

Only On Holidays

by [Peter Glassman](#) (October 2023)



Driver in a Cab (detail), Prunella Clough, 1950-53

Avril Nordic looked out his window seat at the rare patches of snow on the outskirts of Logan Airport. Boston is a marked contrast to the warm palm trees and sandy beaches he left in Miami. Even the high-rise buildings of the Boston skyline looked cold. Nordic mused about his last visit five years ago. It was in July. Boston seemed to radiate oldness. And not historic oldness, just a dusty, grey, metropolis of double-parked irritable inhabitants. But this visit will be different. It was Halloween Eve. He would see some of his friends from his adolescence and college days

Nordic spoke to his cabbie, the name on the ID card in front of him was Morris Dorf, "Morris, when was the last snowstorm?"

"The best answer, even from our weathermen, is today. It seems that Boston gets a little sun, a little fog, a little rain, and some light snow every day." Morris glanced in his rearview mirror at his passenger. "And it's that way, more or less, throughout the year except spring and summer."

Nordic smiled, "Today is Halloween Eve, what is the predicted temperature?"

"Well, sir, it will be a chilly night for the trick-or-treaters, but the skies will be clear."

Nordic watched the road signs in recognition of the environment of his younger days, "The roads seem wider than I remember. My destination is coming up. There were more trees in Malden on my last visit."

Morris laughed, "Boston suburbs now extend all the way north to Lowell and south to Weymouth." The cabbie handed Nordic his card, "Call me any time, night or day. It'll save me waiting in the long airport taxi line for a fare."

Nordic hefted his one carry-on suitcase and rang the bell above the nameplate—The Brodnys.

Sharon Brodny answered with a wide smile, "Avril, welcome. Come on in. The others are due to arrive in a few hours."

Her husband, Elmo, grabbed Nordic's suitcase and urged him into the warm foyer. "Avril, it seems like more than five years have gone by. You may not recognize Ellen and Joshua."

Two pre-teen children appeared.

Nordic smiled, "Well, I recognize them but they have grown up. Pretty soon they'll be teenagers."

Sharon frowned, "Don't remind me. Oh, and let me show you to

your room. I know you'll be leaving in the morning, but it's good to have a home base even if only for a day."

The guest room was a comfortable twelve-by-twelve with a central green carpet cushioning a full-size bed and a student desk. There was a knock on his door. "Avril, it's Sharon again, I have your costume for tonight."

Nordic laughed, "I almost forgot, we're all getting dressed for the trick-or-treaters." He held up the costume by its hanger. "So I'm to be a pirate tonight."

"I think it fits perfectly with your lifestyle. You're forever traveling and we don't even have a home address for you." She hugged him. "We're having dinner just before dusk. The men and women have to get back to their homes to receive the Halloween revelers."

The house atmosphere reflected the menu for the night: a potato and ham dinner, bread pudding for dessert, and a cinnamon rum punch.

Nordic scanned the table and contributed to the conversation which focused on highlights of what each of his friends accomplished in the past five years.

Once a high school football star, Ralph Jameson was now teaching health and hygiene and was the coach of Malden High's football team. Jameson still had an athlete's body and was dressed as a football player. He raised his rum drink at the offered toast, "To more reunions."

His wife was a blond fit-looking woman who had once dated Nordic in their high school senior year. She blushed slightly and faced Nordic, fanning herself in a Marie Antoinette hooped period dress., "You should keep in touch more, Avril."

Kenny Jones had become a corpulent, successful real estate manager. Bulging everywhere in his Peter Pan outfit, he raised

his rum glass, "Yes, we should all keep in contact with each other. I mean, more than just the occasional holiday. "

His wife, also once a teenage Nordic paramour, smiled and just said, "Hello, again." She recoiled into her chair and seemed to be tightly wrapped in her Marilyn Monroe costume.

Jerry Manoni didn't smile. He looked around the table, "The economy seems stagnant but as a bank manager, I still keep my head above water. I stick to big loans and avoid struggling small businesses." Manoni had divorced three years ago. He sat unescorted like Avril. "I'll receive the Halloween kids in my everyday costume as the bank manager." Jerry stuck his thumbs in his vest pockets and expanded his chest removing the small creases in his black suit and straightening its fine silver pinstripes.

Elmo Brodny folded his arms on his chest covering the Boston Red Sox identity of his baseball outfit, "My printing Company is doing well with its diversity. I branched out from printing posters, business stationery, and pamphlets to corrugated boxes, wedding needs, and paperback books."

