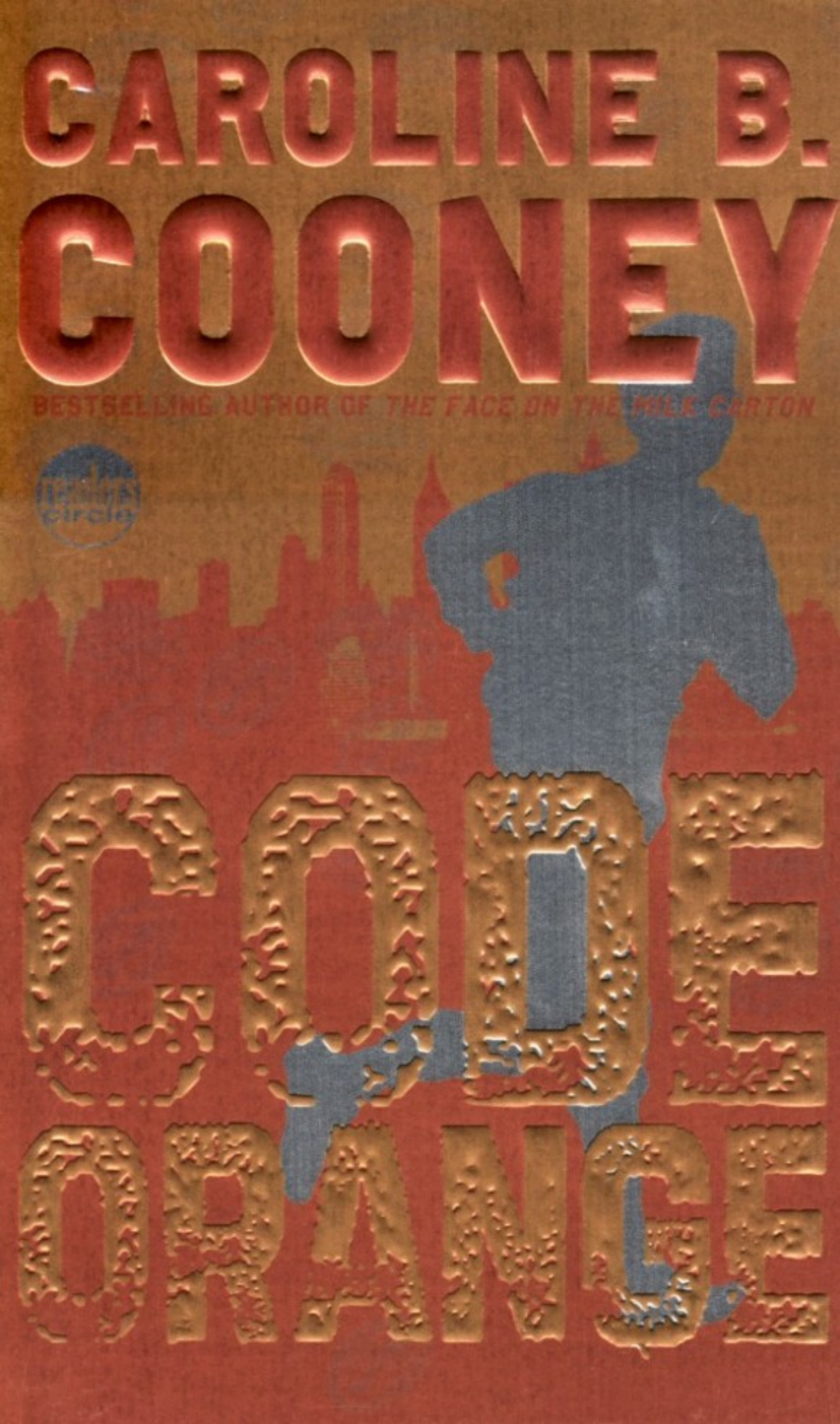
CAROLINE B.
COONEY

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON*



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CHAPTER ONE

On Friday, Mr. Lynch walked around the classroom making sure everybody had written down the due date in their assignment books. Luckily, he started at the far side, giving Mitty Blake time to whisper to his best friend, "Due date for what?"

