

Incredulous-

Joni had ridicule. Every day. Every hour. Every minute. When she was young and in school. And now in her older days.

Fara. The mark of beauty. Everyone's heartbreak and everyone's love. With her perfect hair and glowing skin. Everyone loved Fara. Everyone.

The open road. Winter. A gray sky blankets the area, the lighting, and the mood. On a small two lane highway a small passenger automobile moves along. It passes by a twisted tree looking dead with no leaves. The cars headlights are on even though it's daylight. Never can be too careful.

### Grade School.

The playground had a hill. On days when there was snow the kids were allowed to bring sleds and go down the hill at recess. But this was a different kind of day at recess. The kind after the beautiful snow had come and gone. And all that was left was cold wet ground. Dead grass and mud. It was a day commonly referred to as "Black Top Day". The kids were not allowed off the concrete "Black Top". They were forbidden from the mud and mess. On the top of the hill the kids congregated. Looking somewhat like tiny inmates standing in small social structures amidst the chain link fences and concrete paths.

Fara's winter jacket was powder blue. Little penguins on the pockets would appear and disappear depending on temperature. Coats like this were all the rage and the object of every cold town kids desire. Fara of course was the first to have one. As she was usually the first to have most things. Her mom had a card at Neamon's. She stood with her small group of mostly girls and a couple of boys that liked them. Trying to act adult. Fara's cheeks were perfect even with a little hint of pink from the cold.

Near by, but as far as she could get from the other kids was Joni. She was much larger than the other kids. And very androgynous. Depending on light and circumstance one could not tell if she was a boy or a girl. To make matters worse she didn't have or would ever have the newest latest in kid fashion. No penguins. No magic color change. Just an old torn winter coat passed down from a cousin or family friend somewhere. Joni was ridiculed by the other kids for everything. Her size, her hair cuts, her clothes, even her name. Due to the short lived program "Joni loves Chachi" the kids had hours of material to make fun of her with.

Joni, although shy, was very bright. She wouldn't let on to the other kids but was really quite intelligent. She would spend her recesses and free time in fantasy worlds she had created all around herself. Her parents knew from her at a very early age she would have trouble making friends. So there was always an attempt to keep her entertained. Mostly with toys, at least the ones that they could afford. At this point in time she was very into Strawberry Short Cake dolls. Every weekend she would take her father to the toy store on search for the newest one. Whether it smelled like blueberries or peaches. Those dolls were her friends. Especially at lunch. Until this cold day.

Bill was one of the athletic kids. Popular, arrogant for his age, a real show off. He was part of Fara's circle and was always looking for a chance to show off. On this day at recess he saw an opportunity and he took it. In the corner of his eye he spotted Joni, playing with her dolls at the end of the black top. He and the other boys had no guilt or moral implications for picking on her. "It's not like picking on a girl" they thought to themselves, "She's half boy anyway."

Under Fara and the other girls watching eyes he made his move. He made his way over to Joni, making his appearance as friend at first. Then as villain as he snatched up one of her dolls. "Why do you still play with toys?", he asked. Fear of loss shot through Joni as she tried to blurt out her words. "Give it back!". "Oh, you want it huh? Here you go!" With a careless toss the doll was thrown a couple of feet from arms reach into the mud. Far enough from the black top to get Joni in trouble. But she had learned from previous situations it was not in her best interest to squeal or get the teachers or aids involved. As the other kids laughed Joni bent over trying to reach for the doll. Fara looked on with a blank face. The other kids in the circle just laughed and giggled. Joni's big man ass was right up in the air of everyone to point and laugh at. Then full of himself in his glory Bill made another move. He lightly kicked Joni right in her man ass knocking her over balance and into the mud. She hit the slick ground with just enough momentum to slide down the muddy hill with her doll tumbling behind. The other kids were shocked and entertained. They laughed as cruel kids do. Later after recess Joni was sent to the principals office and was punished for getting dirty and not staying on the black top. The rest of the year she was not allowed to bring toys to school again.

The rest of her school career would be filled with that kind of treatment.

## High School.

Prom was that weekend. The Schools halls were filled with the buzz. Banners and flyers were hung and hand painted. Excitement was everywhere. Almost everywhere. Not at The Circle.

