

## The Bill of Life

The Second Civil War, also known as “The Heartland War”, was a long and bloody conflict fought over a single issue.

To end the war, a set of constitutional amendments known as “The Bill of Life” was passed.

It satisfied both the Pro-life and the Pro-choice armies.

The Bill of Life states that human life may not be touched from the moment of conception until a child reaches the age of thirteen.

Moreover, between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, a parent may choose to retroactively “abort” a child...

...on the condition that the child’s life doesn’t technically end.

The process by which a child is both terminated and yet kept alive is called “unwinding”.

Unwinding is now a common and accepted practice in society.

## Part One

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### Triplicate

“I was never going to amount to much anyway, but now, statistically speaking, there’s a better chance that some part of me will go on the greatness somewhere in the world. I’d rather be partly great than entirely useless.”

Samson Ward

## Connor

“There are places you can go,” Ariana tells him, “and a guy as smart as you has a decent chance of surviving to eighteen.”

Connor isn't so sure, but looking into Ariana's eyes makes his doubts go away, if only for a moment. Her eyes are sweet violet with streaks of gray. She's such a slave to fashion – always getting the newest pigment injection the second it's in style. Connor was never into that. He's always kept his eyes the color they came in. Brown. He never even got tattoos, like so many kids get these days when they're little. The only color on his skin is the tan it takes during the summer, but now, in November, that tan has long faded. He tries not to think about the fact he'll never see the summer again. At least not as Connor Lassiter. He still can't believe that his life is being stolen from him at sixteen.

Ariana's violet eyes begin to shine as they fill with tears that flow down her cheeks when she blinks. “Conor, I'm so sorry.” She holds him, and for a moment it seems as if everything is okay, as if they are the only two people on Earth. For that instant, Connor feels invincible, untouchable...but she lets go, the moment passes, and the world around him returns. Once more he can feel the rumble of the freeway beneath them, as cars pass by, not knowing or caring that he's here. Once more he is just a marked kid, a week short of unwinding.

The soft, hopeful things Ariana tells him don't help now. He can barely hear her over the rush of traffic. This place where they hide from the world is one of those dangerous places that make adults shake their heads, grateful that their own kids aren't stupid enough to hang out on the ledge of a freeway overpass. For Connor it's not about stupidity, or even rebellion – it's about feeling life. Sitting on this ledge hidden behind an exit sign is where he feels most comfortable. Sure, one false step and he's roadkill. Yet for Connor, life on the edge is home.

There have been no other girls he's brought here, although he hasn't told Ariana that. He closes his eyes, feeling the vibration of the traffic as if it's pulsing through his veins, a part of him. This has always been a good place to get away from fights with his parents, or when he just feels generally boiled. But now Connor's beyond boiled – even beyond fighting with his mom and dad. There's nothing more to fight about. His parents signed the order – it's a done deal.

“We should run away,” Ariana says. “I'm fed up with everything too. My family, school, everything. I could kick-AWOL, and never look back.”

Connor hangs on the thought. The idea of kicking-AWOL by himself terrifies him. He might put up a tough front, he might act like the bad boy at school – but running away on his own? He doesn't even know if he has the guts. But if Ariana comes, that's different. That's not alone. “Do you mean it?”

Ariana looks at him with her magical eyes. “Sure I do. I could leave here. If you asked me.”

Connor knows this is major. Running away with an Unwind – *that's* commitment. The fact that she would do it moves him beyond words. He kisses her, and in spite of everything going on in his life Connor suddenly feels like the luckiest guy in the world. He holds her – maybe a little too tightly, because she starts to squirm. It just makes him want to hold her even more tightly, but he fights that urge and lets go. She smiles at him.