"Notes for the term paper," whispered Derek. "The one you've been working on for four weeks?"

Mitty hadn't even chosen a topic yet.

But Mr. Lynch had been teaching for years. He had encountered many Mittys. So although the paper itself didn't have to be turned in until February 18, on this coming Monday, February 2, each student in advanced biology had to submit an outline, ten pages of notes and a bibliography including four physical books.

"Books?" said Mitty, stunned. He was sure this had not

been mentioned before. "Mr. Lynch, nobody uses books anymore. They're useless, especially in science. Facts change too fast."

"Books," repeated Mr. Lynch. "This is to prevent you people from doing a hundred percent of your research online."

Mitty had done zero percent anywhere, but he had certainly planned—insofar as Mitty had plans, which he didn't—to do his research online. So he said, "Mr. Lynch, an actual book is out of date before it gets printed. Anyway, a good scientist does laboratory research."

"We did laboratory research last fall, Mitty," said Mr. Lynch. "I don't recall that you threw yourself into your project. I recall that you received a passing grade only through the efforts of the rest of your team. A scientist, Mitty, has to be able to dig through the published research of others. A scientist has to grasp the background and history of things. That means books."

Mitty was willing to grasp the background and history of rock music. On a slow day, he could listen to Nirvana or Pearl Jam. But the background and history of *disease*?

Because that was the depressing topic of this assignment: infectious disease.

"Each of you," Mr. Lynch had said, so many weeks ago that Mitty could barely remember it, "will choose an infectious disease of plants, animals or humans. You will study the disease in history and its ancient treatments or lack of them. If the disease has a specific history for us here in New York City—for example, during the yellow fever epidemics of the 1700s, people sometimes died at the rate of three hundred per city block per day—you will cover that. Other sections of your paper: description

and course of the disease, current treatments and ongoing research. Finally, if your disease has an application in bioterrorism, you will cover that also."

Even Mitty had awakened briefly to the exciting possibility of bioterrorism.

Derek of course had wanted to be an exception to the rules. "Can we research bioterrorism only? I want to do anthrax but specifically Ottilie Lundgren, the ninety-four-year-old woman who died of anthrax in 2001 when she opened her mail. She's FBI case number 184. It's impossible for me to use books. No book has been written about her yet. All my research has to be online." Derek warmed to a favorite topic. "I can solve her mystery. I believe everything is online now, every clue I need, and I can nail her murderer."

"I would be proud of you," Mr. Lynch had said, without sarcasm, "and you may focus on Ottilie Lundgren, but all that will do is make your paper longer. You still have to include everything I described *and you still must have* four books. Remember, class, that I too know how to use Amazon.com. I too can pull up a title that looks useful and stick it in a bibliography without actually reading the book. I too can open up the free first chapter and find something to put in my notes. I will know if you actually read a book or if you are cheating."

Mr. Lynch was one of the few teachers who admitted that even here at St. Raphael's, a Manhattan prep school for the rich and/or brilliant (Mitty fell into the first category), there was such a thing as cheating. Other teachers skirted this possibility as if it were anthrax-laced mail.

Right away, rare cool African diseases like Ebola and Lassa fever had been chosen by eager students. Two

Walking around New York City is what Mitty Blake does best. He loves the city, and even after 9/11 he's always felt safe. Mitty is a carefree guy—he doesn't worry about terrorists or blackouts or grades or anything. He'd much rather watch the game or hang out listening to his iPod than do research on infectious diseases just to get a good grade.

Mitty does feel a *little* pressure to hand something in. So he considers it good luck when he finds some old medical books in his family's weekend house. But when he discovers an envelope containing two scabs in one of the books, the report is no longer about the grade—it's about life and death. His own.

Variola major is a virus. It has no personality, no blood for circulating, no brain for thinking. It has one task—to take over the cells of other creatures and spread. And it has the potential to kill everyone in New York City.

This edge-of-your-seat thriller by best-selling author Caroline B. Cooney will leave you breathless.

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