



Phil's  
Good Ol'  
Days

BARTON K MANN

# Phil's Good Ol' Days

Barton K Mann

Published by Barton K Mann, 2019.

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

PHIL'S GOOD OL' DAYS

**First edition. February 7, 2019.**

Copyright © 2019 Barton K Mann.

Written by Barton K Mann.

To street walkers everywhere

Phil was busy dreaming of sidewalks full of people when a high-pitched whine pierced the air and woke him up. He was disappointed because he had been enjoying a delicious moving portrait of humanity: mothers pushing strollers, cheerful window shoppers, and businessmen rushing to appointments. And then came that hideous whine. When it turned out that the sound was also part of the dream, he dismissed it bitterly and got up for the day.

Sitting in the morning silence, he ate his cereal and listened to the radio. His cereal tasted like yesterday.

The news on the radio was the same news as the day before, and the day before that. It had been another night of silent violence and the gruesome culling of innocent bystanders. Damned scooters.

Frankly Phil was getting a little sick of it all. He was especially tired of obeying the goddamn curfew. Who in their right mind chooses to stay in and shutter up by 7 pm? Sure things were sketchy outside, and certainly they got worse after dark, but he was a young man with a young man's desires, and it was his sneaking suspicion that these were supposed to be his "good ol' days." He had picked up this idea from listening to his father tell stories of his life before settling down with his mother. They were both gone now of course, victims of the scooters.

So instead of being stuck hiding like some kind of sewer rat, Phil wanted to be out at night drinking with his friends and dating mobs of girls and conquering the world. "No," he said to the empty room, "I want some goddamn good ol' days and I want them now!"

But he was aware that his demand was based on him living long enough to have some actual "ol" days, good or otherwise. Considering all the crap that was going down, it seemed more and more unlikely. However, if Phil had anything to do with it he was determined to live a long life. Maybe make it to 50 even. And when he did, by then he will have gotten his "good ol' days" no matter what.

He finished his cup of vibra-café and threw the cup in the shredder. Then he headed out towards the stoop of his apartment. He had no

plans, he just wanted some fresh air. The smart door frame turned on as he passed and kindly reminded him of three items on his “to-do” list.

He winced. All three were important, the first being drop dead necessary. Even worse, all three tasks were at different locations. He’d have a lot of walking to do. Ever since the scooters, walking, even in the daytime, had become a dangerous proposition. He wished, one more time, that he had the money to buy or even rent a vehicle. But with no job and the collapsing welfare state, that wish hit the sidewalk next to him like shattering glass.

He went back into the apartment to grab some things and came out again. There he stood still, looking left, then right, and then left again. A few assorted vehicles zoomed by on the road, but the sidewalks were pretty clear as far as he could see. There were only a handful of other walkers on foot. Just early shifters and “to-do” listers like him.

That was good though, other walkers made for good padding. He’d see one of them get hit first, and then be able to do a dodge in some direction before the scooter could get closer. He had used the tactic to save his ass more than a few times.

It wasn’t like the scooters were extremely fast. They could only get up to 30 mph, but that was enough. Essentially skateboards with handlebars, they didn’t look very imposing, but they were solid. Getting hit by one at 30 mph was no joke. Get hit more than once, or by more than one, and you’d be done.

Phil began walking forward towards his first “to-do.” The imperative one. He had several letters that had to get his contacts in the underground before they made any moves. If they acted without the information he had it would be disastrous. He was one of the few people around still using paper. He hated relying on it, but it seemed like the best bet for privacy. Unless the goon squad was opening the snail mail now, which according to the reports they weren’t... yet. Their assumption was that nobody would be stupid enough to hard copy important information and so that was why it worked.

The post drop was about five blocks to the west. Five long blocks. Phil asked his watch what time it was again. He now had only twenty minutes to get there before the drop was closed. Five long blocks.

He kept walking, keeping a keen watch for any signs of motion. The foot traffic thinned out until he was alone on the sidewalk. He listened to his own footfalls as he proceeded, keeping the rhythm steady. He needed to continue moving but he couldn't rush carelessly. He thought he would make it in time if he didn't encounter any trouble.

As he cautiously traveled up the steep avenue, he heard a scream from over the rise that reminded him of a bad set of brakes. It was quickly interrupted by a muffled booming thud. It was the sound of someone getting hit.

Phil immediately scurried up the manicured lawn draped next to the left side of the sidewalk. Luckily it was at an abrupt pitch, so he figured that a scooter wouldn't be able to take it. Still, he dropped down to one knee behind a small hedge, hoping to be less evident. This was exactly the sort of trouble he couldn't afford.

Soon enough he heard the high, almost inaudible electric whine of a scooter approaching. It was the sound of death and dentist drills. It crested the hill and raced down the sidewalk towards where Phil was hiding. Even though it was jet black, Phil could see blood smeared on the front of it.

