

The Mineral Palace



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<p>It is the drought-ridden spring of 1934, and Bena Jonssen, her husband, Ted, and their baby move from Minnesota to Pueblo, a Western plains town plagued by suffocating dust storms and equally suffocating social structures. Little can thrive in this bleak environment, including Bena and Ted's marriage, and the baby, whom Bena-despite her husband's constant assurances-believes is slipping away from her.

To distract herself from worrying, Bena accepts a position at Pueblo's daily newspaper, the Chieftain, reporting on the town's elite club women

and their "good works"-women such as Reimer Lee Jackson, with her plans to restore the town's crumbling monument to the mining industry, the Mineral Palace, to its former grandeur. Bena is drawn to the Mineral Palace and to more of the seamy side of Pueblo-the lurid hallways of a brothel, where she encounters a prostitute, Maude, and Red, a brooding cowboy. Through these emotional entanglements, Bena exposes not only the sexual corruption on which an entire town is founded but also the lies enclosing her own marriage and the sanctity of motherhood. She returns again and again to the Mineral Palace; finally, within its eroding walls, she is forced to confront her most terrifying secret, which becomes her only means for salvation.

With gritty and magical prose, Heidi Julavits conveys the darker sides of wealth and status, and the intersection of parental love and merciful destruction. *The Mineral Palace* is a startling and authentic story of survival in a world of aridity and decadence.

"The *Mineral Palace* is daring and brutal in its revelation of lives distorted by past injury and present denial. Heidi Julavits has written a dark Faulknerian tale."-Maureen Howard

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