

*A collection of
stories from the
dark side of my
mind.*

The Darkness Around Me

by Michael Timothy Smith

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A collection of Stories
from the Dark Side of My Mind

Michael T. Smith

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The Itch was Gone

Michael was fifty-seven years old. Life was good. His health wasn't the greatest, but he lived a comfortable life with his beautiful wife Ginny.

Retirement was his dream, but he didn't have much hope of reaching it within his lifetime.

The years had been rough.

Ginny was out of town to visit her son. Michael sat on the sofa, writing a story on his computer, as he watched television. He felt an itch on his right shin and scratched it innocently.

By nightfall, the itch was maddening.

He kept scratching.

The next morning, there was a rash, which he kept scratching.

Within days, the rash spread over his lower right leg, then his left leg, his thighs and eventually his arms and torso.

He couldn't sleep. He'd wake throughout the night tearing at his skin. When his fingernails started to slide over the skin, he knew he'd gone too deep. Blood made his skin feel like rubbing hot fingers over ice.

The backscratcher he kept at his bedside became his best friend. In the morning, his fingernails were black, caked underneath with dead skin that he'd ripped from his body.

His lack of a job, prevented him from having health insurance.

He suffered without care.

Things changed. He was recalled to work and received the blessed insurance. His wife came home from her extended stay with her son and his family. She saw his condition and was shocked.

In the morning, the bedspread had blood stains and a coating of dead skin and fresh scabs that used to be part of his body. It reminded him of a light dusting of snow on his lawn on a winter morning.

Ginny washed the sheets every other day. Other days she vacuumed them.

The first doctor said, "I always go with my gut feeling. I think this is scabies."

He gave Michael a lotion to coat himself with.

It did nothing.

Michael knew it wasn't scabies.

He was nowhere near where he could have caught it and the symptoms didn't match, but, hey, Michael wasn't a doctor. Little did he know, he'd soon become his own.

Ginny helped him apply the lotion.

As expected, it didn't help.

He went to a dermatologist, who laughed. "They always suspect scabies. No! Just looking at you, I can tell this is eczema."

They gave Michael a steroid shot and a regiment of lotions and potions and told him to come back in two weeks. The

steroid helped temporarily. The rash cleared and the itching stopped, but a month later, it was back with a vengeance. It went on for several months. At one point, they had him shower, put the lotions on, then damp clothing and then a vinyl suit for a few hours to hold dampness in.

It was supposed to moisturize his skin.

It didn't help. He suffered with scaling skin and itch.

He tried a different primary physician. That doctor looked at him. "I love a puzzle."

The doctor ordered many blood tests, sent him to a new dermatologist and gave him more steroids. The doctor also took a biopsy of his skin. The results were inconclusive.

Parts of it looked like it might be psoriasis, but other sections didn't. The pathologist could not give a definitive diagnosis.

The steroids worked like the time before, but after a few weeks, the rash and itch were back.

One evening, when the itch really kicked in, he walked into his garage. On his work table sat his power sander.

He looked around. He was alone. His wife was in the living room watching TV.

On his right thigh, a spot flared up. He started to scratch it and decided scratching wasn't enough.

He plugged the sander's power cord into the socket, placed the sand paper against the itchy spot and applied pressure to the power button.

He watched with amazement as the rough paper took off layers of itching skin.

There was a little blood too, but he didn't care. The itch was gone temporarily.

It wasn't enough. A week later, he saw his drill.

Michael picked it up. "This might help."

He selected the smallest bit in his set, inserted it in the drill, dropped his pants and looked at the spots on his legs that itched the most.

The bit cut into his flesh with ease. Drops of blood and bits of flesh flew from the bit in a red spiral. It covered his thigh and dripped to the floor of his garage. Michael made a mental note to clean it up before Ginny saw it and asked questions.

He must have screamed, because his wife called out, "Are you OK?"

"I'm OK. I just stubbed my toe."

"OK! Just checking."

"I'm OK."

