

Excerpts from *Trust Issues: Stories* by K.P. Davis  
(Cornerstone Press, 2025) may be used for promotional purposes

**From “Nebula”**

Bula unlocked the kitchen door at the Dairy D-Lite at 7:30 on the dot and nearly forgot to clock in in her rush to get the lights on. The cook didn’t show up until 7:45, but Bula already had the grill hot for him. A couple of deaf-as-posts old farmers thought they were being discrete shouting at each other.

“That’s Alice Marie’s girl,” said one.

“She favors her Mama, don’t she,” the other replied.

The first man took a deep look into his coffee cup and slowly shook his head to convey the regret everyone felt for the way things had gone with Alice Marie. She’d been a ragamuffin of a girl who started smoking dope and ran off to California—come back pregnant talking about space aliens. It was every family’s worst fear—what they prayed would never happen to their own daughters.

“Uh, uh, uh,” said the first man.

Bula was used to being talked about. In a town this small everybody knew everybody’s business, and their hearts were mostly in the right places.

While Delbert, the cook, clattered around as if he was doing something, Bula handed him the green-striped slip from her pad. “Here’s their order,” she said.

Delbert took the order, avoiding her eyes. He acted scared of her. She knew he’d heard the talk, but when Bula tried to reassure him, he said, “I don’t play around with any of that hoodoo mess.” As he said it, he rubbed his right hand over a tattoo on his left forearm that looked like a wrought-iron railing from the French Quarter. Bula knew from inside his head that it was a

Excerpts from *Trust Issues: Stories* by K.P. Davis  
(Cornerstone Press, 2025) may be used for promotional purposes

talisman to evoke Papa Legba for protection. She also understood from that quick glimpse that Delbert firmly believed that he had made it home from 'Nam with both arms and legs thanks to Papa Legba's protection.

After she delivered the order to the old men, she said, "Delbert, I'm not a witch. I couldn't do anything to hurt you." She didn't know if that was true, but she knew she would never hurt anybody unless they hurt her first.

The cook said, "I know that stuff's real. My aunty's best friend's stepbrother got messed up by a hoodoo man down in New Orleans. Hexed the dude till his Johnson turned black and fell right off."

Bula busted out laughing. The funniest part was the expression on Delbert's face. He was trying to look serious, but the way he opened his eyes wide and pursed his lips just looked funny to her.

Delbert said, "Folks remember when your mama rocked up pregnant and crazy, talking about how the space aliens were gonna come for you and her one day. Your people never believed her. That's why she went back to California to wait for her spaceman to come."

The sun was full up when the boss came in and went straight to the till. "Mornin' Bula," she called over one shoulder, then "Mornin' Delbert," over the other. There weren't more than half a dozen customers that whole day, and when Bula hung up her apron at six o'clock, the boss handed her a pay packet, and their hands touched a little bit, and Bula knew right then what the woman was going to say. "I'm going to have to let you go, sugar. I'm *real* sorry. We just don't have enough business."

Excerpts from *Trust Issues: Stories* by K.P. Davis  
(Cornerstone Press, 2025) may be used for promotional purposes

Bula nodded. It took her a minute to swallow the lump in her throat and say, “Thank you for keeping me on this long, Ms. White.” In that lightning-fast brush with Mrs. White’s hand, Bula picked up the woman’s deep worry and sadness at having to close the business. It wasn’t her fault the town was drying up.

The Greyhound blew past as she walked home, and Bula smelled freedom in the diesel fumes. It felt like the world shifted just the tiniest little bit on its axis.

**From “Strings of Solace”**

*Why on earth did I think I wanted to transfer here?* Carly asked herself on the way back to the car. Because Billy, a Chicago native, thought it was a good school? “A degree from there is worth a lot,” he’d said, “even in music.” She wouldn’t be called back. *I wouldn’t go to that school if you paid me.* Her gait was slow, and her ears burned with shame. She felt like something Dr. Bonham had scraped off the bottom of his shiny-f\*cking-shoe.

As she came within sight of her car, she thought, *it is a charming area.* Shop windows and cafés beckoned. *Oh, well, guess I’ll never get to know you.*

She passed a music store with antique instruments in the window and went halfway down the block before turning back. *Why not? I’ve got nowhere to be.* The shop was warm, and the old floorboards creaked. The door blew shut with a bang behind her, and a bell rang above her head. The shelves were crowded and dusty, and a man with a grey ponytail and a bushy beard greeted her from behind a counter to her left. She nodded pointing to a rack of sheet music. Sometime later, she found a book of Irish jigs and reels, but when she went to pay for it, the shopkeeper

Excerpts from *Trust Issues: Stories* by K.P. Davis  
(Cornerstone Press, 2025) may be used for promotional purposes

was in the back room. She rang the bell by the register. While she waited, she heard a heartbreaking mandolin melody in a minor key, and looking down into the glass case, she saw an old mandolin on display. It had a rounded back like a lute. When the shopkeeper came out, she asked to see it.

“It doesn’t play,” he said. “We just keep it here for looks. Hasn’t been tuned in forever.”

“Would you sell it?” she asked. Tim would have a fit that she’d spent money on another instrument she wouldn’t play for him, but she felt a wild hair cropping up.

