

The image features a central composition of overlapping, semi-transparent shapes in blue, purple, and yellow. The text 'evil' is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font on a black rectangular background, positioned on the blue shape. Below it, the word 'glasses' is written in a similar font, with each letter on a separate black rectangular background, overlapping the purple and yellow shapes. The design is decorated with four black starburst symbols, each with eight points, and three circles connected to the central shapes by black lines: a cyan circle at the top right, a yellow circle at the bottom right, and an orange circle at the bottom left.

evil

glasses

Edition 13

July 1. 2018

table of contents



I Died

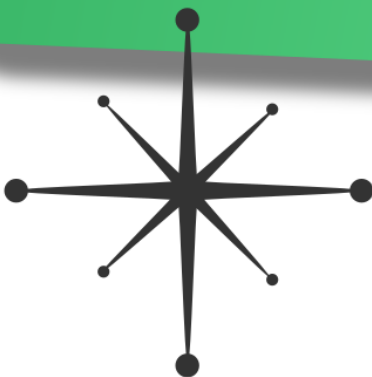
Page 1

by Sara Lufrano

No Kill Shetler

Page 4

by Marshall Bowles



I Died

By Sara Lufrano

I'm dead, he isn't. I know how it happened and everything, a cycling accident. A FedUP truck hit me.

I was mostly in my bike lane and bam, splattered all over the truck and the road.

My mom, dad, and little sister got paid handsomely from the settlement but he wasn't included since he was never legally family. He actually didn't even make it to any hearings.

I know that because I've been with him, watching him, since it happened.

I know it's sad when I look at him but I can't feel anything anymore. I see him cry, I see him lay in bed for days, I see him not eat, not answer his phone. I see him doing nothing and I know it's sad but there are no feelings in me.

We were each other's soul mates. We jokingly talked about how we wouldn't be able to move on if the other died. Super funny.

I had no idea I'd be watching him like this after and it makes me wonder who was watching me until I kicked it.

He goes to a job, he lost his real one after it happened. He lives in an unfinished basement of someone's house after losing our apartment. And he sits there, or lays there, and does nothing until it's time to get up and get on the bus to his job.

I'm not able to get his attention or move anything to show him I'm there, I can't talk to him during his dreams, or flicker lights when he cries out my name.

So I wrap my arms around him and lay there with him. I always wish that this didn't happen but I feel no pain.

Years passed and I'm still here with him.

He was true to his word about not being able to move on. He doesn't cry anymore but he's still by himself in this basement working jobs, doing nothing but watching Netflix.

He's thicker than he was a year ago but still not back to the size he was before. His hair and beard are long but he combs them and keeps them tidy. He got some new clothes that fit him better on his new frame.

He's handsome now just like he always was.

I don't know if anything is ever going to be different for me. I might watch him for his whole life and then when he dies maybe we'll be together. Maybe that thing will happen that when I do something good I go on to the true afterlife. Maybe I'll wander here forever even after everyone else is gone.

I know that I don't want to leave him. Even though I'm dead and can't feel anything I know I don't want to be anywhere except with him.

I've got my routine too. When he wakes up I give him a kiss and say "good morning, how did you sleep?" We sit together at his little outside bistro set that he has inside and have coffee. He gets ready, I give him his space then, and I sit and think or reread any text I can see.

I go to work with him. He's started riding a bike again. I understood what he was going through everytime he looked at a it. I'm glad because I really did enjoy it, now I just know it as a reasonable mode of transportation.

In the evenings and his days off we hang out and watch TV or he plays games on his console and then we go to bed.

Recently he's been in better and better moods. He gets texts more often now and he's got more friends at his job. It's good for him. He smiles too.

I do like seeing him this way. It's a small glimpse at how he was when I was alive.

It had been months and he's grown further away from me. There's a woman at his job that he talks with, that talks with him. He smiles and laughs when she's around. They like each other.

What she doesn't know is when he's home he cries because I'm gone. I think about what I would feel like if I could and it's satisfaction. But I only sit with him as he cries and doesn't respond to her texts, gently running my hand down his arm telling him everything will be okay.

It's a few weeks later. He's been looking at his phone a lot but no one is texting or calling.

