

Kirkus Reviews

IN THE BODY OF THE WORLD

Author: Eve Ensler

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A feminist playwright and activist's riveting account of how uterine cancer helped her "find [her] way back to [her] body, and to the Earth."

Incest survivor Ensler had dedicated her life to understanding the experience of living in a female body since she had become so disconnected from her own. In 2007, her professional obsessions eventually led her to the Congo, where "the systematic rape, torture, and destruction of women and girls" in the name of securing mineral wealth was a horrifyingly banal reality. Ensler began working with Congolese women to create a female-centered safe space called City of Joy, only to discover in 2010 that she had uterine cancer. The diagnosis awakened her to the body that until then had only been "an abstraction." Suddenly, doctors were cutting into her flesh to fill it with cancer-fighting drugs and then drain it with bags and catheters. Her body, like the body of the Congolese women she was trying to help, had become a host not just to a literal disease, but also to the metaphoric cancers of cruelty, greed, stress and trauma. Loving friendships with women saved her spirit, while chemotherapy, in tandem with surgery that left her permanently incontinent, saved her life. In the meantime, the physical transformation brought about by the disease caused Ensler to experience a heightened sense of living and being in a world she had once tried to flee through alcohol, drugs, sex and overwork. Reborn through suffering, she issues a clarion call to women to turn "victimhood to fire...self-hatred to action [and]...self-obsession to service."

Fierce, frank, raw and profoundly moving.