Uncle Otto's Truck
by Stephen King

It's a great relief to write this down.
I haven't slept well since I found my Uncle Otto dead and there have been times when I have really wondered if I have gone insane -- or if I will. In a way it would all have been more merciful if I did not have the actual object here in my study, where I can look at it, or pick it up and heft it if I should want to. I don't want to do that; I don't want to touch that thing. But sometimes I do.
If I hadn't taken it away from his little one-room house when I fled from it, I could begin persuading myself it was all only an hallucination -- a figment of an overworked and over-stimulated brain. But it is there. It has weight. It can be hefted in the hand.
It all happened, you see.
Most of you reading this memoir will not believe that, not unless something like it has happened to you. I find that the matter of your belief and my relief are mutually exclusive, however, and so I will gladly tell the tale anyway. Believe what you want.
Any tale of grue should have a provenance or a secret. Mine has both. Let me begin with the provenance -- by telling you how my Uncle Otto, who was rich by the standards of Castle County, happened to spend the last twenty years of his life in a one-room house with no plumbing on a back road in a small town.
Otto was born in 1905, the eldest of the five Schenck children. My father, born in 1920, was the youngest. I was the youngest of my father's children, born in 1955, and so Uncle Otto always seemed very old to me.
Like many industrious Germans, my grandfather and grandmother came to America with some money. My grandfather settled in Derry because of the lumber industry, which he knew something about. He did well, and his children were born into comfortable circumstances.
My grandfather died in 1925. Uncle Otto, then twenty, was the only child to receive a full inheritance. He moved to Castle Rock and began to speculate in real estate.
In the next five years he made a lot of money dealing in wood and in land. He bought a large house on Castle Hill, had servants, and enjoyed his status as a young, relatively handsome (the qualifier "relatively" because he wore spectacles), extremely eligible bachelor. No one thought him odd. That came later.
He was hurt in the crash of '29 -- not as badly as some, but hurt is hurt. He held on to his big Castle Hill house until 1933, then sold it because a great tract of woodland had come on the market at a distress sale price and he wanted it desperately. The land belonged to the New England Paper Company.
New England Paper still exists today, and if you wanted to purchase shares in it, I would tell you to go right ahead. But in 1933 the company was offering huge chunks of land at fire-sale prices in a last-ditch effort to stay afloat.
How much land in the tract my uncle was after? That original, fabulous deed has been lost, and accounts differ... but by all accounts, it was better than four thousand acres. Most of it was in Castle Rock, but it sprawled into Waterford and Harlow, as well. When the deal was broken down, New England Paper was offering it for about two dollars and fifty cents an acre... if the purchaser would take it all.
That was a total price of about ten thousand dollars. Uncle Otto couldn't swing it, and so he took a partner -- a Yankee named George McCutcheon. You probably know the names Schenck and McCutcheon if you live in New England; the company was bought out long ago, but there are still Schenck and McCutcheon hardware stores in forty New England cities, and Schenck and McCutcheon lumberyards from Central Falls to Derry. McCutcheon was a burly man with a great black beard. Like my Uncle Otto, he wore spectacles. Also like Uncle Otto, he had inherited a sum of money. It must have been a fairish sum, because he and Uncle Otto together swung the purchase of that tract with no further trouble. Both of them were pirates under the skin and they got on well enough together. Their partnership lasted for twenty-two years -- until the year I was born, in fact -- and prosperity was all they knew.
But it all began with the purchase of those four thousand acres, and they explored them in McCutcheon's truck, cruising the woods roads and the pulper's tracks, grinding along in first gear for the most part, shuddering over washboards and splashing through washouts. McCutcheon at the wheel part of the time, my Uncle Otto at the wheel the rest of the time, two young men who had become New England land...
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