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opening extract from

Candle Man

written by

Glenn Dakin

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Theo sat up and looked around. He saw a glowing candle on a tombstone in front of him. Suddenly a dark figure stepped in front of it.

CandleMan



By
Glenn Dakin

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Glenn Dakin

Glenn Dakin was inspired to write this novel while exploring the overgrown graveyard close to his old home in London. As well as writing for numerous cult comics and children's TV shows, he has spent the last few years seeking out crypts, sewer tunnels and sites of mysterious significance in his research for Candle Man. Glenn *claims* his book is a work of fiction, but if you look very closely at his pictures of the cemetery you may spot a smoglodyte lurking in the shadows . . .

To find out more visit www.glenndakin.com

Chapter One
The Present

'So this is my birthday treat,' Theo said, gazing about him. The teenager surveyed the world gloomily, the fine drizzle already causing his dark hair to droop over his sad grey eyes. 'When you said I would be visiting a special place, surrounded by important people . . .'

'Just my little joke, young master,' interrupted Mr Nicely, Theo's butler, with a bright smile. The pair stood in a cemetery. Lopsided gravestones, monuments and sad stone angels surrounded them. 'There are a lot of important people in graveyards,' the butler added.

Theo just looked miserable. His face was now almost as pale as the marble cherubs in front of him. 'I had hoped, now that I'm older . . .' he began.

'Now now.' Mr Nicely wagged a finger. 'You know you aren't safe amongst *living* people,' he

added, leading the way down a tangled path, 'or at least they aren't safe amongst you. On account of your condition.'

'But I've got my gloves on,' Theo protested, glancing down at the thick leather gauntlets he was ordered to wear at all times. He knew his words would be wasted. He was only too aware of the rules that governed his illness.

'Half an hour!' shouted Mr Nicely and twirled his umbrella jauntily.

Theo ignored the rain and peered around, his heart racing. He hadn't been out of the house for a year. He hadn't seen another person – outside of his household – for three hundred and sixty-five days. Theo's predictable routine meant he always saw the same three: Mr Nicely the butler, Clarice the maid and Dr Emmanuel Saint, his guardian. No one else was allowed to enter his circle of misery. Just in case. It would be a thrill just to glimpse another human being.

'We might see someone – from a distance . . .' Theo ventured.

'"Might" is not for you, young master,' chuckled Mr Nicely. 'Your life has been planned and regulated to leave "might" and "maybe" out of the equation. Now take a quick stroll, enjoy the company of your betters,' here the butler nodded down at the leaf-strewn graves, 'and we'll get back home.'

Theo strode quickly through the woods. Already his legs were aching from the unaccustomed exercise. But it was a nice ache, not the horrible pain that followed his treatment. He peered through the clumps of thistles and ragged weeds that choked the pathways. Years ago his guardian had said a cemetery keeper lived here. There had been some mention of him having a daughter – maybe Theo would see them.

'I've half a mind to nip home early,' the butler called out from somewhere behind him. Mr Nicely had seen enough of this dreary November day already. 'Then I can just squeeze in a nice cup of camomile tea before the good doctor returns from his meeting.'

Home early? From my one trip out in three hundred and sixty-five days!

Theo made an effort to distance himself from the eternal presence of the butler. He ducked under the dark boughs of a knotty old hawthorn, and found himself in a little clearing.

Suddenly he saw it. Under the glistening leaves of a thick holly tree a tiny parcel was perched on top of a gravestone. It was wrapped in black paper with a golden bow tied around it. Tiny beads of rain shone on the bow.

He looked closer. Written in silver ink on the black paper was one word: *Theo*. It was for him, only for him – somehow he knew not to mention it to his companion.

Too surprised to really know what he was doing, he slipped the little packet into his coat pocket. Then he turned round to see Mr Nicely stroll into view.

'Come on,' the butler grinned. 'Early home, and a spot of camomile tea for yours truly will be just the ticket. You've been far too unruly already!'

To the butler's surprise, Theo made no protest.

'Time to open your gifts!' Dr Saint announced with a smile. His white teeth, round glasses and bald head all gleamed down on Theo as he sat in the study. Theo was back at Empire Hall, the vast mansion in Kensington Gore – one of London's wealthiest quarters – where he and his guardian lived.

This was one of Theo's three rooms – the bathroom, his bedroom and the study. He barely knew of any other places in the world. In front of him on a shiny walnut desk were three parcels, one from Dr Saint, one from Mr Nicely and one from Clarice. They all waited expectantly.