"The Circle" was a large concrete end of a pipe laying upright in the woods behind the school. A leftover piece from sewer construction and the place were all the stoners and "cool" kids went to smoke while waiting for school to get out. In a time before it was cool to be weird it was where the weirdos hung out. Along with them was Joni. Older now than before. Larger. Taller. Almost seven feet. Joni towered over the others and out-weighted most of them as well. In many ways though she still looked like the sad little girl in the torn coat. Except now her coat was denim and there was a patch of "Eddie" on the back. High School gave her some new venues. Other freaks to hang out with and certain drugs to help offer escapes and cures for boredom. The teachers couldn't figure out how a dumpy girl who hung out with the kids from the circle could do so well in her studies. She was well on her way to college. So was Fara. Clad in boyfriend letter jacket she made her way down the hall. Dressed in the glow that all the

other kids would look at her and know that as of the next weekend she would be nominated for Prom Queen. Sadly as a cruel joke the weekend would also mark Joni's nomination for Prop King.

The car continued down the road. The first part of the trip was very silent. Every now and then the radio would pick up something besides a farm report on the AM. Joni faced forward. She had agreed to give Fara a ride back to their hometown. But that was all. Tension was thick in the car. For more reasons than previous tension from the school days. They were both on their way to a funeral. "I need to get gas in the next town" mumbled Joni. "Do you need to stop and get food or use the bathroom?" Fara feeling the tension nodded. She smiled out of the corner of her eye. "Yeah, I skipped breakfast today."

Fara had grown up a little since her grade school and high school days. The mother who always bought her things was actually in competition with the father that did the same. Through the end of Fara's High School career they went through a messy divorce. It forced her away to college as an escape. It also forced her to grow up a little bit.

As the car continued along Fara turned to Joni. Fara watched her as she drove the car. She could barely fit. Her large legs were cramped and her stomach was at the steering wheel. She signaled and changed lanes. Fara then spoke up. "Hey, I'm sorry about the way everyone was to you in school. Kids can be such little fuckers". Joni continued driving and looking forward. She spoke with no expression. "Its all right". Snow lightly fell outside. The car continued forward.

### Chad Relnick

Honor role. Debate team. Swimming team. An all around great guy. Popular. Sporty enough to fit in with the "cool" kids but raised well enough to know how to treat the "others" as well. During one period you could find him talking football with the letter jackets the next period you would find him talking movies or music with the jean jackets out at the circle. He had somehow found himself being part of most students lives. Fara knew him. And actually so did Joni. He was one of Joni's only friends. His parents knew Joni's parents. They knew of the struggles both emotional and financial that Joni's family endured. He always tried to be there for her. He seemed like an angel at times because even his mere presence in the area would mean no one would tease her.

Fara knew him in a different way. A more traditional high school way. But not as well as he knew her. Like many of the boys in their school he was very much in love with her. They had met in some class along the way. He spent his entire school career dreaming of her. They even dated a couple of times. But Fara being the girl she was couldn't just settle on a "Popular" guy. She needed someone who was "On the team" as well.

But that was then. Those were the High School days. And things had changed. This was now and Chad was dead. And these two girls were on a journey back home for the services. It

was all rushed. Very sudden and little was known. Joni and Fara were the only two from their town to end up at the same college. When they got word of the tragedy they both dropped their plans to get back. Fara couldn't book a flight in time and Joni could never have afforded one. Even with her credit card resources Fara could get a flight so she contacted Joni. It was actually the first time the two had ever spoken to each other.

The sign at the edge of town read "Pucket Cedar". The light flurries of snow were dying down as the small car entered town. It made its way to stop in front of "Smileys towing and gas" right next to the "Pucket Cedar Motel". Fara went inside searching for food. Joni opened the trunk. She then carefully removed a hand gun and a key. In worn gold paint the key read Room 12, Pucket Cedar Motel. She had been here before. Joni waited for Fara to return with her food then calmly moved into her surprise.

Gas station coffee and a shrink wrapped Ding Dong fell to the ground. A gun was aimed at her in a low key fashion and Fara was very surprised. She had turned the corner of the car and standing in front of her was Joni. She continued aiming the pistol while keeping it out of site.

"If you scream or make a sound I will fire." Joni still spoke with no real expression. A shocked Fara nodded. "Walk over to room twelve of the motel and act normal". The two made their way over. Joni opened the door and forced Fara inside. Once inside the lights were flipped on. Revealed was an average roadside motel room. A bed. A TV facing it. Left over paintings from the seventies. But, there were also some new additions. Joni had definitely been here before. Decks of electronic equipment, wires, and a couple of monitors were strung across the table next to the TV.

