

MULLIGAN'S MAGICAL MARVELOUS

A toy store
Where you can be
A kid again
...literally

Barry
Oliver



Mulligan's Magical Marvelous

Mulligan's Magical Marvelous

by
Barry Oliver

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Mulligan's Magical Marvelous

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Chapter 1



Parker Madison stood inside the revolving door entrance to the FAO Schwarz toy store in Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. He looked impatiently at his wristwatch. He loved the fact that he was in the latter location—New York City—but not so much the first—a toy store. His wristwatch was the kind that didn't connect to any other electronic device, it merely told the time. He wondered why he even needed a watch at all, considering he carried a cell phone that also told the time and connected to the entire planet. It was just a habit, really, not to mention a status symbol.

Five minutes, his \$5,000 dumb watch informed him. How long will this take?

Parker glanced up from his watch to peruse his nausea-inducing surroundings. To his left was nearly half the ground floor dedicated entirely to candy.

This is Manhattan! How much does it cost to lease that much space just for candy? The candy odor was the immediate source of Parker's nausea. I hate candy.

To his right was a massive plush animal section displaying stuffed animal toys of every size and species. To Parker, it looked more like a bizarre taxidermy display of murdered fantasy animals who had been stuffed and given stupid smiles on their faces. Facing directly ahead was a spiral staircase leading to the floors above housing even more toys (as if that were necessary) and where his

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girlfriend had already gone ahead. She was entirely necessary, Parker reminded himself.

Parker side stepped a few paces rightward away from the candy section to stand in front of a giant plush giraffe smiling down at him. Parker rolled his eyes before looking away from the giraffe, and back at his watch.

Seven minutes! I'll just wait for her here, he sighed. At least I don't have to smell that damned candy.

At age 33 and working for an investment firm named Empire Futures, Parker Madison was doing well for himself in the Big Apple. Born George Simms from Indiana, that name had not been big enough for his dreams. So, as a young man, *George* had fled Indiana for New York City, changed his name (Parker after Park Avenue, Madison after Madison Square Gardens), and was now a few dollars short of making a seven-figure salary. His was the Frank Sinatra dream. If Parker could make it big in New York, he would make it to the top of the world. Parker Madison was well on his way to the top. He had no time for toy stores (though at least at FAO Schwarz, he was in New York's finest), or children for that matter. Having children would only drag Parker down.

Then Parker had met Julia Bloom, a 24-year-old "starving artist" in Brooklyn's artsy Red Hood neighborhood. She worked in a vintage record store so she could make enough money to survive. Yes, they sold original black vinyl records, not the re-imaged records made from multi-colored plastic. Julia's passion, however, was painting. Not just any kind of painting, Julia loved to paint murals, the larger-than-life kind that adorned entire sides of buildings. And the subjects of her paintings were always children; of children playing, building things, talking to each other, and arm-in-arm in friendship. Julia wanted children of her own one day, and she communicated that desire with the beautiful little people she painted on walls around the city.

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There were advantages to having a girlfriend nine years his junior. At age 33, Parker's energy, though still vigorous, had mellowed a bit as he focused on his career. Julia brought back a young, fiery energy that Parker yearned for. Yes, their sex life was a thing of wonder. The thing about children, however, would be a problem for him. Julia clearly wanted them; Parker surely did not. Perhaps their relationship would not last long, but Parker would enjoy it while he could.

It was a child who was responsible for the two of them shopping at FAO Schwarz today. A 9-year-old cousin of Julia's (*isn't his name Jimmy or something like that?*) was having a birthday and she was determined to find the "perfect" present for him. Thus, it had to be FAO Schwarz, a toy store that had presently swallowed his girlfriend somewhere in its floors above.

Eight minutes! Will this pain ever end?

Standing a few paces away, Parker spotted a fellow suffering male standing near a plush elephant; a guy like himself, glancing at his own watch impatiently, looking like he wanted to be somewhere else. Their eyes met for a brief second. The other guy smirked, then stepped over toward Parker and his giraffe.