Theo opened the gifts. The first was *The Complete Guide to Good Manners: Part Four*, a large volume from Dr Saint. Then there was a framed photograph from Mr Nicely – of himself. And finally, Clarice had bought Theo a book of fairy tales, ten years too young for him.

'Completely checked and approved by myself,'

Dr Saint added, as Theo flicked through the book's garish illustrations.

He tried to say thank you but his mouth only framed the words – no sound would come out.

'A bumper harvest,' chortled Mr Nicely.

Theo looked up. 'But what about . . .'

'Yes?' demanded Dr Saint.

'I asked for a book about the world – or about history – something about real life . . .' he faltered.

Dr Saint exchanged a glance with Mr Nicely.

'I'm sorry, Theo,' said Dr Saint, eyeing his ward with a strange cold gaze. 'But we've been through all this a hundred times. The world is not good for you and you are not good for it.'

'So you keep saying!' Theo blurted out. 'But I'm nearly a man now, and I haven't got a clue about what it's really like – out there!' He gestured towards the curtained window.

The doctor sighed and placed his hands together in the prayer-like gesture he often adopted when being wise.

'Now listen, Theobald. Facts about the world,

real events, true history, all these things excite the mind. That stimulation is, sadly, very bad for you. It makes your mind race, your metabolism accelerate. The effect on your condition could be disastrous.'

Theo looked away bleakly.

'I am trying to save you from your own curiosity, Theo,' the doctor said. 'I know that where a teenager is involved, I have set myself a thankless task!'

'You're a bloomin' hero, sir!' Mr Nicely muttered, looking at the floor.

'But most of the time I feel all right!' Theo cried out. 'Apart from being bored out of my mind!'

Dr Saint sighed. Mr Nicely tutted.

'I fear Theo's thrilling day out has muddled his wits,' Dr Saint said. 'Warm up the Tube, Mr Nicely. I suggest an extra-long session of therapy!'

Theo went pale.

That night, as on every other, he was forced to stand upright in the Mercy Tube, a transparent casing with a powerful ray emitter housed at the

top. His eyes screwed tight against the blinding light, Theo was bathed in radiation for several minutes. He could hardly stand afterwards, and felt sick in the pit of his stomach.

Clarice brought him a glass of water and his dressing gown. As he sat on the edge of his bed, he heard the others talking in the room next door.

'Well, I'm off out with the Society of Good Works tonight,' said Dr Saint. 'We have those widows to take care of, and a big cheque to give the Prime Minister.'

'Very saintly of you, Dr Saint,' said Mr Nicely.

'Nice of you to say so, Mr Nicely,' said Dr Saint.

Theo grimaced, crawled up on to his bed, half dazed, and passed out.

It was evening. The thrum of traffic in the street was dying away. Unseen dogs exchanged barks further down the Gore. Clarice came in to clear up the supper things. Theo leant back against his pillow and studied the haloes of the lamplight on the ceiling.

He was pleased to be left alone with Clarice.

With her plain face, short, mousy hair and drab uniform, she couldn't be described as attractive but she was a quiet, soothing presence. At least she didn't smile all the time.

'I've been thinking,' Theo said. 'If my condition is so bad, why don't I see anything wrong with my skin?' He peeled off his gloves as he always did before sleeping and studied his hands in the half-light.

'And if the Mercy Tube is curing me, why do I only feel bad after I come out of it?' he continued, pleased to be able to ask questions freely. The maid picked up the tray and left the room without a word. It was what Theo had expected. After all, she was completely deaf.

At last Theo was alone. He stepped across the room, took the parcel from his coat pocket and returned to his bed to study it. There was his name on the paper in ornate silver writing: *Theo*. He liked that. There was something about seeing his name written out in shiny letters by an unknown hand; it was as if *Theo* could be somebody special,

a name to conjure with, not just a useless invalid.

He opened the present. Inside, packed in shredded paper, lay a snow globe. He had seen one or two of these before. The glass bowl contained a little miniature of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, a place he knew from one of his approved picture books. But there was no note with the gift, nothing to suggest who had sent it.

He shook the globe, expecting to see the swirl of white snow, a magical winter scene. But instead he stirred up a blizzard of black flakes. Theo watched in surprise as the dark shapes whirled like a cloud of bats above the tiny tower. As they settled they blotted out the quaint scene, burying everything in darkness.

Weird, Theo thought. Frowning, he replaced the globe in his coat pocket and climbed into bed. He lay in the dark, wondering about the strange gift – and who could have sent it – until he drifted off to sleep.

His birthday had been more intriguing than he

had expected. But he had no idea that the events of the night ahead would change his miserable life forever.