Fara turned to Joni. "You've been planning this? What's going on? I thought we were going to Chad's funeral?!" Fara started to break down. A tear streamed down her face. She was trying to grasp the situation at hand. Joni stared coldly at her from the other end of the gun. "Depending on your behavior here you'll still get to the funeral on time." "Why are you doing this?" Fara blurted out. "Have a seat on the bed". Fara did what she was told. She sat very nervous as to what would come next. "There's a cup on the night stand. Nothing in it will hurt you. I want you to drink it." Joni's directions were clear and precise. "What? Why?" Fara was hysterical. Joni raised the pistol clicking back the hammer. "Drink it!" Out of fear Fara grabbed the milky looking glass and chugged its medicine tasting contents. She wiped the white purple liquid from her mouth. Very upset she looked up at Joni from the glass. "What did I just drink?!" Joni just stared back at her. Then Fara screamed very upset "What did I just drink?". Joni finally replied. "A hallucinogen. It will help you get to where we are going." Joni placed the gun in a drawer. She then picked up a roll of duct tape and walked over to Fara.

“It will take a while to set in. As she unrolled the tape Fara made a swing at her hitting her square in the face. It had little effect. With Joni’s large and powerful arm and hand she knocked Fara back toward the bed. Joni then overpowered her taping her hands together in front of her. Then her feet. Then, out of a box Joni revealed something strange. A pair of metal goggles with wires and strings attached leading into one of the electronic decks across the room. It appeared as Virtual Reality type equipment. Joni explained the purpose while forcing the equipment onto Fara’s head. “In my younger days at school your people made the world so horrible and so painful for me to be in the only way I could survive was to create my own worlds to escape to. First only with my imagination. But, as I grew older and excelled in school and my studies I found ways of enriching and enhancing and making new spaces. I was learning more and more about different chemicals on the brain different effects from light patterns. I was finding ways to create worlds where people like you and your kind could not hurt me.”

The monitors on the wall began to flash panels of color. No real images but strobing patterns of color. The goggles strapped to Fara’s unwilling head did the same. “This technology will help me to unlock some of the doors and barriers in your mind.” For the first time Joni smiled. “I’ve learned a lot in college”. Joni walked over and made some adjustments on the equipment. Fara screamed again. “I don’t want to do this!” Joni made her way back over with a piece of tape for her mouth. As she placed it over Fara’s mouth she made a comment. “I didn’t want to get up every single day of my life in your world.”

The motel room was dark. Dark and very still. Joni had left Fara there alone. Bound and gagged with her eyes hooked up into the color strobing machine. The chemicals were making their way through her blood. Her mind was starting to wonder. To unravel, and open. Time passed through her and she could feel it. She was sinking into the mattress below. Slowly passing through. She could feel its Jell-O and gut insides squishing around her. She was slowly falling down through the bed. Nothing she could do or think could stop her. She felt as though she was drowning as her head passed through the space below. And then it let go and she felt like she was falling.

She was falling. Only now not through the mattress or bed but somewhere else. She was falling through the sky. Passing through clouds. The clouds broke and she could see the ground very far below. Her screams of terror seemed muffled by the nothingness around her. There was nothing for her screams to bounce off of. So she stopped. She was only surrounded by air. She continued to fall. She then saw something in the corner of her eye. It was Joni. Somehow Joni was there and falling as well. This was Joni unlike anything Fara had ever seen. There was something drastically different. Joni was smiling. Confused thought raced through Joni’s head. “What is going on here, where is here, Are we falling, am I going to die”. Then the silence was broken.

Joni spoke. “Well, you picked a heck of a place to enter, but never the less you’re here.” They continued falling. A frightened and confused and now angry Fara spoke. “Where is here?” The ground was coming closer.

Joni Smiled proudly. “Incredulous, this is the place I had to create to get away from your

world.” Fara was still very confused. “Incredulus?” “Yes, I was a little girl I always wanted a kingdom that was all mine. I thought it would be a little incredible and a little fabulous. As I learned more about creating environments I never let myself forget the childhood dreams” Fara looked down toward the coming ground. “I’m afraid of this.”

Joni’s form seemed ever changing. “This can be a good place. Joni’s words began to mumble and blur as the clouds around them began to grow dark. The ground beneath started to disappear from their site. A rich blue and black presence began to surround them. Then as Joni tried to say something she disappeared and Fara was falling alone through the coming darkness. Then She hit.

