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The following story is based on the life and times of Edward Gein. In the 1950's this seemingly gentle handyman was engaged in activities that would set the small potato farming community of Plainfield, Wisconsin on edge for generations. The story that appeared in a Life magazine that Bob Mowen brought to camp prompted this story to be circulated from cabin to cabin. Because this as written this story is a composite of fact, rumor, lies, and myth I have chosen to change the names of the characters and location. Various parts of this story were told depending on the age of the campers. The entire story is too gruesome to induce a good night's rest.

Ed Gein

The September sun was warm and a slight breeze ruffled the colored leaves on the tall old maples in the cemetery. Most of the people in the little farm community of Greenfields had gathered to say a farewell to one who had chanced to die too young. The body in the coffin was that of a young woman of 17. She had been outgoing and popular, not a gorgeous beauty, but not exactly a plane jane either. Her death from a biking accident had sent shock waves through the town. Some of the businesses had shut down for the two hour funeral and the high school canceled classes for the day.

One of the people in attendance knew the truth. One in the audience could hardly wait for the ceremony to end. One had a shovel and lantern in his old truck waiting for the dark of night when he would return. In his mind he could picture the body with a false painted on smile and arms crossed across the chest. At last he would have a young body at his disposal instead of the tired old hags that were usually buried in this hallowed ground.

As the service dragged on with the testimonials of friends and relatives, Ed's memory slipped back to the days of his youth. At the age of 14 his mother noticed that Ed had begun to notice the differences between boys and girls. A shy youth, he blushed when a girl talked to him. He was apprehensive when it came to girls, yet he could not help staring at their female shape. His mother warned him that he should not look at girls that way. "Their trouble, Ed," she would say. "Leave them alone or before you know it they will put an end to you."

Since his father had died of pneumonia when he was 12, he and his mother made their living by renting out the farm land they owned and doing odd jobs for the neighbors. Each day Ed's mother Martha would open the old family bible and read to him for inspiration. The verses that Martha now choose to read were how Eve got Adam thrown out of the Garden of Eden; how Delilah had Samson's hair shaved off; how Mary Magdalin danced for the head of John the Baptist. These images of evil, sinful women were pressed into his pliable mind. Yet his public image was that of a shy, harmless, reclusive youth.

At the age of 16 his mother noticed that Ed was aroused by seeing a picture of a girl in a swimsuit in the Sears & Roebuck Catalog. A fire flashed in Martha's eyes, but gently she said, "Ed, come over here and stand by me." When he did he got the shock of his young life. His mother touched the crotch of his overalls and began a gentle stroking. "When this happens," she said stroking his erection, "just rub it a little and the pain will go away." With deft fingers she undid the fly and freed his penis. As she again began to stroke him, he turned and ran in terror of what was happening to him. "Women can make you do that," Martha called after him. They are evil and that is an evil thing that you have."

Caught between his budding maturity and maternal manipulation, Ed became confused and felt lost. How could something that came to him naturally be so evil. Martha kept working on him and then one night she seemly came to his rescue. While he was asleep she came to his bed. She introduced him to manhood. From that time on he and his mother slept each night together until her death.

After her body was removed from her room, Ed carefully cleaned it and made up a fresh bed. He pulled down the shades and backed from the room. The door was locked and the key hung outside the door on a nail. The room would not be opened again for 25 years.

His mother gone, Ed's mind was free to wander. Now all of the forbidden magazines that he had always kept hidden were out in the open. He began making trips to near by Hectors Point to buy as many magazines as he could afford. About half way to Hectors was a little wayside tavern where Ed would take a break on his way home. The 56 year old widow who owned and operated the tavern would one day play a part in Ed's life.

The magazines had seemingly solved Ed's woman problem, "Ghouls Who Love the Dead," was the title. It described how necrophiliacs were raiding cemeteries for their dates. His first time digging up a corpse was almost his last. After he had taken it home, it soon began to decay. He had to take it out in the woods behind his house and bury it in a few days. The Greenfields area has two lakes that attract tourists because of the fishing. The desire of the fishermen to preserve a trophy catch promote taxidermy. If a fish can be stuffed, why not a person?

As Ed began to develop his new hobby, he experimented with the compounds that are used to tan animal hides. His fruit cellar held jars of interesting body parts floating in preserving liquids. Transparent leather lamp shades replaced the old paper ones on Ed's lamps. Leather bound books stood on the shelf. The top of a skull served as ash tray. Ed had come a long way from the first days after his mother died.

