

“I love this ride, Danno!” Blair Van Howe shouted to his partner, who was passed out cold in the passenger seat. “I’d buy one myself, but the voters might not approve!” He leaned forward and accelerated.

Blair had never driven a Porsche before and was relishing every second of it. The power and responsiveness of the 911’s massive engine, the tightness of the steering, and the way the tires gripped the road felt strangely seductive. He was driving fast, which was not his habit, but it was past midnight, and the neighborhood streets were empty. The events of the past two days had him riding a wave of exhilaration, and rocketing around the deserted streets of North Beverly in Danny’s new Porsche 911 Turbo was a perfect way to conclude a thrilling week.

The north end of Beverly was a well-to-do enclave on Chicago’s Far South Side. Danny Moran had grown up there, and Blair had been captivated by it from the moment of his first visit, when he and Danny were still in law school. The houses were large, stately old brick structures built during the early and middle part of the twentieth century, on spacious, tree-covered lots. The streets were winding and irregular, unlike the grid-like pattern so prevalent throughout the rest of the city. This was because the neighborhood abutted Dan Ryan Woods, the only forest preserve within the city limits. The woods served as a buffer between the affluent Beverly residents and the not-so-affluent areas to the north and east, and prevented any through traffic, giving the area a quiet and secluded ambience. Tonight, those wide, winding streets felt like Blair’s private racetrack, an ideal place to be celebrating life with the assistance of a Porsche 911.

He was just a few blocks from Danny’s house, where he would have to leave the Porsche and walk the short distance to his own home. He would also have to find a way to get Danny inside, which would undoubtedly be a challenge, given Danny’s highly inebriated state. Before

tackling that chore, he would treat himself to one more Porsche-delivered thrill to bring the evening to a fitting conclusion. The snakelike roads made it impossible to go for pure drag-racing speed, so he'd been delighting in the 911's maneuverability as he whipped around sharp turns with barely a tap on the brakes. Blair gunned the turbo-charged engine as he approached Hamilton Avenue, Danny's street, inspired by the sonorous whine emanating from beneath the hood. He felt as if he were one with the vehicle, as if it had nerves and reflexes and were an extension of himself. He jerked the steering wheel hard to the left, leaning into the turn as the Porsche careened around the corner.

Suddenly, he was jolted out of his euphoric state by the harsh glare of high-beam headlights flashing directly into his eyes, blinding him momentarily. Exhilaration turned to panic as he felt the back end of the Porsche swerving and realized that he had lost control. He slammed the brakes hard, and they responded with a deafening screech as the oncoming vehicle veered out of his path, missing the Porsche by inches. Two other sounds simultaneously assaulted his eardrums: the sound of shattering glass as the trophy that had been resting in Danny's lap was hurled into the dashboard, and the sickening sound of crumpling metal as the other vehicle slammed into some unknown object.

The terrifying cacophony lasted just a couple of seconds, and then everything was still. "Son of a bitch," Blair said under his breath. His entire body was shaking.

"Danno, wake up!" Blair shouted, staring at his passenger. Danny didn't stir. "Wake up, Danno!" Blair yelled louder, gripping Danny's shoulders and shaking him. Still no response.

Blair reached down to unbuckle his seat belt and felt a sharp pain shoot through his right hand as it struck a shard of glass, the remnants of their shattered trophy. "Shit!" he cried as blood spurted from a deep gash in his right index finger.

He opened the door and climbed out, gingerly confirming that all of his body parts were intact and that he was unhurt. He surveyed the Porsche. There was not a scratch on it. With a feeling of dread, as if moving in slow motion, he turned around and gazed up the street in the direction from which he had just come. "Oh my God," he said in a trembling voice as he beheld the horrific scene ninety feet away. He felt dizzy and almost vomited. He glanced back at Danny, desperately hoping he'd come to, but Danny remained peacefully oblivious.

The car was an old one. He couldn't tell what kind in the darkness, but it appeared to be 1960s vintage. That meant no airbags. From where he stood, Blair could see that the vehicle had run head-on into an enormous oak tree. The entire front end was grotesquely contorted and pancaked into the passenger area.