Her body went numb with pain as it crashed through what seemed like a ground made of layers of glass. She continued crashing through layers losing her momentum. Then she was on the cold wet ground. Concrete. Broken Glass. Everywhere around her were jagged little edges. She checked herself for cuts, for vital wounds, remembering her glass shard fears as a child. No cuts. No blood. Somehow she survived all of this. But what was this she was surviving.

She was laying in some sort of alley. Dark brick and concrete was everywhere around her. She brushed herself off looking around at the still night time. Inside the alleys it looked like night. But as once she was on the street it just looked like a very gray and dark day. Fara felt as though a huge downpour of rain was just moments away. A Metropolis surrounded her. She felt somewhat dizzy because the buildings not only stretched into the sky but also looked as if they went down very far into the ground. “Incredulus?”, she thought, “How could any of this be?”. “If she wants to kill me why doesn’t she just do it. What this treatment, why this torture?”

Red ribbons and streamers started to fall down from the sky. All of the sudden Fara found herself in the middle of some type of street parade. Some type of victory celebration. Marching down the street toward her was a procession. Dark figures in armor and helmets marched in unison down the street. They were covered in black armor. Long red spikes went up their helmets and reached into the sky. Night seemed to follow them and once again be everywhere. The soldiers in front banged loud horrible drums. Others carried strange spiked and elongated weapons. Coming up the back were soldiers carrying banners which depicted a terrifying image to Fara.

On the front of these banners was a black, red, and white simple illustration of Joni. An older more wicked and larger Joni. One far more evil and sinister then Fara had ever seen. Fara ran and hid in a stairwell to a building. She was the only person on the street except for the soldiers. The black confetti and streamers continued to fall from the sky. The loud drums grew more and more loud and close.

“There’s nothing you can do.” A familiar voice ringed from behind her. Terrified Fara turned to find an old face. One she knew from her younger school days. It was Brad Thompson. He was wearing the same letter jacket he wore his three years of school. “They know where we all are, and they’ll come, and they’ll find us, and they’ll take us to her.” “Take us to who?” Fara blurted. “Why are you here?” She then asked. Brad smiled reassuringly. “You brought us here.” Just then the guards over came them. All of the sudden it felt like a hundred sets of cold hands were grabbing at them. It was the men in the helmets, the soldiers, they were dirty and smelled like death. She tried to fight them off, so did Brad, along with many other faceless letter jackets being pulled into the street from other surrounding buildings. The numbers of the soldiers

were just too great. They quickly became prisoners.

As Fara was drug into the line and forced into the procession with the other prisoners she began to see the scope of what was going on. The parade like path of the army went on into the distance for what looked like miles and miles. The soldiers were hurting, breaking, capturing, anything in their path. It looked like they were headed into the art of the huge glass and industrial city.

Joni sat on the floor of the cramped motel room. Wires from machines led everywhere behind her. She sat quickly trying to type into a small portable key board. She worked with a sense of urgency. All the while Fara lay still on the bed still hooked up to all of the wires and machinery. Flashes of light strobed through the room as Fara's body would twitch. Joni continued...

An explosion. Blue and fire flashes everywhere around them. Fara was jolted by the blast. Faceless warriors emerged from the dark alleyways. Heat and battle surrounded her. She was overwhelmed. The soldiers were fighting off the barrage. Dark figures fighting everywhere. Fara began to faint. The last thing she felt were a couple of hands catching her from behind as she fell to the ground.

The camp was quite. A different environment from the load chaos of combat earlier. The camp was built amidst some old ruins of a building. It looked like it had been bombed out. The roof was gone and the remaining walls made somewhat of a courtyard. In the middle was the concrete pipe known as the circle. Small fires burned in various places, surrounded by small groups of faceless people. The area felt safe and warm hidden against a back drop of cold winter dead trees.

Fara awoke. She looked around although unaware of her surroundings she felt less at risk and more adjusted. A voice came from across the small shelter she was sleeping in. It was Joni's voice. "You're among friends again." she flashed a warm smile. Fara rose, "What exactly is going on?"

"Try and relax." Joni was confident and warm in her speech. "This is Incredulus, a place that exists in our minds. A full world for anyone to escape to or explore. After my experience with hallucinogens I dedicated my time and focus on their chemical properties and uses, I focused on ways of opening doors. Doors in our minds and our realities, our perception of realities. Finally one day through the right combination of light patterns, certain chemicals in the blood and brain and a certain trance like state in the human condition I was able to unlock this door. To Incredulus... But, I didn't anticipate that your fear and anxiety would change the make up of this world and throw things into this chaotic state." Fara responded. "What do you mean change?"

