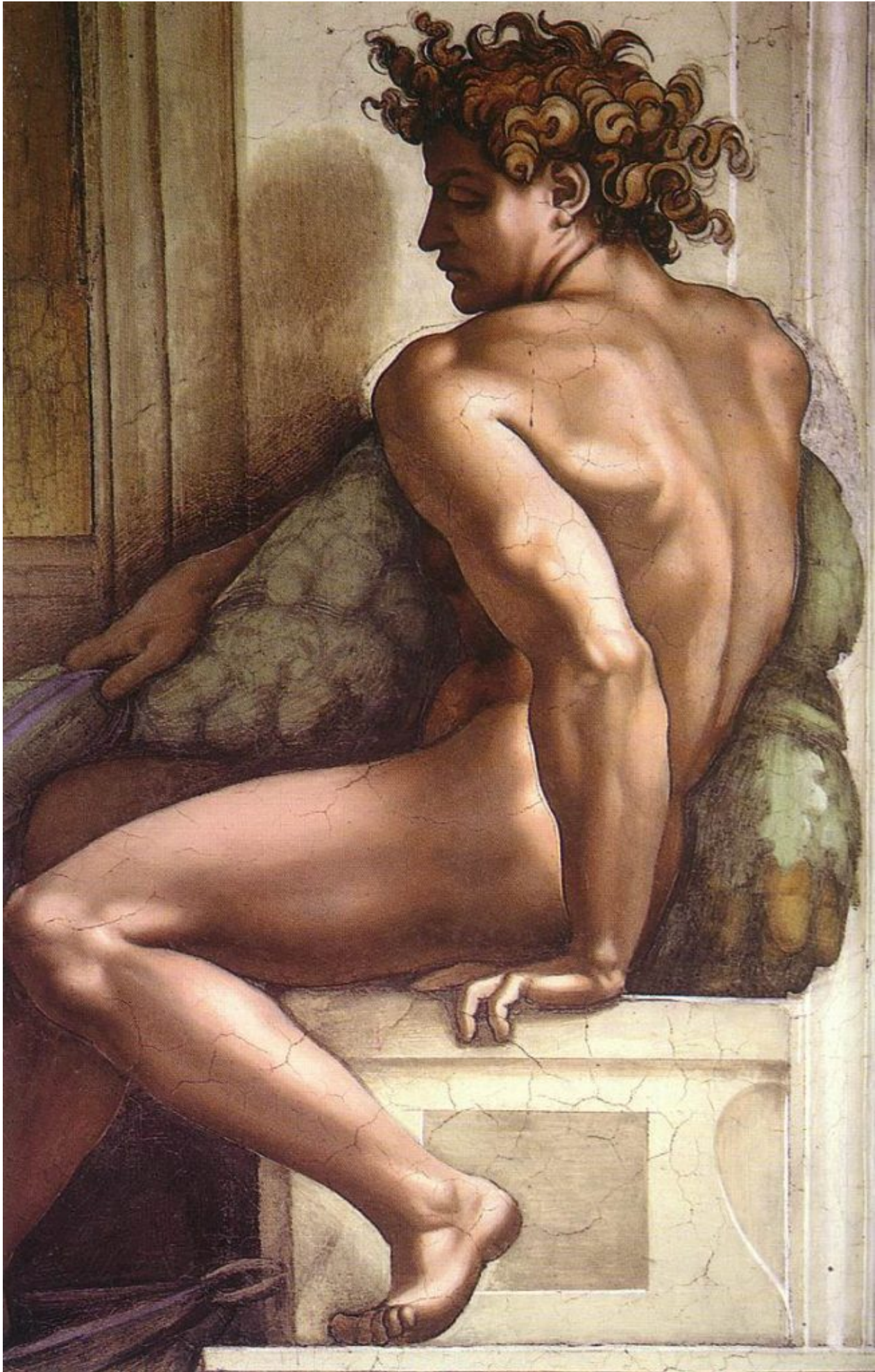


# Dorton Thiery and the Angel

by [Fred McGavran](#) (February 2024)



Ignudo, Michelangelo, 1509

Dorton Thiery had finished breakfast and was walking through the living room to the sun room with his coffee and newspaper when he heard snoring.

Now what the hell, he thought.