The TV is off, it's sprinkling rain. He opens the door and steps outside. I follow him and stand next to him. He gets a shiver, I watch him shake it off.

"Leave me alone," he says staring out in the rain.

I look to where he's looking but there's only the street, there's not even a house across the way.

"I don't want to keep doing this."

He closes his eyes. He's crying.

"If I say out loud that I don't love you anymore will you leave me alone?"

Don't love me anymore? Who is he talking about?

His hands are fists, down by his side. "I don't love you anymore!"

I put my hand out to grab his shoulder and it goes right through him. I try again.

"I want to forget you!"

And then he was gone. Or I was gone. Either way we weren't together anymore. I know that in this moment I was happy that I didn't feel anymore.

No Kill Shelter

by Marshall Bowles

K9 grabbed the unopened bag of dog food from the top shelf of the twenty-second row of the warehouse. His synthetic metal fingers were vaguely humanoid, though he only had three fingers per hand. The bag of dog food weighed 50kg, easy enough for K9 to carry under one arm. He slung the bag over one shoulder and balanced it there. He displayed a *smiley* emoji on the screen that served as his face and then rolled outside.

The land was gray and dying. A few shrubs clung to life among the rocks and rusted out cars, but they were having a hard time of it. Little sunlight made it through the thick dust that filled the sky. K9 knew something had gone terribly wrong, but he was not sure what. He had not been able to establish a connection to the internet in 3.76 years.

K9 started his twenty-five minute commute home, a route he took every day. It wound through a dead forest, dilapidated houses, and the playground behind the burnt husk of an elementary school. Like most days, he tried to reason out what happened to change the world so much. A meteor? A war? Insufficient data.

He was never programmed to handle such a situation. Those first few weeks were the most difficult. There was no one to guide him. His customer service routines broke down, and he was forced to do something his creators never intended. K9 had to *improvise*.

K9 crested a hill and saw his home below: the Green Village Doggy Halfway House. The small building was nestled in a depression between low hills, sheltered from the harsh winds that often raged across the land and tore apart other structures. K9 made repairs to the building when it needed them, ensuring that it fared better than the others he passed on his daily commute.

The building was one story tall and made of poured concrete. A pair of double doors in the front were the main entrance. Beside the doors, a large window took up the rest of the storefront. An image of a smiling puppy was stenciled on the window.

K9 rolled down the hill and pushed through the front doors. His treads left a trail of dirt across the tile floor, and he made a note in his maintenance log to sweep it later. The front desk was empty except for a small stack of adoption applications sitting in a tray. Hannah had sorted and stacked the papers the last time she came to work, 3.81 years ago.

He pushed through the second set of doors that led into the back room and changed his face to the *big grin* emoji. "I'm baaaack!" K9 said, imitating the vocal inflection he learned from Hannah. He was greeted by a chorus of excited barking from the dogs. They were always excited at supper time. So was K9. It was his favorite time of the day.

The back room had two rows of kennel cages facing each other and they were closed off with metal gates. At the far end of the long, rectangular room, a large loading bay door took up one wall. Opposite that was a door that led to the small infirmary. That was where the dogs were treated whenever the vet paid a visit.

"Hello Muffin," K9 said, unlocking the gate to pen 12. Muffin was an old Saint Bernard, slow and friendly. Muffin wagged his tail and walked out.

"Looking sharp, Spot!" K9 said, opening Spot's pen. Another figure of speech that K9 learned from Hannah. Spot was a Jack Russell terrier, middle aged yet full of energy. Spot ran off to join Muffin, who was heading toward the feeding area.

K9 opened the pens one by one. The shelter was home to twenty-five dogs. K9's sole mission was to care for these animals, something that he had been doing every day since he was activated 8.83 years ago. He enjoyed it. Even though something was wrong with the world, the dogs were happy. K9 would never let anything bad happen to them.

In the final cage, Fluffy waited patiently, sitting on her hind legs. Fluffy was a beautiful Samoyed, her white fur soft and puffy. She came to the shelter as a puppy without a name. Hannah asked K9 if he wanted to pick a name. K9 chose Fluffy, because her white fur reminded him of clouds.

"Fluffy!" K9 said, opening the pen. "How are you, friend?"