Today and the corpse resting in the coffin had a special significance. He was the one responsible for her being in that coffin. She had come down the road on her bike with her bare legs flashing in the sun. The wind pushed her blouse tight to her chest. Ed drooled as he thought of tanning her skin and covering his favorite chair with it. When she sped out of sight he calculated where on these nearly deserted roads she would be headed. Ed jumped in his old truck and set out to head her off with murder in his heart. It was in a wooded area that he waited half way down a steep hill ready to thrust a small log in the bikers path. Peering from the ditch he soon saw the bike on the crest of the hill. The bike picked up speed as it approached. His victim was totally unaware of his presence. His timing was perfect. The log threw the bike rider off on the back of her head. Dazed she never saw him lift her head and bash in the back of her skull with a rock. Ed's heart pumped with excitement. It was a thrill the likes of which he had never had before. He wanted to pitch her into the back of his truck and take her home with him right then. It took only a few moments to make the scene look like an accident. Ed walked back to where he had parked his truck knowing that in a few days the body would be in his woodshed workshop. "What luck," he thought to himself, "there are few abrasions to the skin and the bruises will not affect the quality of the leather."

Handy-man Ed Gein was called upon to fix roofs, rake and cut lawns, repair lawnmowers and boat motors. He built docks for the summer residents at the near-by lakes. When a farmer needed a hand for a few days, Ed was usually the man he called on. Ed cut fire wood for his old fashion kitchen range and a pot bellied stove that heated his home in the winter. The old burning barrel out behind the house most always had some sort of scrape burning in it. Some thought him strange to pick up old tires and burn them because of the thick black smoke this made and the odor that came from them. When asked Ed said he couldn't stand to see the country side being messed up by all the litter.

He was very shy around women, but he did make comments to men about women that would later make them shutter, especially if they were directed towards their wives or daughters. "That girl shore has nice skin." "She looks good enough to eat." "That one should be hung by her heels for the way she acts." "Dead women don't talk back." "I dug me up a date the other night." "I like my chickadees sliced, diced, boiled, or fried."

Later Ed sat in his newly recovered leather chair reading another magazine. He had read most of the stacks of girlie and smut magazines two or three times. He should make a trip soon to Hector's Point to re-supply. The weather was cold and the gray winter clouds hung low in the sky. The thirty mile trip should not take too long. Besides he nothing else to do today. So he set off to restock his library.

"Dad, I don't like the way the handy-man looks at me." remarked 17 year old Joan Stagger. Her family owned a cottage on Sliver Lake. Her father replied, "Ed is a little weird, just a harmless old man who has lived in the back country too long. He won't hurt you." The rest of the summer Joan avoided wearing a swim suit or sitting in the yard when Ed came to cut the grass or trim the trees. Fall came and the family returned to their home in LaFlambo. The incident with Ed Gein was forgotten.

It was a warm October evening when Joan walked the short distance from her home to a baby-sitting job. She noticed that there was an old truck parked just down from her home that looked a lot like the one that was owned by the old handy-man, Ed Gein. "It's just a coincidence," she thought. "There must be hundreds of trucks like that." Still it caused a chill to run through her. At her job she thought about getting little Stephanie to sleep as soon as possible so that she could do some of the homework that she had brought with her.

A soft knock on the door surprised her. "It must be one of my friends that needs help with a math problem," she said to herself as she answered the door. There in the shadows of the porch light stood, Ed Gein. It was her worst nightmare come true. As she recoiled to close the door the old man moved quickly. Before she could scream out he had wrestled her to the floor and stuffed an old rag in her mouth. With a quickness of a practiced rodeo calf roper, Ed had Joan trussed up. She struggled against the ropes as he dragged her to his truck. Ed pulled an old potato sack over her and through her into the back of the truck.

As the truck started and began pulling away slowly, Ed began to sing. "Sugar and spice and everything nice, that's what little girls are made of." He stopped once on the way home to check on his cargo. Once home he backed the truck up to his woodshed work shop and unloaded his victim. He removed the sack from her and sat her in a corner. It had been a long night and Ed went off to bed.

The next morning found Joan stiff and sore from the ride and the bonds that held her tightly. Ed came out to inspect her in the light of day. "Nice, he said, "mighty nice." When Ed began untying her feet, Joan began to plot an escape. But there would be no chance. As soon as her feet were free a handcuff was put on each ankle. A rope fastened to a pulley on a beam pulled her so that her body hung head down a few inches from the floor. With a sharp knife, Ed quickly and expertly cut off her clothes. With the skill of a surgeon, a sharp knife was passed through her neck severing her head. Always neat, Ed washed the bloody head and hung it on a nail to dry. As he continued his grisly work he sang to himself; "Sugar and spice and everything nice, that's what my supper will be made of."

The mystery of Joan's disappearance was not solved until a crudely mounted head was found in Ed's home. She was identified by her hair and dental records.