Sharon looked at her husband, "He's so busy, I hardly ever see him at home much." She turned to Nordic, "And, Avril, he doesn't travel a fraction of what you do."

All eyes turned to Nordic. Manoni broke the short silence, "Well, Avril, do you still have the same job and only work on Holidays?"

Nordic knew this question would arise again like it does every time they get together. He sat back in his chair. "I still have that job. Remember, I'm a freelance financial advisor to big corporations in the US and Europe."

Sharon managed the cleanup of dishes and leftovers. She dismissed everyone. "Don't forget all the adults hand out goodies to the kids, so I'll let you get to your homes." She

turned to Nordic, "Avril you'll be helping us here."

Nordic lifted his pirate eyepatch, "I'm looking forward to it. By the way, what time does trick or treating end?"

Elmo smiled, "The younger kids finish at 8:30, but we get stragglers until ten."

Nordic had enjoyed greeting the children in their costumes and relished his act as a pirate. Once the Brodny children were asleep, Elmo appeared with a glass of Claret as Nordic, now changed back into his travel clothes, descended the staircase.

"Avril, you're not staying the night?"

"I have a redeye flight. I can hang out a few minutes more until my cab arrives." He placed his carry-on beside him on the living room sofa.

Elmo was still in his baseball player outfit, "You know, we never know what you do for work. I mean, you say you work with big business, but how?"

"Elmo, my job specifics are confidential." Nordic turned his head to the door as he heard the taxi's horn. "Oh, oh, here's my ride to the airport."

"Well, Sharon's already in bed sound asleep. Domestic labor is fatiguing." Elmo shook his friend's hand as he left for the cab.

Nordic talked to the cab driver and looked at his watch. It was 11:00. "Wait just a few minutes. Keep the meter running, Morris. I forgot something inside." He walked to the door and rapped lightly with the brass door-knocker

Elmo appeared with a surprised look. "Avril, did you forget

something?'

"I have to tell you what my trip to Boston is about. It was nice seeing you guys again but my job involves removing liabilities that result in lost corporate revenue."

Elmo, tilted his head, "I don't understand."

Nordic stared at his longtime friend. "I know about you laundering money for several big organizations, Elmo. I also know that you've refused to curtail your skimming. You owe us over 6 million dollars. I won't discuss the extra counterfeit bills you've held back."

Elmo turned red, "What? Who are you exactly, Avril?"

Nordic maintained eye contact, "In the words of the pirate I portrayed this Halloween, Your money or your life, Avril."

"What? I don't have access to those funds. The legit money is held in several Caribbean and European accounts."

"Just sign this affidavit. It will transfer all assets to the corporate account above your signature."

Elmo complied with a shaky hand. "Okay, now what?"

"Elmo, you've had your chance to settle your transgressions with us." Nordic reached into his inside coat pocket. He withdrew a silenced Glock 9mm and fired one shot into Elmo's forehead." Avril looked down at his former friend. "So sorry, this will be my last Holiday in Malden."

The cab driver looked into his mirror, "Okay, sir what airline are you using?"

Nordic looked at his watch, "I have a plane waiting at the private air transport sector. Get me there by 12:30 and you get a hundred-dollar tip."

Avril looked at his small assignment book. His next Holiday is Thanksgiving, in Portland, Oregon. At least he'd be back on track by then tending to people he didn't know. He smiled at his Christmas Day target. It was a wayward Santa Claus con man in San Antonio, Texas.

The airport signs were appearing. He smiled, "Happy Halloween, Morris. Don't you just love working on Holidays?"

The cabbie looked at Avril in his rearview mirror, "Sometimes, like now." Morris pulled the cab into the breakdown lane.

Avril looked around and back to the driver. "What's wrong Morris?"

Morris smiled and fired two bullets into Avril's chest. "I get thousands for people like you, but the hundred-dollar tip was a nice gesture."

The car that had been following the taxi stopped. Morris entered and spoke to the driver. "That guy was right, I do love working only on Holidays."

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Peter Glassman is a retired physician living in Texas, who devotes his time to writing novels and memoir-based fiction. He is the author of 14 novels including the medical thrillers *Cotter*; *The Helios Rain* and *Who Will Weep for Me*. Some of his short stories were written for presentation at the San Antonio Writers Group Meetup. You can read more about him and his books [here](#).

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