Fluffy responded with a soft bark, something she did often. K9 thought of it as Fluffy's way of talking back to him. She walked over to K9's side and looked up, wagging her tail. "Shall we serve dinner?" K9 said. Fluffy barked, and K9 took that as a yes.

K9 rolled to the feeding area, a small open space against the back wall where he kept the bowls. Fluffy stayed by his side while he filled them with food. The other dogs dove into the dry food, greedy and slobbering. K9 filled Fluffy's bowl last. She looked up at him and gave a little bark before she started eating.

K9 opened the bay doors that led out to the fenced in yard. As the dogs finished eating, they made their way outside. K9 left them to their own devices. He grabbed the pooper scooper and garbage bin and set about cleaning out the cages. While he was working in cage 3—Claw's cage—Fluffy came in and sat beside him. "Hello, Fluffy," K9 said. "Do you not want to play today?"

"Rrr rrr," Fluffy said.

"Ok," K9 said. "I am happy for you to accompany me while I clean."

Fluffy followed him from cage to cage, sitting on her haunches while he cleaned. She often stayed by his side instead of socializing with the other dogs. K9 was glad she did. He and Fluffy had been close from the day she came to the shelter. She was his best friend.

When they were leaving cage 5, Fluffy stopped mid-stride. She held her head high and turned toward the front of the store, her ears perked up. K9 heard it too. The rumble of a combustion engine, likely some kind of old-timey automobile. The sound was distant but growing louder. K9 estimated that it was headed directly for the shelter.

"Fluffy!" K9 said. He changed his face to the *wide-eyed* emoji. "That could be new customers. Shall we go greet them?" Fluffy looked up at K9 and raised her eyebrows. Her tail stood stiff instead of wagging like it normally did. K9 rolled away, and Fluffy followed after a brief moment of hesitation.

K9 rolled into the lobby just in time to see a heavily modified bus skid to a stop on the cracked pavement of the parking lot. The vehicle appeared to have originally been a school bus, built back before all automobiles became autonomous. Rusted metal plates were welded along the sides, and sturdy grates covered the windows.

The bus door opened and two people hopped out. A man and a woman in their thirties, both wearing drab clothes that blended in with the dry dusty ground. The two of them stopped outside of the bus door. They turned and held out their arms. A moment later, another person—an older woman with gray hair—fell out of the bus and into their arms.

The older woman's head drooped. She seemed to have trouble getting her feet under her. The younger man and woman put their shoulders under the woman's armpits and carried her toward the shelter. Behind them, a large man with a long gray beard stepped out of the bus. He carried two automatic rifles, one in each hand.

The first three of them came through the front doors of the shelter. Fluffy scurried to hide behind K9. K9 opened his arms and displayed a *big grin* emoji on his view screen. "Greetings!" K9 said. "Welcome to the Green Village Doggy Halfway House and Adoption Center."

The man and woman froze. They stared at K9 with wide eyes. The older woman tried to lift her head but failed. The younger man looked K9 up and down. Fluffy peeked her head out from behind K9. "It's fine," he said. "Just an old service bot."

The older woman groaned. K9 noticed that she was bleeding, a large patch of her shirt stained red. The younger pair carried her to the wall and gently sat her down, putting her back against the wall. "We are proud to be a no kill shelter," K9 said. "All of our pups receive the best care until they are matched with a loving family."

The younger man stood up and approached K9. "Hey, robot, are there any people here?"

K9 displayed his *sorry* emoji. "Not at the moment. My coworker Hannah was last in the office one thousand three hundred and ninety-two days ago. If you would like to wait, I'm sure—"

"Do you have any medical supplies here?" he said, cutting K9 off. "A first aid kit. Surgical equipment. Anything?"

K9 paused for a moment, processing the request. He switched to his *thinking* emoji. This was an unexpected branch in his customer service routine. He searched for the most appropriate match. "Why yes, our puppies do get sick from time to time. We have a fully stocked infirmary and an on-call vet, so you can rest assured that our animals are well cared for."

The man's eyes lit up. "Where's the infirmary?"

K9 gestured toward the doors at the back of the lobby. "It is in the back room past the kennel—" The man bolted through the double doors before K9 could finish. A chorus of excited yapping echoed from the back, the dogs happy to see a new face in the shelter.

