

Excerpt 1 – *The Kaleidoscope*, B K Nault

Ruddy complexions were like skywriting, a girl in high school had told him once. The message may appear slowly, but everyone can see it for miles around and remember it for days. “I have to get back to work.” He gathered up his trash and headed for the can. When he turned around, Pepper was standing close, nose to his chin. “Tell Glenda hello.” Before he could go, she grabbed his arm.

“Harry, I really mean it. I am glad I saw...what I saw. Where did you get it again? Could I get one like it, or is that a one-of-a-kind thing?”

He told her about the encounter in the park with the homeless man. “It’s a mystery why he picked me.” He pictured the day of the handoff, the police hurrying the old guy away before he could explain himself. The police responding to his own complaint about the vagrants camping out. She was the first person he shared this with.

“You have been given much responsibility in many areas.” With that, she stood on tiptoe and pecked him on the cheek. “You have been given a gift. Thank you for sharing your magical looking-piece with me.”

“Um. You’re welcome. And thanks.” He demurred, dropping his hand from her grip. “But I don’t believe in magic.”

“A man of science and numbers, I get it.” She tipped her head sideways, considering him. “The mysteries of the universe reveal more than we see with our eyes or hear with our ears. If we slow down and really absorb what it’s trying to teach us, we might be surprised and delighted.” She poked a slender finger at his chest. “I choose to keep my mind open to the possibilities. What about you, Harry?”

Excerpt 2 – *The Kaleidoscope*, B K Nault

One more piece of the puzzle, and the technology anticipated, even feared, would be born. If he'd calculated correctly, and Walter was meticulous about calculations, the day's mail should contain the gem he'd saved and scraped for. Every tip, handout, or penny literally scraped from the gutter had gone into a jar, and last week he'd exchanged the sum for a cashier's check and placed the order. If this final trial didn't work, he'd lose everything he'd slaved over. His ideas were running out, his home was about to be razed, and what made the urgency even more crucial, he sensed "they" were about to discover his hiding place.

Flipping the wall calendar over his workbench, Walter circled a date two weeks hence. That would give him sufficient time to install the final part, to test, and make note of his achievement. Perhaps even enjoy it himself before he turned it over to the one who would carry it to the world, who could safely deliver the technology where it would do the most good. It was time to plan the handoff.

The sun's rays pouring from a high window warmed and loosened Walter's back muscles. The glint on the shaft of metal, as thick as a Cuban cigar, the length of a number two pencil, gave him more than a few moments of pride he'd not felt since the birth of his long-lost son.

He held the eyepiece up and sighted, spinning the dial. It caught and stuck in place. He wrapped it once again in the cloth, gently rested the device between the jaws of the vise and slowly cranked it shut, stopping at precisely the point where the Kaleidoscope would be held firmly in place, but not harmed by the firm grip. He filed and sprayed, working over the delicate prize until the dial spun like butter and the magnificent colors fell into place.

Excerpt 3 - *The Kaleidoscope* B K Nault

She yanked off the scarf and dropped it into his lap, climbed up on the bench and began leaping from one bench to the next, her sandals slapping the concrete.

Harold was afraid she would slip and fall, and wondered whether he should first call someone, or check her for ABC's if she did. But she jumped lightly, a sprite among the forest of potted birds of paradise. Airway, breathing, c...what was the C for?

"I've always wanted to do this! Haven't you?" Where the benches were too far apart, Pepper scissor-kicked to the ground and danced. Harold could breathe as long as she was safely on the ground, her arms aloft, her body swaying. Then she would leap up again, the sun reflecting off bald spots between shags of spirally hair. And she laughed. Not a scary, maniacal sound, but a child-like whiffle that whisked Harold back to the elementary school when Edna Velasquez had tried to jump around the lunchroom but fell and broke her arm when she slipped in pudding. Harold was the only one Edna didn't pester to sign her cast. Circulation. That was what C stood for.

Pepper collapsed next to him, panting, her caramel skin aglow. She was a china doll with kewpie lips and taffy-pulled earlobes. "That felt good, Harry." She dabbed at her upper lip with the scarf, a tiny rattle in her breath. "You should dance more. We should all dance more."

The warmth from her body awoke something in him that had long been dormant. Confused emotions tangled somewhere in his soul, and he met her gaze.

"What makes you dance, Harry? What stirs your soul?"

She'd dared to pull at the thread he'd buried underneath years of proving himself worthy, smart. Sane. "I find satisfaction in my

work.”

“And what is that? No, wait. Let me guess. You’re a Pez-head designer. No, a sign spinner for discount plastic surgeons. I could use one of those by the way.”

He knew better than to acknowledge her cosmetic surgery remark. Honest answers to conversations beginning with “Am I pretty enough?” and “I’m thinking of getting work done” had never gone well with Georgia. “I’m a fraud investigator.”