Blair approached the vehicle slowly. His stomach turned again as he stopped several feet from the driver's door. The windshield looked like it had exploded into thousands of tiny particles, glistening in the pale glow of the streetlight. The driver was slumped over the steering wheel, his face and head a bloody mess, the lower half of his body pinned beneath a mass of twisted wreckage. Blair stared at him, recognition setting in. He couldn't recall the man's name, but he remembered his face. He and his family were new to the neighborhood, and Blair had met them at a recent block party. The man opened his eyes for just an instant and looked at Blair, then closed them again.

"Help me," the injured man said in a voice no stronger than a whisper.

Blair continued staring at him, feeling paralyzed, unable to think or act. He had always counted on Danny when things went wrong, and Danny always came through. Danny was right there, just ninety feet away, but he was dead drunk and utterly useless.

Blair moved closer to the car, and with a start, noticed a child in the backseat. She was

weeping quietly, rocking back and forth, clutching a small stuffed animal.

“Are you okay back there?” he asked, trying to collect himself.

The child looked at him, then turned away without responding.

Blair looked closer and saw that the girl had the distinctive features of a Down syndrome child. She appeared to be seven or eight years old, but it was hard to tell in the darkness. “Are you okay?” he asked again. He couldn’t help noticing the unmistakable sound of panic in his own voice.

“Help my daddy ... help my daddy,” the child repeated, staring straight ahead with unfocused eyes.

“Don’t worry, kid. I’ll call for help. They’ll be here fast. Everything will be okay.”

The child shot a glance in his direction, then looked away again. “Help my daddy,” she whispered through her quiet sobs.

Blair yanked at the driver’s door. It wouldn’t budge. He peered through the open window and looked more closely at the tangled wreckage covering the driver’s legs. He could see that the driver was pinned in tightly, and that there was no way he could extricate the injured man from the vehicle by himself. He had to get help. He raced back to the Porsche. Danny was still out cold. Blair opened the passenger door and shook Danny again, then slapped him across the face. No response. “Goddamn it, Danno, wake up! I need you!” Danny stirred and mumbled, but did not open his eyes.

Blair pulled his cell phone from the holster on his belt and began dialing: nine, then one—and then he stopped before adding the other one. He stared at the phone for a long time. The events of the past few days flashed through his mind. He thought about all of the glorious publicity he’d received following the trial. He thought about the campaign. He was on the cusp

of fulfilling a lifelong dream, and he had never wanted anything so badly. Then he envisioned the police giving him a breathalyzer test and taking him away in handcuffs. This would be an unmitigated disaster.

He closed the passenger door and paced back and forth in front of the Porsche, gripping his cell phone and struggling to control his scattered thoughts. He stopped, put his elbows on the Porsche's driver's side door, and peered through the open window. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Then he took a long look at his unconscious friend and partner. "I'm sorry, Danno," he whispered to himself. He put away his phone, and then he opened the door, leaned in, and unfastened Danny's seat belt. As Danny slumped forward, Blair grabbed him under the arms and began pulling him out of the passenger's seat. Danny was dead weight, so it required great exertion, but he finally succeeded in moving him into the driver's seat. Danny slumped forward, completely limp. Blair pulled the shoulder strap tightly around him and fastened it in place, leaving Danny sitting upright behind the wheel, his head hanging like a rag doll's.

Blair took a few deep breaths; then he removed Danny's cell phone from his jacket and dialed 911. "I've been in an accident. Eighty-ninth and Hamilton. I think the other driver is hurt pretty bad. We need an ambulance right away!"

"Of course, sir. We'll get right on it. May I have your name, please?"

Blair pushed the *end call* button and dropped the phone into Danny's lap. "Sorry, pal," he said softly, tears welling up in his eyes and blurring his vision. He looked around. There was not a soul in sight. He patted Danny on the shoulder, slammed the door, then briskly walked away.