"Let me guess," they guy said without introduction.
"Girlfriend dragged you in here."

Parker was amused by this stranger's perception. *Was it that obvious?* "None other. What about yourself?"

The guy nodded then looked away evasively. "Oh, something like that. I don't enjoy coming into places like this."

Parker tapped his watch. "Nine minutes. It's been nine minutes and I can't wait to get out of here. I mean, look at this place. This is prime Manhattan real estate. Can you imagine how much it costs to lease this space just to sell toys?"

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"More money than we'll ever see in our lifetime," the guy smirked.

Maybe more money than you'll ever see, Parker thought a bit condescendingly. But one day I'll be able to buy this place, not that I would ever want to.

"Name's Parker," Parker extended his hand to the stranger. "Parker Madison."

"Theodore," the man shook Parker's hand, then failed to offer a last name.

Parker thought the name sounded a bit formal and out of date, and *why didn't he give his last name?* He soon dismissed it. What followed next was a slightly awkward pause as two strangers with a shared disdain for toy stores had to come up with something else to talk about. Was Theodore a sports fan? Should Parker talk about the Yankees? —always a safe bet in New York.

Theodore broke the silence first. "You know, there's a much more interesting store not far from here. They carry toys for adults, if you know what I mean."

Parker found that information hard to believe. This part of Manhattan had been cleaned up for decades, since at least the early 90s. The "sex shops" had all been shut down to make this end of the city a more family and business-friendly place. "Really?" Parker answered skeptically. "How so?"

"I'm serious," Theodore's eyes opened wide. "It's just around the corner on 6th Avenue. I can show it to you if you want."

Ever alert to a scam, Parker looked away from Theodore and back to his watch. "Sounds interesting, but maybe some other time."

Theodore persisted. "It will only take a few minutes. We'll be back here long before your girlfriend is done shopping, I bet." He gave a nod toward Parker's cell phone. "Go ahead. Ask her."

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Parker continued to eye Theodore suspiciously. The man was a good three inches shorter than Parker and more slightly built. At six foot two and 190 pounds (muscle not fat. Parker was a gym enthusiast when he wasn't at work or entertaining Julia) Parker Madison could fend for himself. He was more than a match for little Theodore, here. Still, most scams were not about brute strength. Still again, it was the middle of the day in Manhattan, 6th Avenue no less. This was Parker's territory. He felt safe.

Parker reached for his phone. A quick text confirmed it. Julia would be here for at least another hour. He had permission to make a brief side stop.

"Okay," Parker pointed to the revolving door exit. "Lead the way."

Stepping out of FAO Schwarz onto 49th street, it was a short walk to the corner of 6th Avenue, followed by a left turn, another block and they had arrived. The street was heavily trafficked by cars and pedestrians, so Parker felt completely at ease. And there it was, wedged between a bank and a jewelry store.

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The word "Magical" was spelled in multi-color crayon. "It's an odd name for an adult toy store," Parker commented. Then he read the slogan below the large lettering:

If it's Magical

If it's Marvelous

It must be Mulligan's toys

Adding to Parker's confusion, prominently on display in the main window was a selection of children's toys. "Are you sure we are in the right place?" he said to Theodore, who was already walking toward the entrance.

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"Oh yes, this is the right place," Theodore spoke over his shoulder as he reached for the door. "Wait until you see the inside."

Parker followed cautiously a few steps behind Theodore, mentally preparing himself for a quick exit. One look around the inside, however, immediately allayed Parker's fear. It was, in fact, a children's toy store. Children of various ages could be seen running around the aisles and playing with toys, while their parents stood in line at the checkout counter. A cashier wearing a formal black tuxedo with a white bow tie was busy ringing up their purchases.

Parker felt the fool. This man, Theodore, had obviously tricked him into leaving one toy store for another—probably an employee from this store trying to steal customers from their larger competitor.