It couldn't be the dog; the dog had died a year ago. Then he heard a wheeze, a fart, and something moved at the top of his favorite Chippendale chair facing away from him toward the fireplace. Thiery crept closer. Something like feathery poles poked over the sides of the chair. The retired lawyer set his paper and coffee on the butler's tray table beside an empty bourbon bottle and dirty glass and tiptoed around the chair.

A man in his sixties with long greasy hair and a beard and wearing a blue hospital gown was leaning back open-mouthed and snoring. He only had one bootie.

Oh shit, thought Thiery and was backing up to call the police, when he bumped into the fireplace tools and knocked them over with a crash.

The man shuddered and woke up.

"All I wanted was a little peace and quiet," he muttered, and then he saw his host. "Try to be a little more considerate, Bud. I've had a hell of a night."

"What are you doing here?"

"Don't know I could tell you. Hey, you got any tomato juice?"

If I can distract him, I can get to the phone, Thiery thought. So he said, "In the kitchen."

As the man stood up, the poles behind his shoulders flapped open into wings with a sound like a sheet cracking. The smell

of wet dog was nearly overpowering.

"What are you?" gasped Dorton.

"Guess you could call me a fallen angel."

The angel saw the tray table.

"Now that's the good stuff," he said, pointing to the empty bottle. "You got any more of that?"

Thiery nodded.

"Nothing like a little hair of the dog, Bud."

The angel collapsed into the chair at the kitchen table where Thiery's wife Marge sat when she wasn't away visiting the grandchildren or meeting with one of her clubs. Dorton was looking for a clean glass for the tomato juice when the angel took the can and drained it into his mouth, spilling some onto his beard.

"You got a beer?" the angel asked. "And an egg?"

Thiery cracked a raw egg into a glass of beer and handed it to the angel. Maybe I should make one for myself, he thought as the angel chugged it.

"I got to get some sleep," the angel said.

"Marcie's old room upstairs is vacant."

"Good. I suppose it's got its own bathroom?"

Thiery didn't answer. He was watching the angel push himself up on the table.

"I'll find it by myself," the angel said.

As he lurched away toward the stairs, Thiery saw the wings stretching the split-back gown apart. The angel grabbed at it to hold it together.

Dorton returned to the kitchen, took a glass out of the sink, poured a beer, cracked an egg into it, and gulped it down.

I'm going back to bed, he thought. Maybe I ought to lighten up on the bourbon after the evening news.

As he pulled himself upstairs to his bedroom, he heard the toilet in Marcie's old room flush.

\* \* \*

Dorton woke up in the late afternoon when a pipe banged in Marcie's bathroom when the shower was turned off just as it had all the years his daughter had lived there. He stood up, went to the bathroom and was gargling when the angel appeared behind him in the mirror. Thiery spit out the mouthwash all over the counter.

"Take it easy, Bud," the angel said.

Thiery turned around. The angel was naked except for a towel around his waist, reeking of the raspberry rain body wash Dorton's daughter had abandoned when she started college.

"Is that a hair dryer," the angel asked, pointing to the dryer Dorton's wife Marge had forgotten to pack. "I could use some help with the wings."

So while the angel sang Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne," Dorton dried his wings.

"You got any clothes I can borrow? All I could find in the other room was girl's stuff."

Thiery opened his dresser and pulled out his next-to-last clean underwear and socks, and found a pair of old trousers in his closet.

"I don't have a shirt that will fit," he said, looking at the angel's wings.

"I wear them backwards."

The angel went into Dorton's closet and rummaged through his shirts.

"Here's one that might work. And how 'bout these shoes?"

He emerged wearing an extra-large shirt backwards and a pair of white walking shoes. After checking himself out in the mirror over the dresser, he led Dorton downstairs to the living room. They sat down by the butler's tray table.

"Have another one of these, Bud?" he asked, picking up the empty bourbon bottle.

Thiery went to the wet bar in the corner and took out his last bottle. There weren't any clean glasses, so he washed out two from the sink.

"Water?" he asked.

"Just over ice."

The ice cube containers were in the sink empty. He poured the drinks and handed one to the angel.

"I'm out of ice," he apologized.

"I'll take it neat," the angel said sipping.

Dorton sipped, too, and felt the familiar rush of clarity and warmth that lasted a few seconds before the alcohol burned itself out.