"Incredulus to me is a heaven. To you it is a strange and scary place. A place you fear. When I am here alone it is a happy and safe place. But, your fear of this place and of me has altered this reality into a dangerous space."

"But I saw you!" Blurted Fara. "Evil on the flags, on the soldiers banners, it was you. They were all under your rule. I saw it." Joni tried to calmly respond. "That's true it is me.

The me that you have created in your mind. The me that you don't understand. The me that you never understood. Isn't that part of the problem?"

Fara looked back blankly. Joni stood and walked toward the doorway. She looked out the doorway across the plains at the megacity in the far distance. Fara stood and joined her. As the lights off in the distance appeared to flicker Joni spoke. "Somewhere in the middle of all of that is another me which you created. An evil me. One that you created and embodies fear. To stop her and to stop what is happening to Incredulus we have to reach her." "How do we do that? Her soldiers were killing people back there." Joni looked on assuredly. "In order to reach her its important to reach you. That is after all why I brought you here..."

Joni lead Fara back through the camp to some concrete stairs that went down into the ground. It looked like the entrance to a subway. Fara took one last look at the dismal camp around surrounding them. She saw the wounded, and the faceless rebels. She wondered where they all came from. They walked down the stairs, the light of the torches was the last thing she saw in the camp. Once down underground she saw something very different.

Teased hair. Bangs hairsprayed up. Bright colors. Packs of boys. Packs of girls. Mullets. Iron Maiden and Depeche Mode on the back of jackets. Neon signs. All filling the mall... Fara and Joni had not only crossed into a different space but also a different time. They were sometime circa eighties. They felt like they were in a montage mall scene from 21 Jumpstreet. Cool high school guys hung out and cruised the mall for chicks. Fara recognized and responded to the environment. She instantly felt more comfortable. She gazed around the warm shopping center. She gazed at the stores, clothes, mannequins, groups walking by. She spotted the arcade in the corner and all of its familiar sounds. Then she turned and saw a sobering site. Joni. The way she was and the way she appeared in high school. Large. Fat. Ugly. Covered in bad clothes and bad skin. Fara quickly found her way to a reflection in a store front window. And there she was. Bad hair, letter jacket, eighties color scheme, and all.

"This brings back so many memories". She thought. "So many nights after school we would hit the mall and get pizza and ignore boys." Fara had just found some of her heaven. Then Joni spoke. "Not me. I don't remember any of this. I never got to do any of this" There was a pause as Joni gazed upon the situation. "Do you know how badly I just wanted to be one of you for one night. To hit the mall with the girls, to try on clothes I was never planning on buying, to flirt with the boys in front of the movie theater..." Fara was somewhat shocked. "Didn't you do this with your friends, I thought everyone did." Joni continued gazing across the painful mall instead of giving Fara eye contact. "Not once." Just then the warm environment started to change. The positive into a negative. At the end of the mall by a big department store Fara could once again see the soldiers preparing for another siege. But Fara was starting to understand this place. She was bright for one of the "popular kids". Perhaps that's why she was brought here.

The soldiers continued forward in the mall, preparing to strike. Fara remained calm. She could see the pain on Joni's large face and she knew what was bringing those soldiers to them. She had a solution. The soldiers revealed their bayonets. She turned to Joni. "You and me right



now. Lets shop. Lets take care of some of those things you haven't done. Pizza, boys, clothes, lets do it." "You mean it?" Fara took Joni's hand. "I just hope credit cards are good in this place..." The soldiers disappeared. And the two girls were off into what would seem like a montage in a good eighties television show.

Music filled the air. Maybe from mall overhead speakers, maybe from somewhere else. They tried on scarves, hats, dresses, they ate corn dogs, pizza, got cokes, talked to boys, ignored other boys, played air hockey, video games, waited in line for a movie then changed their minds, they went to the music did everything they could think of. Somehow in this incredible place in-between worlds Fara could visit the past and Joni could visit a dream world she was never allowed to go into. Fara thought to herself. "If there is a struggle going on and a war being fought over Incredulous what a way of fighting it" Joni was happy not only for the experience but also to know that her point was getting through to Fara. Still though, in the back of their minds they both knew that elsewhere, in another place, and another room outside of their dreams that Fara was still a bound prisoner, and Joni was the Captor and that both of them were still on their way to mourn for someone dead. As long as that was the case Incredulous wouldn't be completely free. For them or for anyone that existed in it. The trip to the mall was over. The bags in their hands disappeared and they both knew what they had to do...