"Umm... this is not an adult toy store," Parker turned to complain to his newfound friend. Theodore was nowhere to be seen. A group of children ran past the spot where Theodore had been standing a moment before.

Parker felt even more foolish. *I'm getting the hell out of here.*

He turned to leave, then had a second thought. On a whim, he would ask a question of the tuxedoed cashier, since this was an ordinary toy store and Parker was in no danger. Parker waited a minute for the line to clear, then approached the cashier.

"Umm..." Parker spoke in a low, conspiratorial tone. "A friend of mine told me there was an adult section inside this store. Am I in the right place?"

The tuxedo-wearing cashier smiled broadly and spread his arms wide. "My good sir, this is Mulligan's Magical Marvelous, don't you know? We have toys for children of every age. Why don't you walk around and have a look? I promise you will find something magical."

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That was a stupid whim, Parker chastised himself. He had no intention of exploring a toy store for children. Parker stepped away from the counter and turned to leave.

“Thank you, but I’ll pass.”

As he turned, Parker was stopped in his tracks by a small boy who was standing in front of him, blocking Parker’s exit. The child looked to be seven or eight years old, though Parker was terrible at estimating children’s ages. The boy might still be in diapers for all he knew.

The boy looked up at Parker with an inviting look and held forward a toy airplane. “Hey mister, do you want to play with me?”

Parker wrinkled his nose. “Sorry, I don’t play with kids. Go find someone your own age.”

The child continued to stare at Parker pleasantly while not moving out of the way. “Please.”

Parker glanced around the store quickly. “Where are your parents?”

“Oh, they’re around somewhere,” the boy said without looking.

Parker could imagine the news story. 33-year-old creepy man caught playing with kids in a toy store. Charges pending. Full story at eleven.

“Sorry kid, I’m not going to play with you.”

The boy held forward his toy airplane invitingly. “You can have my plane. It’s really a lot of fun.”

Having no intention of playing with this child, Parker took the airplane from the boy merely to give it a look. The aircraft was a model of a 1940s-style transport plane, with twin propeller engines, smooth rounded wings, and silver skin. The plane was made of wood, not metal, yet was surprisingly heavy in Parker’s

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hands. It was a solidly made toy, built to endure the rough-and-tumble of a child's play.

Parker was about to hand the plane back when something changed about it. The plane itself didn't change so much as Parker's imagination of it. Ideas about how to play with it began to fill his mind. Parker could imagine pretending to fly through jungles and over mountains.

I know exactly what to do with this plane!

"Okay," Parker relented. "I'll play with you for a minute. But I want the plane."

"Sure," the boy nodded. He reached for Parker's hand and guided him down one of the toy aisles.

In that moment, Parker was unaware that the boy's hand and his own hand were the same size, or that they were now standing eye-to-eye. Parker made no note of the change in his own voice or the new lightness in his step. Parker didn't notice these things because this was the same self he had always been. It was an 8-year-old Parker who followed his newfound friend with a toy airplane in hand, oblivious of his own, profound transformation.

It occurred to Parker that he didn't know his friend's name. "My name is Parker. What is your name?"

The boy sat cross-legged on the floor where he had built a play airport with similar wooden planes, trucks, and woodblock buildings. "My name is Theodore, but everyone calls me Teddy." Teddy invited Parker to join him on the floor.

Parker hesitated. Didn't he know someone named Theodore? Wasn't Theodore the reason for his being in this toy store in the first place? Parker then brushed his doubt aside. He had obviously never met this boy before. Parker joined Teddy on the floor. He pretended to land his plane at the pretend airport, and together they pretended to fuel it and load it with new cargo.

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After loading, Parker stood and pretended to fly his plane through the toy aisles. In his mind, he could see mountain ranges and jungle trees in place of the shelves of toys. Pretending to fly this simple wooden airplane felt surprisingly exhilarating.

Teddy was right. This is really a lot of fun.

