



Mr Was by Pete Hautman

Subjects: Time travel; Family problems; Minnesota

Award: Best Books for Young Adults

Book Lists: Gifted, Grade 6, Middle School, North America, Reluctant Readers

Props: Cane

(Use the cane and an old man's voice) Andie says I should tell my story. I should write until the notebooks are full. So I will. It all began a long time ago, when I was just a boy.

The telephone ring startled me awake in the middle of the night. A few minutes later, my door opened, and my mother walked over to my bed.

(Put down the cane, use the voice of a mom and young man)
“Are you awake, Jack? It’s your grandpa Skoro. He’s dying. We have to drive to Rochester, to visit him in the hospital. Your father can’t come because he doesn’t feel well. I need your company Jack. Please come.”

I knew that my father was drunk, not sick. But I also knew that my mother needed me, so I went.

As my mother entered the hospital room, I stayed back, wishing I was someplace else. I was afraid of the old man and the nearness of death. He hadn’t seen me since I was a baby. But my mother turned around and asked me to come say hello. Grandfather Skoro was smiling. He reached out a veiny hand and I started toward him. But as he opened his mouth to say hello, his eyes pushed out of his head and he jerked back away from me like I was a ghost.

I don’t remember how he got his hands around my neck, but I remember not being able to breathe, his thumbs sinking deep into my neck. My mother was screaming, the old man’s horrid breath was in my face and he said, “You. Kill you. Kill you. Kill you again.”

When I opened my eyes, I was flat on my back on the hard linoleum floor, my mother was sobbing hysterically, my grandfather was hanging half out of his bed, eyes open and vacant, the monitor displaying a flat green line.

It was going to take three days in Memory, Minnesota, where Grandpa Skoro had lived, to put everything in order after his death. As we drove into town, my mom said she would like to drop in and visit with some of grandpa’s friends. I didn’t want to go and Mom decided that I could walk around town and meet her a half hour later. I walked to Ole’s Quick Stop which

turned out to be a sort of grocery store/video rental/bar/café/bait shop. They had some video games I thought I’d play. The old man behind the counter struck up a conversation.

“I never seen you around here before. You from out of town?”

I nodded. “I’m here for my grandpa Skoro’s funeral.”

“Old man Skoror? He didn’t make it, huh? So, what’s gonna happen to Bogg’s End?”

“What’s Bogg’s End?” I asked. He took me outside and pointed back over his building at the rock face of the bluff. Right at the edge, practically hanging from it, perched a huge house.

“That’s Bogg’s End,” he said. “We call it that because old man Boggs build it and lived there with his wife and two daughters until one day, back in 1927—poof—they all disappeared. It’s where your grandpa lived and where your grandma—poof—disappeared from back in 1981. Used to be people thought it was haunted. Anyways, we call it Bogg’s End, on account of it was the end of the Boggsses.”

Mom picked me up shortly after that and told me that we would be staying in grandpa’s old house, in Bogg’s End. I have to tell you, I didn’t feel too comfortable wandering around the place alone. Not like I was worried about ghosts or anything like that. It was just... creepy. That night my dreams were strange. I dreamt of an oddly-shaped door at the far end of a closet, a door that I somehow remembered, a door that I somehow knew opened into another time. I knocked on it, producing a hollow sound. I tried to open it, hitting it with my fists... then I woke up.

(Pick up the cane and resume using an old man's voice) I remember sitting there in the dark shaking from the dream—or what I thought was a dream. For I would find the door in the closet, I would step through it and through time, a half a century into the past. A time when my grandfather was... well, just a boy, like me. But I’m tired, and that’s all I’m gonna say. I’ll write the rest in my notebooks. To find out what happened when I stepped back in time, *(Hold up book)* you’re gonna have to read it for yourself.

