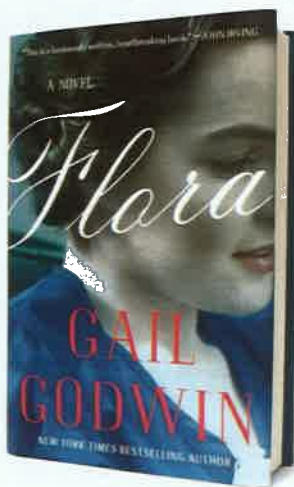


/ Young and Restless /



FLORA
by Gail Godwin
(BLOOMSBURY)

ON A SINGLE STREET In Sri Lanka, the rumblings of far-off civil war grow louder while a group of children—an ethnic mix that mirrors the region's straining cultural diversity—play cricket, fly kites and otherwise sparkle with innocence. This is a brilliant, beautiful and crushing story about childhood, its kindnesses, comforts, misunderstandings and shifting allegiances, and also about the end of childhood. It's not a spoiler to say the book is epically tragic (you'll cry straight through the last 50 pages), because prescience is one of its themes: A young boy, pierced through with foreboding, senses what will happen to his cherished sister, while an omniscient narrator reminds us that we are hurtling toward certain grief. When the war finally comes to Sal Mal Lane, you'll understand exactly what's been lost. And you'll mourn it. —**CATHERINE NEWMAN**

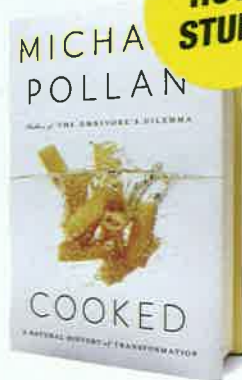
Age of innocence

TEN-YEAR-OLD Helen has a lot to mope about. Lisbeth, her not-terribly-nurturing mother, died when Helen was three. She has just lost Nonie, her loving but secretive grandmother (worse yet, in a way the child feels responsible for). And now, in the fateful summer of 1945, Harry, her alcoholic father, has taken a mysterious assignment in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, leaving Helen in the care of Flora, a sweet, weepy, abjectly admiring and embarrassingly unguarded cousin from the despised poor-relation side of the family. As the summer ticks along toward its explosive ending (friends depart; a polio scare keeps the cousins quarantined; an adolescent crush turns into a triangle; tempers simmer), long-buried stories emerge that explain Lisbeth's chilliness, Harry's cynicism ("I look forward to the day," he tells his daughter, "when you can spot the unsavory truths about human nature for yourself") and Nonie's code of selective silence. In a coming-of-age novel as exquisitely layered and metaphorical as a good poem, Godwin explores the long-term fallout from abandonment and betrayal, the persistence of remorse and the possibility of redemption. —**AMANDA LOVELL**



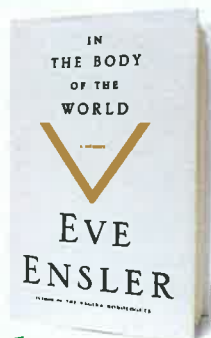
ON SAL MAL LANE
by Ru Freeman
(GRAYWOLF PRESS)

/ Kiss the Cook /



MICHAEL POLLAN'S NEWEST should come with a warning label: Don't read this book if you're hungry. And definitely don't read it if you're in the middle of a juice cleanse. *Cooked* (Penguin Press) is a delectable cri de coeur, a "protest against specialization . . . against the infiltration of commercial interests into every last cranny of our lives." A "sort of" cook whose idea of culinary inventiveness had been boiling store-bought ravioli with a good store-bought sauce ("No one has to chop onions anymore . . . corporations are more than happy to chop them for us"), Pollan travels the world—from the barbecue pits of North Carolina to the Basque country of Spain to his very own Berkeley, California, kitchen—to tackle the question, Why does cooking matter? His penetrating insights weave together sources as disparate as French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, Hesiod's *Theogony* and formative stories from his childhood (as a teenager, Pollan briefly had a pet pig named Kosher). The result is a highly entertaining book that illuminates the act of cooking—and of living a conscious, passionate life. —**DANI SHAPIRO**

/ Real Time /



IN THE BODY OF THE WORLD
by Eve Ensler
(METROPOLITAN BOOKS)

Getting physical

WRITER AND ACTIVIST Eve Ensler went mano a mano with mortality and emerged healed and whole; her powerful and satisfying new memoir tells us how. Diagnosed with advanced uterine cancer in 2010, the creator of *The Vagina Monologues* found that grueling treatments and a brutal recovery brought unexpected transformation. "I was forced to . . . release the past and be burned down to essential matter," Ensler says. Confronting a lifelong dissociation from her body and the world, she's able to inhabit both fully for the first time. That may seem a startling arc for a pioneer celebrator of female sexuality who's also an astonishingly effective global reformer (V-Day, the nonprofit she founded, has raised \$100 million for groups working to end violence against women). But a history of abuse by her alcoholic father explains the disjunction. Ensler writes with verve and urgency about dealing with disease, facing her demons and repairing relationships, an account as entertaining as it is harrowing. Ultimately, she rededicates herself to fixing a mightily screwed-up planet, and she expects us to help. How could we not? —**JUDITH STONE**