Parker's eyes opened wide. "I have an idea. Watch this." He flew his plane to the end of the aisle, then turned and began to run full speed toward Teddy and the airport. Parker then dropped to his knees and skidded across the smooth floor while his plane touched down and slid into the airport. Parker misjudged his speed, however, and the plane crashed into a block tower knocking it over.

Both boys erupted in laughter. "That was awesome!" Teddy giggled.

A voice suddenly spoke to them from above. A woman employee of the toy store looked down at them from the adjacent aisle. "Children, be careful with those toys," she scolded. "If you break one, your parents will have to buy it."

Both boys stopped laughing and covered their mouths in surprise. They had been caught! A giant guerrilla was after them! New giggles erupted from their mouths as each of them grabbed a toy and ran wildly away down the aisle and around a corner.

The woman had no interest in chasing them. She merely sighed, mildly annoyed. "They always turn out this way."

Parker and Teddy peered around the corner carefully. They had lost their pursuer.

"We got away from the guerrilla," Parker whispered.

"Let's keep playing!" Teddy shouted.

Both boys ran off together flying their model airplanes in and around toy displays and making skidding knee landings.

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Mulligan's Magical Marvelous had become Parker Madison's new favorite playground in Manhattan.

Time almost got away from 8-year-old Parker, but not quite. In the back of his mind, he remembered he was supposed to meet someone in less than an hour.

"Hey Teddy," Parker said breathlessly as he made one final sliding knee landing with his cargo plane. "It's time for me to leave. I'm sorry I can't stay longer."

"It's okay. I understand." Teddy landed his toy plane next to Parker's. "Do you want to play again sometime?"

"Yes," Parker beamed. "That would be fun. I love this place." He extended his hand toward Teddy in a formal, handshake gesture.

Teddy looked at Parker's extended hand and giggled. What a silly, adult thing to do. Teddy embraced Parker instead with a giant hug because, well, that's what kids do.

Parker picked up his toy airplane and turned toward the checkout counter. He had every intention of buying the toy no matter its cost. It was a restored 33-year-old Parker Madison who experienced sticker shock as he pulled out his credit card.

"You can't be serious!" he said to the tuxedoed cashier, aghast at the price tag, and still oblivious to the transformation he had just experienced.

The cashier shrugged his shoulders as if to say, *what do you expect? This is New York City.* "This particular airplane is part of a set," the tuxedo man explained. "If you buy all of them, we offer a discount."

Parker inserted his credit card into the reader. "I'll just take the one," he sighed. The credit card monitor told him his purchase was complete.

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For this price, I had better get laid by a very grateful girlfriend.



Parker presented his purchase to Julia when she, at last, emerged from FAO Schwarz. "Look what I found. Do you think little Jimmy will like it?"

Julia took the airplane from Parker. "How many times do I have to remind you, his name is Joshua." She inspected the model plane closely. It was solidly built and had a very classic look. It was the kind of toy airplane that should decorate the room of every little boy. Julia was surprisingly impressed. "This is really nice, Parker. It's actually quite thoughtful. I think Joshua will love it. Where did you find it?"

Parker shrugged casually. "Oh, just another small toy store I know about. It's around the corner on 6th Avenue."

Julia's face opened in surprise. "Parker, I didn't think you liked kids. How did you know about this other toy store?"

Parker added a grin to his shrug. "Well, I guess I'm full of surprises."

Julia leaned in close to Parker and whispered, "I have some surprises, too."

Now it was Parker whose expression lit up. "Did I just score?"

Julia laughed wickedly. "You have no idea what I can do to you, mister."

Parker took Julia's arm and they both turned down 49th street for the subway. Yes, Parker had truly scored today. Mulligan's Magical Marvelous had proven to be truly magical (in a way he

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could not, at the moment comprehend). He was about to discover all the amazing things his girlfriend's 24-year-old body could do—his own special toy.

Thank you, Mulligan, whoever the hell you are.