

Just before ten o'clock, Holly gives up the book she's trying to read and turns on the TV. . . . Hard news is what she wants. She switches to NBC, where a graphic, complete with grim music, reads SPECIAL REPORT: TRAGEDY IN PENNSYLVANIA. Andrea Mitchell is now anchoring in New York . . .

'Now we're going to take you to the Macready Middle School and our man on the scene. Chet, are you still there?'

He is, standing in a pool of bright light thrown by the camera. More bright lights are shining on the middle school's wounded side; each tumbled brick casts its own sharp shadow. Generators are roaring. People in uniform rush here and there, shouting and talking into mikes. Holly sees FBI on some of the jackets, ATF on others. There's a crew in white Tyvek body suits. Yellow crime scene tape flutters. There is a sense of controlled chaos. At least Holly hopes it's controlled. Someone must be in charge, maybe in the Winnebago she can see at the far left of the shot.

Lester Holt is presumably at home, watching this in his pj's and slippers, but Chet Ondowsky is still going. A regular Energizer Bunny is Mr Ondowsky, and Holly can understand that. This is probably the biggest story he'll ever cover, he was in on it almost from the start, and he's chasing it for all he's worth. He's still wearing his suit jacket, which was probably okay when he got to the site, but now the temperature has dropped. She can see his breath, and she's pretty sure he's shivering.

Someone give him something warmer, for heaven's sake, Holly thinks. A parka, or even a sweatshirt.

The suit jacket will have to be thrown out. It's smeared with brick dust and torn in a couple of places, sleeve and pocket. The hand holding the mike is also smeared with brick dust, and something else. Blood? Holly thinks it is. And the streak on his cheek, that's blood, too.

'Chet?' Andrea Mitchell's disembodied voice. 'Are you there?'

The hand not holding the mike goes to his earpiece, and Holly sees there are Band-Aids on two of the fingers. 'Yes, I'm here.' He faces the camera. 'This is Chet Ondowsky, reporting from the bombing site at Albert Macready Middle School in Pineborough, Pennsylvania. This ordinarily peaceful school was rocked by an explosion of enormous strength sometime not long after two o'clock this afternoon—'