Night fall would be the best time to sneak into the heart of the city. They would have to find the holding palace of the evil alter ego. The Joni that was captor. The one who had suffered to much. They would find her and reach her. And try to let her know of the understanding that everything in this world could be ok.

Slipping into the city perimeter was relatively easy. Getting into the palace was not as easy. It seemed to them after getting that close into the Mecca the best way to get to the Queen was to be brought to her as prisoners. They would have to get themselves caught. They would have to cause a disturbance. Bring some attention. The streets were filled with the same car. Many different colors, but ultimately the same car. A Chevy Citation. Another product of the eighties and clearly another manifestation of Joni's lucid mind. The red one. Two door. Parked on what was thought to be a busy corner would work perfectly.

Fara removed a lighter from her coat pocket. She had picked up smoking during the divorce. Joni broke into the car and opened the gas tank. Once open Fara placed a torn rag into the tank leading out like a fuse. Joni took cover around the corner while Fara lit the rag. She hurried to safety next to Joni. Awaiting eminent explosion like kids and fireworks on any day but July fourth. But there was nothing. They could see the fire still burned but nothing happened. "This isn't what it's like in the movies." Fara thought. Then a huge blast of heat and debris and fire filled the air around them. A bang that echoed through the close knit streets around them as well as their ears. Within moments the street was crawling with police and soldiers. The two were apprehended. And because of the disturbing similarity between Joni and the empress they were taken immediately to the palace for questioning.

Crimson red banners, carpet, chairs, walls, tones of black, tones of blood red. Of organic of hate. Propaganda like images of the empress Joni, the one created of Fara's fear. The one that Joni herself had no power over. She sat in her royal chair sitting high above the room. A raised chair, a raised throne. Surrounded by spikes. There she was. The empress. The Evil One.

Larger than life and more evil. Huge, fat, and ugly. Angry. Covered in veins, covered in the energy of scars. The room went quiet as she spoke. "Bring them forward."

Two of the guards with high helmets lead the prisoners forward. The good Joni tried to speak. The evil and dominating one interrupted. "I know who you are. Both of you. I know about the past and the way it was. The endless nights of dreading sleep because it meant waking and being one step closer to going to that place. Being surrounded by supposed peers whom attacked at every opportunity. I know that one of you represents hope and the other represents the torn up past. In your fear and your hate you have willed this world together as it stands. You have given me complete power..."

Fara turns to Joni. The good Joni. With a look of uncertainty in her eyes she speaks. "In order to save this place I'm we're going to have to leave it."

The Motel room was dark. Except for a small amount of white light coming in from the curtains and the snow covered day outside. The room was cold. Fara laid on the bed in a fetal position, still connected to the goggles, wires, and equipment. Across the room the hulking figure of Joni sat slouched in a chair. She was also hooked into the machine with wires and technology.

Fara snaps awake. As she re-enters the concrete world she struggles some of the tech. Joni awakes as well. Without a word she rises and crosses the room to the automatic coffee maker plugged into the wall. She turns it on then proceeds to help Fara with the remaining wires. After a long period of silence and no eye contact Fara speaks. "I had no idea Joni." Joni looks back almost embarrassed. "We should get going. We don't want to miss Brads service."

The Funeral. Fara had almost forgot. The real part of their journey had not yet begun. They didn't talk. Fara added cream and sugar to her coffee while Joni packed up the cases and equipment. Within the hour they were back on the two lane road on their way home to the funeral.

As small flurries of snow melted on the windshield the tiny economy car cut through the distance. The two inside still very quiet with their minds racing with thoughts. Then like before Fara spoke up breaking the silence. "It's funny the real world doesn't seem so bad... You know compared to that place." Joni responded. "That's the beauty of Incredulous. It's a great place to visit but it doesn't take away from the real world. I learned early on that the problem with drugs, and trips, and journeys, is that they take away from this world. In order for Incredulous to work I knew it had to add to this world, not taint it or take away from it. Fara followed up with a compliment. Most likely the first one Joni had ever received. "You have a brilliant mind." Joni looked on toward the road, kept driving and smiled inside. Nothing else was spoken during the drive. Unknown to them the damage and war inside Incredulous was already being fixed and changing back to normal.