"What the hell is going on?" he demanded suddenly.

"And I was just about to ask for some snacks," the angel responded. "Look, the best way to explain is to say I was on what would you call it? A pick up? I get sent here to pick up people and take them wherever the powers that be direct."

Dorton wished he hadn't asked.

"So I got my assignment and started down here, but I decided to have a few drinks first. One thing led to another, and before I knew it I had forgotten whatever I was supposed to do and was in rehab."

Both men finished their drinks.

"I didn't know angels went into rehab," Dorton said.

"You better believe it. It's a very stressful occupation, going to people and telling them their time is up. There's lots of crying, not just the pick-ups but their families, too. It can really get to you." The angel's voice broke. "And the kids just tear me up."

Dorton was about to ask why the angel had ended up with him, but he didn't really want to know the answer.

"How about you, Bud? Why do you drink so much?"

Dorton hadn't asked himself that question for a long time.

"For something to do, I guess."

The angel just looked at him.

"That's pretty lame, Bud."

"After I retired, all Marge wanted to do was visit the grandkids and be with her friends," Dorton tried again.

"It's always other people, isn't it?"

"I was thinking about going out for Thai tonight," Dorton suggested to change the subject. "There's a good place in the Village."

"I haven't had Thai in ages." the angel said reaching for the bottle. "It always clears my head."



\* \* \*

The dress code at Bangkok Garden was casual, but people did look up when Dorton and his guest entered. Like most suburban males outside the office, Dorton was dressed in a mishmash of LL Bean and Brooks Brothers that his wife had selected to make him "fit in," while the angel had covered his wings with Dorton's old raincoat. Because his wings trembled when he laughed or burped, it was not a convincing disguise. The smell of Marcie's body wash nearly overwhelmed experienced diners who had proudly ordered "hotness five."

Singha beer was followed by Crab Rangoon appetizers, Pad Thai for Dorton and green shrimp curry for the angel, and more beer. Attracted by the angel's odd appearance and smell of feathers and body wash, a four year old slipped out of his seat and pulled at the bottom of a wing sticking out from the coat. It jerked up quickly, like a dog raising a hind leg to scratch. The child dropped to the floor.

"Sorry, kid," the angel said, turning to the astonished little boy.

"Couldn't you be more careful?" demanded the child's mother.

"Wings are more sensitive than you might think," the angel explained.

When he finished his curry, the angel ordered a crispy Pad Thai for himself and another round of beer for both of them, although Dorton had already started his ginger ice cream. He was reeling when he paid the check and had to go to the bathroom before following the angel out to the car.

"Better let me drive," the angel said.

Dorton didn't argue. He was slipping in and out of consciousness when he heard the siren and saw the familiar flashing red and blue lights coming up behind them in the side



mirror. He jerked awake.

"Oh, shit," the angel said slowing and pulling over to the curb. "Guess I took that curve a little close."

"Let me see your license," the Village Hill Ranger said when the angel figured out how to lower the window.

"Guess I left it at home, officer."

"Have you been drinking?"

The odor of beer and bourbon was unmistakable.

"Come on. Get out of the car," ordered the Ranger. "Stand over there out of the road. Now close your eyes and let me see you touch your nose with your right finger."

Squinting, the angel held out his finger until it glowed yellow and moved it slowly to his nose.

"A smart ass, huh?" the Ranger said. "Now let me see you stand on one leg."

He aimed his body cam at the angel.

"Mind if I take off my coat?" asked the angel.

"Go ahead."

The angel dropped the coat on the hood, stretched out his wings, and hovered over the berm, stretching one toe down to touch the gravel.

"How's that?"

"What the hell are you?" he exclaimed.

"Just a guy on his way home after a couple beers."

"Where do you live?"

Dorton told him his address.

"Come on. I'll lead you back. But don't go out again tonight, OK?"

"It's a deal, partner," agreed the angel.

"The guys at the station aren't going to believe the film," the Ranger said.

When they returned to his house, Dorton was so tired he could hardly pull himself upstairs.

"Not staying for a nightcap?" the angel called after him.

Dorton kept going.

"Well, maybe I'll call it quits, too," the angel said following him. "It's been one hell of a day."

\* \* \*

Dorton awoke the next morning when the angel walked through his bedroom to the bathroom in his hospital gown. His wings were dripping wet.