The gray bearded man shouldered his way through the front doors. "Hooly shit!" he said, looking K9 up and down. "An actual working robot. Haven't seen one of those in a while."

Fluffy barked at the man, and he looked at her. She stepped further behind K9 to hide. "And a real live *dog*. I can't believe my eyes."

"Ron!" said the younger woman. "This ain't time for sightseeing."

"Tell me something I don't know, Beth," Ron said.

"Ron, is it?" K9 said. This man seemed much friendlier than the other one. "Are you interested in adopting one of our dogs today?"

Ron shook his head. "Hold on a minute, robot," he said. Ron walked over to where the women were. He propped the rifles against the wall and got down on one knee beside the older woman. "Hey, Allison, darling. You still with me?"

The older woman—Allison—lifted her head a little and smiled. Her breathing was labored, and she made a rasping sound when she inhaled. "Oh Ron, I'm just peachy."

Ron smiled at her. Her head slumped forward, and Ron's smile disappeared. He looked at Beth. "Where'd Zeke get off to?"

"Robot said there's an infirmary in the back," Beth said. "Maybe a lucky break."

"Lucky if it's stocked," Ron said. He stood up, grabbed one of the rifles, and walked over to the front window. He peered out and scanned the horizon.

"You think we lost them?" Beth said.

"Not a chance," Ron said. "Merrick won't give up."

"He can—" Allison started to say, but her voice choked up and a wet sound came out of her throat. She coughed to clear it up. "He can kiss my ass."

Ron looked over his shoulder and smiled at her, though his eyes were sad. He looked back outside. "Robot," Ron said, "you wouldn't happen to have an arsenal back there, would you? Maybe a heap of 7.62 rounds?"

"Sir!" K9 said, displaying a *serious* emoji on his screen. "I must remind you that this is a *no kill* shelter."

Ron laughed. "Alright, alright. I was just joking, robot." Ron glanced at K9. "You got a name?"

K9 put on his *smiley* emoji again. "Yes, everyone calls me K9."

"Well K9, it's nice to meet you." Ron said. He ejected the magazine from his rifle and looked at the rounds inside. He frowned, then put it back in place. "You're an old military model, right? They re-purposed you for civilian work after the war?"

K9 displayed his *sorry* emoji. "I have no memory of my time before working here."

"Ron, he ain't going to be any help," Beth said. She walked over to the front desk and started looking through the drawers.

"Ah, damn, it was worth a try," Ron said.

Allison groaned and slid down the wall. Beth rushed over and grabbed Allison's shoulders, propping the older woman up. Fluffy whimpered. She took a tentative step out from behind K9, and then slowly walked over to Allison. Fluffy sniffed Allison's hand, which laid limp on the floor.

Allison struggled to lift her head so she could make eye contact with Fluffy. Fluffy wagged her tail. "What's...her name?" Allison said.

"Fluffy," K9 said. He rolled across the room and stopped beside Allison's feet. "She is my best friend."

Allison smiled. "I had one just like her. When I was a little girl." Allison tried to lift her hand, but her strength gave out. Fluffy leaned down and licked it. "Such a sweet girl," Allison said.

Fluffy walked over to K9 and sat beside him. She did not try to hide behind K9 this time. K9 displayed a *smiley* emoji, glad that she had warmed up to the newcomers. He patted her on the head, and she wagged her tail.

The doors from the back room swung open. Zeke barged through and dumped a pile of medical supplies on the floor beside Beth. "This is what I could find," Zeke said.

"I'll make it work," Beth said. She picked through the pile and grabbed rubbing alcohol and some gauze.

Zeke grabbed the second rifle from the wall and joined Ron at the window. They were all silent for a while. Beth tended to Allison's wounds while the men kept watch over the desolate landscape. K9 searched through his database for something that could help him with this situation. These people did not seem interested in adopting a dog, and he was at a loss for how to help them.

Fluffy's ears perked up. Something rumbled in the distance, just like the sound of the bus, but louder. Fluffy ran to the window and stood between Ron and Zeke. Her head was just high enough to see over the bottom edge of the window. Zeke gripped his rifle so hard his knuckles turned white. Fluffy barked.