It slowed down a bit as it came closer and he held his breath. He studied the unmanned scooter carefully. It was an Icarus.

Icarus was the first company that had introduced the rental scooters as a cheap alternative to buying a vehicle. They were a huge success and other companies followed. Soon thousands of empty scooters lined the street outside stores and bars and cafes, like soldiers at attention, waiting to be commandeered.

He watched as the Icarus stopped for a moment. With its spindly handlebar and glaring headlight, he thought it looked like an angry exclamation point, searching for a sentence to put a violent end to. The

Icarus sat still while Phil prayed and seconds flamed out. After a minute it picked up speed again and headed further down the road.

As the scooter drove away, he recalled when it was just the rabidly devoted riders that were the problem. They were stupid and drove carelessly and collisions with people happened often. Then when navigation AI was installed in the scooters, something went horribly wrong. The scooters started driving themselves. Then they started driving into people.

At last count it was estimated that there were approximately 75,000 of them on the streets.

When he was certain he was out of the scooter's visual range, Phil inched back down onto the sidewalk. He knew that sometimes scooters ran in packs. The one that just passed could have just been a scout, but the sidewalk looked empty up ahead. So he continued guardedly up the hill

Once at the crest, he saw the body of a girl, lying on the sidewalk. She was about 15 yards down the street. She looked badly battered and cut up, but he could see her moving a little. That she was alive meant it was definitely a solo scooter strike. A pack would have finished her off. With all the blood and bruises he couldn't be sure, but he guessed she was around his age, maybe 21 or 22.

He wanted to rush by her, to keep his own safety the priority. But now he hesitated. Recently he had noticed how the population of the neighborhood was thinning. It occurred to him that this wasn't only about his survival... this was about the survival of the species. That was why he had signed on to the underground wasn't it? He knew something had to be done. He looked at her, broken and helpless on the sidewalk like a discarded doll. He wondered why she shouldn't have her own "good ol' days." She was like him. She deserved to live. So he decided to help her.

He crouched down and inched carefully towards the girl. His breathing was slow and steady. It was not the time to panic or act carelessly. He



had managed to stay alive so far by using his wits and developing street sense. He wasn't about to mess that up now.

He got to where she lay on the sidewalk.

"Are you OK?" he asked the girl as he helped her sit up. She struck him as very pretty despite her injuries. Her leg was bleeding at the knee, blood soaking through her jeans.

"I think so," she said. She looked at him and smiled. He smiled back at her.

"My name is Mary," she said.

"I'm Phil. I'm sorry you were hurt," he said.

"So am I," she said. He reached out his hand to help her up. Her hand was warm to the touch.

She stood up shakily. She had freckled cheeks and what looked like wonderfully soft lips.

"Thank you," she said. Then without warning, she threw her arms around his waist and hugged him. She held on for what seemed like a long time. He had never been hugged by a girl before. He remembered the story of the way his father had met his mother at a school dance. It was love at first sight. For a second Phil thought that maybe this was the start of something of his own. Maybe even the start of something good.

All of a sudden the girl grabbed him by the shoulders, twisted him over her hip and threw him to the ground. His head punched the pavement so hard he saw flecks of bright lights raining down. He tried to stand up but he was too hurt. He felt woozy. Blood ran into his eyes and through a red veil he saw scooters racing down from the top of the hill. They had hidden themselves behind a retaining wall. He tried to stand again but stumbled back down. He knew then that he couldn't get up in time.

As they closed in he looked up at the girl and asked, "Why?" She just looked at him. She was still smiling, but it wasn't a pretty smile. There was malevolence in her manner. When the girl yelled, "All hail Icarus!" he reckoned that she had been one of the devout riders. He thought they

had all given up when the scooters didn't need them anymore. It became obvious that they hadn't.

He watched helplessly as the scooters targeted his head. They had him. After the years of playing it safe, they had him. He understood it now. Understood where he had slipped up. The fanatical devotees no longer rode the scooters. Now they were serving them.

Phil's last thought was a memory of his youth. He was with his parents, walking down a long stretch of busy sidewalk, window shopping. In his final moment, he realized that he had what he had been seeking all along. Those times with his parents, the time before the scooters, those were his good ol' days.

## Also by Barton K Mann

Phil's Good Ol' Days

Watch for more at <https://bartonkmann.com>.

## About the Author

**Bart Mann spent 13 years** as an entertainment journalist/columnist. During the process of interviewing actors and musicians the line between reality and fiction got plenty fuzzy. So he decided to define that line once and for all by writing fiction. He is only partly successful, as his fantastical stories still reek of reality, or a bent version thereof.

Read more at <https://bartonkmann.com>.