“I suppose. I couldn’t ask much—the condition it’s in. It’s not rare or anything. These little Washburn mandos were pretty popular around nineteen hundred or so. I’d take ninety-five dollars for it.”

Surprised at the low price, she said, “Done.” Feeling like she’d stolen the little instrument, she made to hurry out of the shop before the man realized his mistake, but she turned back at the door and asked, “What tune were you playing just now?”

“Hmmm?” The man looked up, confused. “When?”

“I mean when you were in the back room.”

“Wasn’t me, love.”

Carly walked back to her car, confused. She’d clearly heard a mandolin playing, but she *was* pleased with her new instrument. On the drive home, she could have sworn she heard the mandolin tune again.

Excerpts from *Trust Issues: Stories* by K.P. Davis  
(Cornerstone Press, 2025) may be used for promotional purposes

**Nell—On Being Prepared (the complete story)**

It was time to take inventory; make sure she had everything she needed. Hard times were coming. Siege—at least that’s what she feared. Her mother brought her up in the Reagan era, shopping at Sam’s Club, buying mayonnaise by the case, toilet paper by the pallet, giant containers of garlic salt and dried parsley, tube socks by the dozen, and enough coffee bricks to build a skyscraper. Nell was more pragmatic than that, and it was just her and Bug she had to worry about. She knew when the big bad times came, she’d only be able to feed Bug so long, so she’d always let him run down a rabbit or a squirrel. And she had fishing tackle and a sturdy rod—plenty good enough for the bass and catfish she came across.

Bug, a Rottweiler-sized creature with an odd, mottled coat, could take care of himself. With his amber eyes and his ability to blend into shadows, he was more demon than dog to look at. He knew how to act in public, did exactly what Nell told him in whispered-under-her-breath commands and hand signals, but she only ever had room for a couple of cases of canned meat. Kibble wasn’t going to cut it. It’d be cruel to allow that to take up space better used to contain compact foods like dried rice and beans that would sustain them longer, so she and Bug ate from the one pot of rice and beans with the occasional meat on the side. When she was in a town, she’d buy fresh fruit and veg, otherwise she foraged mushrooms and wild herbs, berries and nuts.

Nell made a note in a manky-looking spiral notebook, “corned beef hash, bouillon cubes,” and she flipped to the next page where a penciled heading read, “Guns and Ammo.” There had not been a day since her Daddy had given her her first gun, a single-shot .410 shotgun, when she was six years old that Nell had not been armed. Her daddy had had six inches sawed off the stock, so it fit her. He taught her to shoot it, clean it, and take care of it. And she’d always

Excerpts from *Trust Issues: Stories* by K.P. Davis  
(Cornerstone Press, 2025) may be used for promotional purposes

kept a gun, in preparation for when the sh\*t hit the fan. Daddy had evaporated when she was ten. But her mama had kept the long guns in her bedroom closet, and a little pistol in the nightstand, though she never needed them. Nell still had the .20-gauge shotgun, the .22 rifle, and a little Smith and Wesson .38 Special. She didn't use them, but they were there just in case, and she kept them clean. Fired them occasionally out in the middle of nowhere, testing that her aim was still true, and the ammo was still viable.

In her parents' day, it was the Russians and nuclear war, they were waiting for. Now? Nell was ready for any-damned-thing. She tried to keep her opinions to herself when she got among people, tried not to side with anybody, because there was so much nonsense in the air, you couldn't quite tell who to trust. Some crazy, twisted logic in the 7-11 could get you killed. And on top of that, it looked like there might be another world war, gangs were running wild, cops were killing civilians, banks were failing. If this wasn't Tribulations, Nell wasn't sure what was.

She had been laying in supplies all her life in a never-ending cycle. Seemed like she just settled in and got things the way she liked them when it was time to pick up sticks and move at which point the process would start all over. She traveled in different vehicles, mostly derelict. Wheezing rattle-trap pickups and vans made their final journeys with Nell. She'd leave them where they quit and go with a whispered wish that the provisions she left behind would serve someone else who needed them. And her "go gear" was all strapped to a backpacker's frame. It weighed 62 pounds fully loaded, and Bug had saddle bags to carry some cans if they had to walk.

Nell traded on her mechanics' skills, spending a season here and a season there, living rough unless she came across an unoccupied cabin or some Good Samaritan rocked up and

Excerpts from *Trust Issues: Stories* by K.P. Davis  
(Cornerstone Press, 2025) may be used for promotional purposes

offered to pay her rent for a while. Most garages had a space in a storage building she could use for a few weeks. She'd gotten good at fortifying a space quickly, but it took constant vigilance, keeping the rice bag full, and coffee enough for the morning. She would really miss coffee, and she hated to run out of salt. She could eat all manner of crap, but it needed to be seasoned.

She lowered her double-layered masks, pulled a single baby wipe from a box by the door of the shed—that's all it was, a garden shed—and wiped the day's grime off her face. She could feel the tension in the air. It was time to pack up, load the old Jeep Cherokee she'd been working on, give Bug the last of the kibble. It wasn't clear yet which way she needed to head, but she'd be ready.