A fleet of motorcycles came into view as they rounded the bend in the road. The riders wore helmets with small spikes welded to the top, and many of them had bandannas tied over their faces to keep the dust out. The last vehicle to come into view was a tractor trailer truck, the front grill painted with a skull.

"Party's starting," Ron said. He and Zeke moved to either side of the windows so it would be hard to see them from the outside.

The riders fanned out and parked in a semicircle facing the front of the store, with the school bus in the middle of the two groups. The loud engines quieted as the riders turned them off and dismounted. They pulled firearms from holsters on their motorcycles. In all, K9 counted thirty-two men.

The driver's side door of the truck opened. A tall, muscular man stepped out. His hair was spiked in a Mohawk, and he wore a steel skull medallion against his bare torso. The name "Merrick" was tattooed in large letters across his chest. He sauntered forward and stopped in the middle of the semicircle of men. He glared at the front of the shop.

"This is turning out to be a busy day," K9 said.

"Hush robot," Ron said.

"Y'all might as well come out," Merrick said. The dry air carried his deep voice across the parking lot. "Ain't no point in dragging this out."

Fluffy growled.

"K9," Ron said in a loud whisper. "I need you to drag Allison into the back room."

"I'm gonna give you to the count of three!" Merrick said.

Beth slapped a bandage against Allison's open wound. "That'll have to do for now," she said. She grabbed a handful of bandages from the pile on the floor.

"One!" Merrick yelled.

"Get everybody behind a wall, the thicker the better," Ron said to K9.

"Two—ah, the hell with this." Merrick threw his hand up above his head. "Light her up, boys!"

The air erupted with gunfire. K9 froze. No, this could not be happening. The day had been going so well only a moment before, and now his home was under attack. He searched through his decision tree for the appropriate response. He found a branch labeled *active shooter*, but it was empty. His programmers never populated it, either an oversight or because they thought it would never be needed. He watched helplessly as chaos unfolded around him.

Bullets tore through the window, shattering it. Ron and Zeke dropped to the floor, covering their heads as sharp glass shards rained down on top of them. Beth curled up in a ball against the wall beside Allison. Fluffy bolted away from the window and cowered behind K9.

A bullet slammed into K9's torso, carving a small groove before it ricocheted away. The wound sent a shock wave through K9, sparking old circuits long unused. He would not stand by and watch helplessly. His sole reason for existence was to protect the dogs at the Green Village Doggy Halfway House. There was only one option remaining—he had to *improvise*.

K9 turned to Fluffy. She stared at him with wide eyes. She was shaking and her tail was tucked under her body. He would not allow anything bad to happen to her. "Stay here with these people," he said. He flashed a heart emoji on his screen. "I love you."

K9 whipped around and spun his treads as fast as they could go. He zipped across the room, broken glass crunching under his treads. Zeke huddled in the small section of wall between the window and the front doors, covering his head with one arm and cradling the rifle in the other. As K9 barreled through the doors, he snatched the rifle out of Zeke's hand.

K9 burst into the parking lot. The bleak sun shone down on him, reflecting off of his polished steel frame. The men outside were taken aback by the unexpected sight of a robot. One by one they stopped firing and stared at K9. The silence was louder than the gunfire.

K9 looked at each of the men. He displayed a *frown* emoji on his face. It was the closest representation of anger available in his library. His gaze settled on Merrick. The man's jaw hung open. "Leave now," K9 said. "This is a *no kill shelter*."

Merrick slapped the side of his own head and laughed. He looked at his men. "Well what are y'all waiting for?" he said. "Shoot that bastard!"

Gun barrels swung through the air toward K9, but his synthetic body was faster than their slow organic forms. K9 rolled sideways and raised the barrel of his gun. He pulled the trigger in rapid succession, adjusting the barrel a fraction between each shot. Before any of the men had a chance to fire, three of them were dead.

But as fast as he was, K9 was not invincible. Bullets ripped into his body, tearing through his metal hull. One round fractured and bounced around inside his body cavity, shredding his heat regulation circuitry. Another punched into the corner of his view screen, destroying ten percent of the display and leaving a spiderweb of cracks across the glass.