A storm set in while he was at Hector's Point and the road conditions were deteriorating rapidly as he set out for home. There was a full raging blizzard raging when he reached Mary's Place, a road side tavern. The parking lot was empty when Ed pulled in. He ordered a beer and a hamburger and talked to Mary about the weather. He said that he would leave as soon as the snow plows came out and follow one home. Finally they heard the sound of the plow as it scraped the highway. Ed put on his coat and went out the door. In a few minutes he reentered carrying a 22 caliber rifle that he usually carried in his truck for varmints. Mary was bent over the sink washing glasses when Ed raised his rifle and fired a shot into the top of her skull. Years later the hole would be found in a skull identified as hers.

Ed left the lights burning and closed the door as he loaded the body of Mary Lessor into the back of his truck. It would be hours before another motorist would stop and find a deserted tavern. It was a mystery that would not be solved for five years.

"You become a vegetarian?" Ed's grocer asked. "Nope," Ed replied, "got me a mighty tasty deer so I'll be eating on it for a while."

Now and again there was a missing woman that no one could find a trace of. One was a girl whose father often hired Ed to do odd jobs. No connection to Ed was made. One was a coed hitch-hiking home from college. Another woman disappeared from a neighboring town when she went to her car to go home from a tavern. Later the grocer was to note that after the time of the disappearances Ed stooped buying meat.

November is the time to hunt deer around Greenfields. All the men and many of the women are out hunting the mighty white tailed deer. Ed was not known for being much of a hunter, so it was not surprising to see his truck out side the hardware store that morning. What was surprising was after his truck left there was no one to mind the store. Mary Kager was missing. She always ran the store during hunting season while her husband and sons were out in the woods.

That afternoon Ed came into town again. He stooped at the local coffee shop for a sweet roll and a cup of coffee. The owner asked, "You doing any hunting this year?" "Yep," said Ed. "I got me a nice fat doe hanging in my wood shed right now." The local warden was also taking a coffee break at the time. He had seen Ed earlier with and he was not wearing the required hunting clothes. The warden would be heading out toward the Gein place to check for violators later in the afternoon. It might be a good idea to check if Ed had a license he noted.

When the warden arrived at Ed's home, Ed was out cutting wood. The wood shed was attached to the house and the door to it open. The warden decided to check on the doe and see if it was properly tagged. In the dim light of the late fall afternoon he saw a white figure hanging from the rafters. He turned on his flashlight and recoiled in horror. Hanging by it's heels and butchered like a deer was the body of Mary Kager.

Soon the sheriff was on the scene. Ed came in from the woods and meekly surrendered. "Mother told me this would happen if I got involved with women," was all he said. On the stove in the kitchen was a fresh heart boiling and in the refrigerator a liver was sliced up ready for frying. Both were human.

With a search warrant in hand, the sheriff and his deputies entered the house. The normal looking old fashioned kitchen did not prepare them for what waited behind the next door. Peering out of a corner was a totem pole of grinning skulls and mounted human heads. Stuffed human female parts were nailed to the walls. Hollow eyed skulls served as lamp bases. Shrunken heads lay on a table next to a magazine open to an article, "How Headhunters Shrink Heads". A foot stool was made up of preserved human feet. Tanned human skin covered chairs and made lamp shades. A human leather shirt, gloves, and a cape were found. Human bones were carved into pipes, bowls, ash trays, and novelties. Every where there were stacks of smutty magazines. News paper reporters were to call it a house of horrors.

One door inside the house was locked and the key hanging on a nail driven into the casing. As officers opened the door they stepped back in time. Dust covered everything, it was like opening the tomb of a Pharaoh. Ed's mother's room had been kept as a shrine. No one had entered the room for 28 years. It was still the way it was when Ed's mother died.

The work shop held a number of tubs with chemicals in them. On a bench there laid a number of strange shaped knives, all very sharp. There was a rack for drying skins and a stack of tanned human hides. Meat hooks hung from a beam with dried blood on them. The entire wood shed smelled of stale death and chemicals. No wonder Ed never allowed anyone into this place.

Outside sat an overused burn barrel. The ashes in it and piled behind it contained human bone splinters and teeth. Mounds of earth in the wood lot behind Ed's home held the remains of humans. An old barn was the only place that did not bare witness to the horrors of the place. The old truck that was stored there showed no signs it had been involved with the crimes.

Ed was determined too ill to stand trial for his murders. Ed confessed to only a couple of his crimes. There were so many crimes and Ed was confused about

when things had taken place. Only a few of the many pieces of human remains were ever identified. Several graves were opened at the cemetery, most were empty. Many local citizens would not give permission for the authorities to check the graves of their loved ones. They did not want to think of what may have happened to their bodies. How many people Ed killed or cut up will ever be known. As he was lead away to spend the rest of his life in a home for the criminally insane, his house and its grisly trophies burned. Ed's life inspired horror movies and stories, but none could top the real life horror of the gentle handyman.