Tensions rose as they entered into town. They had lost time and would have to go straight to the service. These two estranged characters would soon be among the old crowd, the high school days, and the very people who caused all of the pain in the past causing all of this to unfold.

The worst kind of days were those where the sun is out but the snow is still covering the ground. Like the magic of the moment was gone but the bi-product still littered the ground lingering with cold. That is how the afternoon cemetery looked. As Fara and Joni entered the perimeter they could see the cars and people gathered on the opposite side near the fence. The headstones were sunlit and surrounded by melting snow and mud.

They parked and were on foot and on their way. Looks of surprise and sorrow came from the large group of dark clad generation. They stood out. There was family, friends of the parents, and school associates. Joni and Fara would try to blend in with them. Hugs and sobs were given to Fara immediately from the other young ones. Barely even looks of recognition went toward Joni except from Fara who took her hand and pulled her large frame into the crowd and into the moment. But it didn't last long. It was broken by the shooting glares of Chads family. Glares directed toward Fara. She was someone who was never hated so this was unexpected and not understood.

The family glared at Fara. A torrid layer of hatred and disgust was just behind their eyes. As Joni and Fara made their way to their seats mumbles, opinions, and comments were made. Joni was still on the invisible to these people. An advantage at this point. For some reason Joni had shifted the focus and had become some type of villain. While she was gone at school somewhere else she had slipped into the bad seat. And then it was revealed. Chad, the all American. The good guy. The grade "A" student. The friend to all. Had taken his own life. In an unexpected move he had done himself in with his own hand. His reasoning left in a note somewhere. He couldn't get over the break up and the loss of the girl he had always been in love with. Fara. What had been a high school romance to her, had grown into a full blown obsession for him in the years to follow. While Fara was off living life a college Chad was back in the hometown punishing himself continually because he couldn't let go of the lost love.

To the bitter family and the fickle school mates who had grown distant Fara was at some kind of subconscious fault. All of the sudden everything, every piece, of Fara's world came crashing down in ruin. A sweet young boy who she saw was a friend was dead. And at the moment she felt as if she was to blame. No one could of expected this. Except for Joni. She knew Chad well. She knew his insecurities and desires. She knew of his unfulfilled love of Fara and she also knew that this home coming would be hell for Fara. So Joni's motivations were becoming more clear.

A few hours had passed. The service was over the funeral was over. The people were gone and Fara left devastated. She couldn't believe what had happened to Chad. She couldn't believe she was the source of his pain. The idea that she had effected him in such a way and then abandoned and destroyed him while she was off "doing" college. The people in town along with the grieving parents had turned in the way they look at Fara. For them, she was to blame. In some way she had helped kill poor Chad. Poor happy Chad. Although the family and fellow alumni didn't say anything the tone and vibe were there. This sad homecoming and sad world would forever be tainted for Fara. The subtle mob rule that Fara was no longer welcome there.

Not unlike the feeling that Joni had always had there. Joni knew what it was like to be the effortless villain to these people. Joni also knew a different side of Chad the others didn't

know. He did have weaknesses and that was something she had in common with him. Something they could talk about. Joni also knew about the suicide, and the note, and the way the people in town were bound to treat Fara.

The sky was winter dark. Joni and Fara had stopped for some plain all night diner coffee and then resumed their journey back toward the college town. Joni took up almost the entire front of the car as she maintained her post behind the wheel. Fara sat broken and silent in the back of the dark economy car. Their winter coats and stalking caps on. The single car made its way across the night landscape. Its small weak headlights trying to pierce through.

Joni broke the silence. “Growing up, while the others picked on me you never joined in, you never took joy out of the cruel things they did to me and deep down I could tell you never approved of it. People were cruel. People are cruel. I knew they would turn on you, I knew that this place would become painful for you as it was for me.”

Fara spoke. “I didn’t do anything to stop them. When we were kids. I should have known to do something to stop them.” “If you would have known to do that you wouldn’t have been a kid” Joni brought back.

“I don't know how to deal with any of this.” Fara remarked. Joni slowed the car to the side of the road. The two got out and went to the rear of the car opening the hatchback. The wires and equipment were illuminated by the moon light reflecting off of snow. In front of them was the door to Incredulus. Joni turned to Fara. “You don't have to deal with any of this any more.” Fara began removing the equipment from the car...