K9 wheeled toward the school bus and put it between him and Merrick's men. A critical internal alarm blared, vying for his attention. One of his power cells had taken too much damage and was on the verge of exploding. K9 ignored it for the moment. A burly man with a goatee ran around the bus, firing his gun wildly. K9 shot him in the eye socket.

A burst of bullets slammed into K9's back. K9 turned to see two men coming around the other end of the bus. He aimed his gun and shot the first one. Before the bullet made contact, he adjusted the barrel by one centimeter and pulled the trigger again. The first man fell but the second did not. K9 was out of bullets.

Improvise. K9 spun in an arc, swinging the butt of the rifle as a club. He took off the head of a man who chose that moment to come around the side of the bus near him. More bullets riddled his body, and K9 rolled away. He charged out from behind the bus and into a group of men who foolishly chose to stand close together. He dove into the midst of them, swinging the rifle with one arm and punching with the other.

The alarm grew more insistent. K9's power cell was going to explode soon. He slipped the fingers of his right hand into a pair of bullet holes in his torso. He tugged hard, ripping a ragged hole in his body. He reached inside and grabbed the faulty cell. Before he could rip it out, Merrick's regrouped forces opened fire.

A wave of bullets hit him and blew his left arm completely off. The ball joint that connected his torso to his treads, already suffering from heavy damage, finally gave way. He could no longer balance, and his upper body fell backward. His shoulders and head slammed into the ground. He stared up at the bleak sky, unable to move. K9 had failed. He thought of Fluffy.

"Hold fire!" Merrick yelled. The bullets stopped, and Merrick's men walked forward to surround K9. He could see them with his peripheral vision, but his camera was too damaged to move. Merrick kicked K9 hard. The jolt shifted some of his wiring, and K9 realized he had control of his right arm again.

"Robot, I don't know where the hell you came from," Merrick said. He spit on K9's view screen. "Just know that I'm going to take my time on anybody I find in that building. They're going to die long and slow."

K9 wrenched his arm out of his torso, dragging the damaged cell with it. He held his arm up high, his hand level with their heads. The men jumped back and raised their guns. Wisps of bright green vapor drifted out of the cracks in the small metal tube. "What the hell is that?" Merrick said.

"A bomb," K9 said. The fuel cell exploded. The shrapnel tore through man and machine alike. K9 had just enough time to watch the explosion kill Merrick and his men before it destroyed K9's camera and blinded him.

The blast subsided. K9 was blind and immobile. His internal diagnostics showed that his two remaining fuel cells were busted. They were not in danger of exploding, but they would not work for much longer. He would soon lose consciousness and die.

He heard footsteps approaching, the gritty sound of feet on the sandy pavement. There were two large feet and a set of lighter paws. "Hello?" K9 said. The paws burst into a

run until their owner reached K9. He heard her whimpering as she sniffed him. "Fluffy, my friend." She whimpered louder.

"Damn, they did a number on you," Ron said. His footsteps stopped near K9's head. "I don't know how we're going to patch you up."

"You cannot," K9 said. He did not want to die, but it was inevitable. Once his power source was depleted, his memories would be lost and he would cease to exist.

Ron did not say anything for a while. Fluffy curled up next to K9. "Thank you," Ron said.

"The dogs," K9 said. "Take care of them."

"We will," Ron said. "I promise."

K9 felt the last of his power draining away. "Goodbye Fluffy."

Beth held open the front doors of the shelter. Allison limped out, Zeke helping her walk with his shoulder under one of her arms. Twenty-four dogs escorted them, yapping and wagging their tails as they left the shelter for the final time. The entourage made their way across the parking lot to the bus, and they herded all of the dogs aboard.

Ron grabbed the last satchel of supplies raided from the shelter and headed out the doors. He walked around the side of the building to where Fluffy laid, resting her head atop a mound of freshly turned dirt. A board stuck out of the ground with the name "K9" scrawled on it.

"Come on," Ron said, his voice soft. Fluffy stood up and whimpered, but she followed Ron to the bus. The doors closed and it cranked to life. The bus wove between the abandoned motorcycles and out of the parking lot, kicking up a trail of dust behind it before it disappeared out of sight.