He bandaged his wounds and pulled up his pants to cover it. In bed, his wife asked, "Why are you wearing pajamas bottoms? You never wear them."

"My skin is so sensitive, I get cold at night." he lied.

"OK. Sleep well."

And he did. He didn't itch that night, but he took pain killers to numb the ache in all the spots, he'd drilled. There were several, even in his calves."

Ginny's daughter also had medical problems. She needed her Mom's help, so Ginny left, for what was to be a couple weeks, but ended up being several months.

Michael smiled. He was free to drill and drill he did. Small holes appeared in his arms, legs and even his torso, but he didn't drill deep there. He could not risk the chance of hitting a major organ.

His body was covered in bandages. Michael cancelled all his doctor appointments.

He thought, "I'm my own doctor, solving my own problems."

The itch always seemed to find a spot where the drill hadn't been before. It was especially bad on the top of his right foot. There were too many bones there to drill, but there was another solution.

He had a circular saw.

When he couldn't take it anymore. he picked up the saw, put a fine edged blade in it, took several pain killers, grabbed his blow torch and went to work. The saw cut through flesh and bone easily. Blood sprayed from the blade. Chips of bone, painted in blood, bounced off the wall and rattled against the side of his car. It sounded like windblown hail beating against the windows of his childhood home in Nova Scotia, Canada, where he grew up.

He created his own hail storm.

His right foot fell to the floor. The thump it made, sounded dead, which it now was.

He stared at it – amazed. It might have been the pain killers or the blood draining from it, but the foot went from the red scaly thing it was to a pale, white clump of flesh and meat.

Before he bled out, he picked up the blow torch, lit it and pointed the blue flame to where his foot once was. The stench of burning flesh was nauseating. Even with the pain killers, he almost passed out, which would not be good. He wouldn't be able to finish his work and would fall to the floor and die from blood loss.

He continued until he cauterized the stump of his leg.

It didn't cross Michael's mind how he would explain to Ginny why his foot was missing.

He slept in a "pain killer" stupor for days and developed a fever. When it broke, he climbed from his feces-covered, urine-soaked bed. With the help of crutches, that he had from when he twisted his ankle years before, he managed to move around the house and clean himself.

A week later, the itch came back. This time, it was on his left wrist. He got the circular saw and blow torch, which were in the kitchen, where he'd cleaned the blood from them.

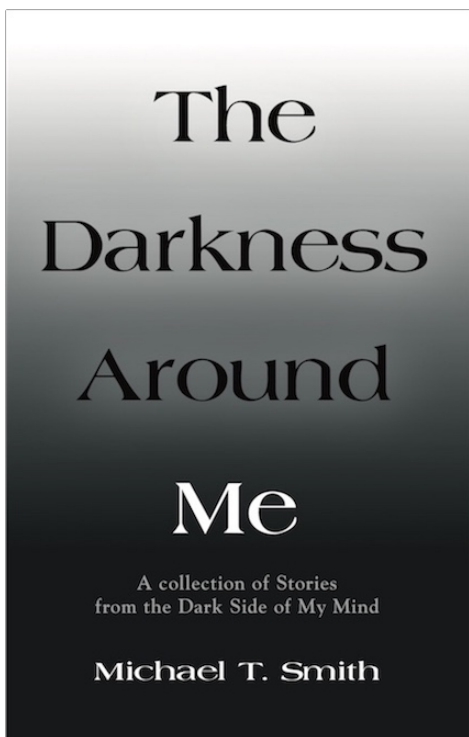
A man takes pride in keeping his tools clean.

He picked up his pain killers, slipped them in his pocket and went into the garage, which now smelled like a meat locker.

He'd forgotten to clean up the puddle of blood from the garage floor. A swarm of flies flew over the mess as he approached. The puddle rippled on the surface, as if a wind had kicked up small waves. He stared. There was no wind. The ripples were caused by a school of maggots.

Michael plugged the saw into the power outlet and went to work.

Soon, the itch was gone ...temporarily.



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