

feel bad about giving out some spoilers. But I wouldn't want to ruin a book that is, as much as anything, a fairly ripping adventure story.

It's also quite a feat of writing. The actual use of language is somewhat austere — an unavoidable consequence of having a boy with autism as a narrator — but it has its own beauty, and it works. So persuasive and so effective is the construction of Christopher, not only is he a character you're rooting for, he's also the character in the story you understand the best. It's startling how believably and comfortably this story puts you into what you might have thought were likely to be some pretty alien shoes.

And that's the problem with only reading medical novels. Whether you're reading for escape or for some supposed loftier purpose, you have to read beyond your own experience. If all I ever read were novels about bookish but sarcastic pediatrics residents, I should quickly come to find them neither exciting nor enlightening.

But if I can't convince you of this, if I can't persuade you to rejoice in *East of Eden* or wonder at *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, if you must read only medical novels, then please read this one.

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## Poem

### Untitled

I have no money  
so I spend time  
a pocket full of minutes  
scattered across late August evenings  
is my currency

I've spent time walking alone alongside the Canal  
marveling at the boats like a tourist  
wondering  
whatever happened to you?

I've spent time screaming, cursing, pleading, threatening the moon  
because I thought it was God's eye and wanted his attention  
it never blinked but I still didn't get a response  
Earth's orbit is always just outside of Heaven's peripheral vision

I've spent time restrained to the bed at the General Hospital psychiatric ward  
watching the sun rise out my fourth floor window but unable to chase it  
brown leather straps keeping me from going West  
let me go  
let me go  
the hallways in here all sting of chlorine  
and I don't anybody in this place is capable of feeling

Love

is a mingling of souls into an arrangement of protection  
a gift and a demand  
love is a removal of walls  
an invitation and a warning  
the best thing that could possibly ever happen to you  
love is an exchange of worlds that creates a universe for you to play in

I've spent time in the shadow of the Peace Tower working for the government  
earning \$17 an hour as a records management quality control officer  
re-arranging inactive files so that they'll be in perfect chronological order  
when they're shipped off to be destroyed  
God bless the Liberals

I've spent time down in the Glebe  
wandering tree-decorated streets with nice old houses that all look strangely empty  
boycotting Starbucks' coffee shops  
until they come clean, break down, drop the pretense, and finally just admit  
it's not tall, grande, and venti  
it's just plain old small, medium, and large

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I've spent time hopelessly lost in Ikea  
aimlessly searching for the Svenning work desk and swivel chair  
desperately asking clerks who actually got off their shifts two hours ago  
but couldn't find the exit to go home

I've spent time at lonely Ottawa outskirt cemeteries  
staring at tombstones trying to make the names and dates autobiographical  
wondering why you  
why you when it was always me that dreamed of a burial

I've crashed  
and a fallen soul is a fallen soul  
it doesn't matter what straw finally broke your back  
tipped the scale to the weight of your burdens  
knocked you down, kept you from getting up  
it doesn't matter  
what matters are the people who help you up  
who reach down  
who stop their world for just a minute  
let it intersect with yours  
and create a universe for you to play in  
where there is no gravity to hold you down  
there is no gravity  
to stop you from drawing the sight of the moon and talking with God  
there is no gravity  
to keep you from breaking the restraints and chasing the sun

what's important  
are the family and friends who love you

I have no money  
so I spend time with them  
and if I did have money  
nothing would change except the numbers in my bankbook

**Matt Peake**  
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Matt Peake is the Winner of  
the 2002 CBC Radio Ottawa  
Region Poetry Face-Off.

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