"Mind if I use your deodorant, Bud? That stuff in the other room sends the wrong signal."

Dorton waited until he was out of the bathroom to get up and dry the angel's wings again. By the time he had showered and dressed, he could smell bacon cooking downstairs.

"How do you like your eggs?" the angel asked as he entered the kitchen.

"Over easy."

"I even found a new can of tomato juice," the angel continued. "See if you can find us some bread."

The angel wiped off a knife from the sink and cut the mold off

the bread Dorton had found in the back of the refrigerator. Then he took some dirty dishes out of the sink, wiped them with a dishrag, and set them on the table. He served the bacon and eggs from the pan.

"Coffee coming up," he announced after wiping out two cups.

"Shall I get the newspaper?" asked Dorton.

"We ought to talk."

The angel set their coffee beside their juice and sat down.

"Long time since I've had a big sky breakfast, Bud."

They ate in silence until they smelled the toast burning. The angel stood up, speared it out of the toaster with the knife, and served it on still damp saucers from the sink.

"I'm afraid I'm out of butter," Dorton said apologetically.

"We'll get by. You know there was a whole pack of bacon in the fridge unopened."

"That's Marge for you," Dorton began, and then stopped. "What day is it today?"

"Beats hell out of me."

Dorton looked at the date on his watch.

"Oh, shit. She's coming home this afternoon."

"Then we better get the place cleaned up. I know how pissed they get when they come home to a dirty house."

To Dorton's surprise, instead of having Bloody Marys to prepare for his wife's return, he spent the morning gathering glasses and empty snack bags from his favorite spots for the angel to put in the dishwasher or stuff in the trash. Then he picked up the empty bourbon and beer bottles, rinsed them out,

and put them in recycling. While the dishwasher ran for the first time in ten days, the angel vacuumed the first floor.

Dorton was ready for a sandwich, another bag of chips, and some beer, but the angel led him upstairs.

"When was the last time you washed anything?" he asked him.

"I don't know how to run the washing machine."

"Let's see if I can remember. You'll catch absolute hell if she finds two rooms torn apart and dirty clothes all over the floor."

The angel even stripped the beds and put the sheets and pillowcases in a separate load. Then they cleaned the bathroom sinks and mirrors and both their toilets.

"We better get rid of these, too," the angel said, picking up the hospital gown and bootie from beside the bed. "Don't want her asking any embarrassing questions."

Dorton was near exhaustion when they finally went downstairs to finish up whatever was left in the refrigerator.

"I always take her out for dinner the first night back," he explained.

"I can see why. But her coming back got me thinking, and I remembered something important. What do you usually do after lunch?"

"Take a nap."

"Good. That gives me time to call in and see if I'm still on the team. We'll have that talk later."

Dorton woke up an hour after Marge's plane landed.

"She'll be here soon," he said to the angel when he went downstairs, wondering how he was going to explain their

visitor.

"Have a seat, Bud," the angel said standing in front of the fireplace. "I got something to tell you."

Wondering if there was time for a bourbon before Marge arrived, Dorton sat down in the Chippendale chair.

"You asked me why I ended up here after I dropped out of rehab." The angel paused. "The reason is I came for you."

Dorton had a sensation he had not experienced since he received a draft notice 50 years earlier.

"But I got it all planned," the angel continued. "Once we get there, we'll go into rehab together. Sound good?"

"You mean sit around with people I never saw before and tell my life's story?"

"That's part of the normal admissions process anyway. If you go into rehab, you'll be killing two birds with one stone."

"Can I have a drink first?"

"I'll have one, too. Like I said, this is the part that tears me up."

While Dorton stared at the cold fireplace, the angel poured two bourbons at the wet bar.

"Is she coming from the airport by cab?" he asked, handing Dorton his glass.

"Uber."

"Then I'll unlock the front door. No need making this harder on her than it needs to be."

They stared at their drinks until they heard the sound of a car at the front door and a trunk opening and closing. The

angel raised his glass, and they both drank.

“Ready, Bud?”

The front door opened.

“Dorton?” Marge called. I’m home.”

The angel held out his hand. Dorton set down his glass, stood up, and took the angel’s hand. It was calloused and warm. Then as easily as a decal sliding off wet paper, he slipped out of his body, and they were gone before Marge entered the room.

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